# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

**SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 377**

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

**SESSION 2001–02**

COMPRISING PERIOD
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*17 December 2001*

# THE
# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

**SIXTH SERIES** **VOLUME 377**

**EIGHTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002**


# House of Commons

*Monday 17 December 2001*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## HOME DEPARTMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### Drugs Strategy

1. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): What plans he has to focus the drugs strategy on harm minimisation. [21143]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth):** As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made clear in his evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs, the Government will be increasing the focus on harm minimisation within the drugs strategy. As part of the review of the strategy, we are looking at what more we can do to minimise the harm that drugs do to individuals and their families, to communities and to society in general. In addition to the recently published action plan on drug-related deaths, we have set up a group of key experts to tackle the treatment of crack cocaine addiction and, with the Department of Health, we are looking to produce new guidance for heroin prescribing.

**Mr. Love:** My hon. Friend will be aware of the excellent work done by the drug action team and the crime and disorder partnership in Enfield, using £250,000 provided under the communities against drugs initiative. Apart from tackling criminality, that money is being used for education and early intervention to try to reduce the use and misuse of drugs. But if we are to be successful in tackling drug misuse, surely we must concentrate on the harder drugs, which are currently blighting the lives of 250,000 of our younger people at a cost of over £1 billion to the criminal justice system.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We continue to try to get the message across, so that we are credible with young people when we tell them what drugs will do the most harm. Our response must be proportionate in order to do that. We need police resources to be aimed specifically at the majority of areas that are causing the greatest problems. My hon. Friend is right: the link between class A drugs and acquisitive crime is clear and indisputable.

**Mr. Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden): While I welcome the Home Secretary's recent move to reclassify cannabis, will that still not mean that people who wish to consume this stuff can only get it from illegal sources because it remains illegal, but that the police will not be able to crack down effectively on the trade? Is this a sustainable position?

**Mr. Ainsworth:** My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's position on the matter is clearly known to the House, as is that of the right hon. Gentleman, who, effectively, advocates the legalisation of cannabis. That is not the policy of the Government. We are trying to encourage the police to aim their resources where they are most needed. The police ought to be looking in far more detail at the work done with regard to class A drugs,

which is where most criminality occurs in terms of the acquisitive crime to pay for them. It is not the intention of the Government to legalise cannabis.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): The statement is welcome, but does it mean that we have moved away from the failed policies of harsh prohibition that we, Sweden and the United States have followed for a long time and that we have joined in the policies of harm minimisation—described in the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love)—which have been so successful in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium and Portugal? Is this a change in policy? Will it be reflected in the evidence that the Home Office gives to the Council of Europe's report on drug abuse that will be considered in January?

**Mr. Ainsworth:** My hon. Friend studies the problem not only in this country but abroad, and he will know that there is a convergence in drugs policy across many countries. There is no decriminalisation of drugs in Holland. There are differences of emphasis. We are looking actively at renewing our focus on harm minimisation within the drugs policy and strategy in order to be as effective as we can. If my hon. Friend looks properly at what is happening in other countries, he will see that many of the trends are in the same direction as the one which we are looking to follow in the UK.

**Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): Will the Under-Secretary be clear? Is he saying that harm minimisation should be an equal goal in the strategy, as has been argued by many of those who have come before the Select Committee—most recently Mike Trace, who was the deputy drugs tsar? Given the unacceptable number of deaths from heroin overdoses and heroin impurities, should not harm minimisation be as important as the other goals in the drugs strategy?

**Mr. Ainsworth:** The hon. Gentleman is right. Much work has been done on harm minimisation over a period of time. The Government introduced needle exchanges in the UK in the early 1980s, but a lot more can be done. That is why we have put the emphasis on that area, and that is why the Home Secretary listed it when he gave his evidence to the Select Committee as one of the issues that he wanted examined.

**Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): Injecting drug users use an average of only one syringe a day, which forces them to reuse and share their syringes. Are there any plans to review syringe exchange schemes to cut down the spread of infectious diseases, such as the hepatitis C virus?

**Mr. Ainsworth:** As I said, we are reviewing the whole strategy, and together with the Department of Health, we are looking at the availability of needle exchanges to make certain that we are doing the maximum that can and should be done in that area.

## Police (Administration)

2. **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): What plans he has to reduce the administrative work load of police officers. [21144]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth):** Recent research commissioned by the Home Office showed that up to 43 per cent of police officers' time was spent in the police station. "Policing a New Century" outlined our proposals to provide support staff with the necessary powers to undertake certain roles that do not need to be carried out by a police officer. The Home Secretary has established a taskforce, chaired by Sir David O'Dowd, to co-ordinate the steps necessary significantly to reduce the unnecessary burdens on police officers' time. It will report in the spring.

**Mr. Baron:** I thank the Minister for that response. The findings of that study will result from the great burden of paperwork, including 58 performance criteria, the best value regime and a raft of arrest paperwork. Given that detection rates are at their lowest ever, when will the Minister allow the police to do the job that they want, which is to fight crime, not push paper?

**Mr. Ainsworth:** The hon. Gentleman throws back at us some of the issues that we have exposed in order to make progress on that issue, which we are doing in the police reform White Paper. He is right that we are looking to streamline the number of targets to which the police are subject through best value and other regimes, but other issues include the amount of time spent in a police station on arrest. Some of that work can be done by other people, and is being done by other people in some police forces. Those are some of the issues that we intend to address, so that police constables can spend more of their time doing the work that they are highly-qualified to do and that the British public expect them to do.

**Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): Will my hon. Friend pass on the congratulations of many hon. Members to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on his pungent remarks a couple of weeks ago about delays caused by the legal profession? The administrative work load on police officers and the administrative work done by housing officers, police officers and councillors in pursuing antisocial behaviour orders—in my city of Nottingham and elsewhere—cost massive amounts of money. The case gets to court and then some smart arse lawyer finds a way to get the little brat—which would be the parliamentary expression—off and out into the community again. Will my hon. Friend ensure that the joined up thinking continues so that the time of council officers and councillors is used productively?

**Mr. Ainsworth:** I am not sure that I would dare refer to the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary as pungent, and I do not know whether my hon. Friend meant his remarks to be pungent. However, efforts are being made better to align court time with police time, so that police officers do not waste their time unnecessarily waiting for court cases. We need better co-ordination and communication to avoid that happening.

**Mr. James Paice** (South-East Cambridgeshire): Is it not a sad indication of the state of police morale that they should consider working to rule? The police cannot strike, so will the Home Secretary and the Minister agree that the flexibility that we all know is necessary must be

achieved by agreement? To achieve that, what will the Government do? It is a question not of setting people to do different jobs, but of getting rid of paperwork. What forms will the Government abolish? What reports will they stop calling for? What will be the Government's side of the bargain in reaching the agreement needed if the police reforms that the Home Secretary wants are to be achieved?

**Mr. Ainsworth:** The Government published "Diary of a Police Officer", and we seek to halve the number of best value indicators as part of our efforts to cut bureaucracy. Such things underlie the whole agenda of the White Paper. We are in the middle of negotiations that could affect terms and conditions for the police, and the hon. Gentleman should not be surprised if the press comments on that. While we are handling such important issues, the British public will consider both how the Government handle matters and how the Opposition respond. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will respond reasonably and sensibly instead of playing games on the back of an important issue.

## Sex Offenders

3. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): What recent measures he has taken to improve public protection from sex offenders. [21145]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes):** The protection of the public, and of children in particular, is of the highest priority to the Government. The matter is at the forefront of our mind following the conviction last week of Roy Whiting for the murder of Sarah Payne. I want to convey our deep sympathy to the Payne family.

We have implemented a range of measures to increase public protection. Nationally, we have strengthened the law covering offenders, and locally we require the police, probation and other agencies to set up multi-agency public protection panels. In a sentencing review and in our strategy for dangerous offenders, we shall go further to bring in longer sentences and extended supervision, monitoring and treatment.

**Dr. Starkey:** Effective measures to protect the public are extremely important in this difficult area. I have held extensive discussions with the multi-agency sex offender team in Milton Keynes, and was extremely impressed by the way in which the police, the probation service and social services worked to ensure proper protection of the public.

That work, however, is extremely labour intensive. Huge efforts are made to ensure that the public are protected, particularly from high-risk sex offenders. Is the Home Office reviewing the cost of providing that support? Is it considering whether those costs should be reflected in cash allocations to police forces that happen to deal with a large number of sex offenders?

**Beverley Hughes:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's interest and remarks about how the multi-agency public protection panels are beginning to work in this, their first year. She will know that the allocation of resources within a police service area—there have been significant additional resources—is a matter for the chief officer. We expect chief officers to regard protection of children from sex offenders as a central part of normal policing. We are monitoring development of the multi-agency panels, including cost implications and training needs. We shall build the findings of our evaluation into our future plans.

**Mr. Ian Taylor** (Esher and Walton): Does the Minister accept that the best interests of the Payne family, who are constituents of mine, will be better served by effective law than by law suddenly devised because of newspaper campaigns? Does she agree that really effective law would put sex offenders in prison on indeterminate sentences so that they were neither released prematurely into the community on legal technicalities, nor released unless they had accepted treatment and could be verified as safe. That is the only way to give parents a proper understanding of the risks in their communities and to let them allow their children to play in open spaces.

**Beverley Hughes:** Yes, we have already brought in a number of measures, including the post-release supervision of sexual and violent offenders and more treatment programmes—both in the community and in prison. We have introduced sex offender orders and restraint orders that the courts can use.

In July, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced a review of sentencing, a number of whose recommendations we are closely considering—including much longer sentences for violent and sexual offenders; requiring courts, in certain circumstances, to give a life sentence; possibly providing for tagging and further extended supervision; and so on. That is very much the direction in which we think we need to go, in the context of our wider policy—and detailed strategy—as to how we manage dangerous, severely personality disordered and sexual offenders.

**Syd Rapson** (Portsmouth, North): I thank the Government for the actions that they have taken so far, but may we consider adequate training for local authority members and officers in understanding the difference between sex offenders and paedophiles, so that they can assist their communities when there is a suspicion that a paedophile is active in the area?

**Beverley Hughes:** All agencies—local authorities, sports clubs—take seriously the need to train their employees and volunteers not only to be able to recognise possible sexual abuse when it is occurring, but also to enable children to disclose the problem more effectively to adults when something untoward may be happening to them. At present, there is much uncertainty in relation to sex offenders and paedophiles, as my hon. Friend outlines.

Cases such as that of Sarah Payne, in which children are abducted by strangers, are horrific, and as a parent I do not want to diminish that horror. However, we need to remember that the vast majority of cases of sexual abuse of children are committed by people who know them: 80 per cent. of the offences are committed in the home either of the offender or of the victim. To deal effectively with sexual abuse, we have to deal with a wide range of offenders.

Stranger paedophiles commit only a small minority of the cases of sexual abuse against children, I am glad to say—although even a small number is too many.

**Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I thank the Minister very much for her replies so far. From the Liberal Democrat Benches and elsewhere there is huge support for the view expressed by the Payne family's MP, our colleague the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor), that sentences should be indeterminate, with the court retaining the right to decide at any stage whether it is safe to leave the offender in the community, or what conditions are needed to ensure that the offender is unable to reoffend.

Will the Minister confirm that it is not Government policy that previous convictions, should be disclosed to juries—a move bound to prejudice the right to a fair trial; and that it is absolutely not Government policy to endorse the naming and shaming programme reawakened yesterday by one of the Sunday papers? Will she confirm that the police services and Ministers will be careful not to be conned by newspapers into appearing to endorse naming and shaming, when in fact—I hope—all they were endorsing was the proper search for people who had broken conditions and were out in the community without our knowing where they are? Those are entirely different things, confused, no doubt on purpose, by a Sunday paper yesterday—no doubt to increase circulation.

**Beverley Hughes:** On the disclosure of previous convictions, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already made it clear that we are considering that in our review of those matters. There are arguments for and against. Clearly, cases such as this raise the issue again and put it into the public domain. We are still considering our response.

On public access to information about sex offenders who may be living in the community, Ministers have recently made the position clear. We are starting by trying to evaluate what would be most effective in the interests of child protection. That has to be our focus. We are clear that it is not in the interests of child protection to make people's names and addresses widely accessible in a community.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said recently, however, that we understand the concerns of the community on this issue and that it needs some locus to express its concern. So he is considering enabling properly trained members of the community to take a seat on the multi-agency public protection panel in recognition of that concern. We are considering at the moment how best we can take that forward.

**Ms Debra Shipley** (Stourbridge): Does my hon. Friend agree that—let us be straight—Sarah's law is not the way to go, appalling and sad though the incident was? The fears and genuine concerns of parents must, however, be addressed as a matter of urgency. Most people in this country feel that a very substantial tariff is now required and that convicted paedophiles should not be let out automatically.

I agree with my hon. Friend's reply a moment ago that most sexual attacks are made by people who are known and, indeed, that they occur in the home; but I have heard that said so many times, without support being given to enable people who fear that such things are happening domestically to report them effectively. To my knowledge, there are no clear guidelines—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Beverley Hughes:** I do not need to repeat what I said about the so-called Sarah's law. We are starting from the point of view of protecting children and we are clear that widespread availability of names and addresses is not the way forward. I agree with my hon. Friend; Ministers are looking closely at how we can ensure that sex offenders are not automatically released from prison unless their risk assessment clarifies that, on balance, it is safe to release them.

I do not share my hon. Friend's view that there are no clear guidelines or robust and proper processes for parents and others to initiate investigation when cases of sexual abuse are suspected. I am sure that there is more that we can do in that regard, but I am glad to say that the system in this country has improved dramatically over the past 10 years.

**Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): Will the Minister confirm in addressing this exceptionally serious matter that the Government intend to ensure that the protection of innocent children remains at the heart of their policy? Will she further confirm that they wish to take no steps that could in any way encourage vigilantism in this area?

**Beverley Hughes:** I have already made that clear several times this afternoon. As I have said, we have begun the process of putting together a package of measures, including proper sentencing, proper extended supervision, the potential use of tagging, and treatment for offenders for whom that is effective. Establishing the multi-agency public protection panels has been a big step forward. That is still evolving and developing, but I am clear that those measures are together the best way in which to protect children.

## Crime Statistics

4. **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster** (Hastings and Rye): What evidence he has collated on changes in the crime rate in England in the last four years. [21146]

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett):** The most recent British crime survey, published on 25 October, showed the largest ever reduction in crime in one year, totalling a 22 per cent. reduction since 1997. We intend to extend the sample surveyed to 40,000 in order to be able to narrow the figures down to command unit level, so that we can make a proper comparison of like with like.

I should like to make the point that economic and social policies, including a reduction in unemployment, have contributed to the fall, but so has the work of the police service. Thirty-four of the 43 force areas have seen a reduction in recorded crime as well as that in the BCS statistics. The message needs to go out to Glen Smyth and others in the Metropolitan police federation that we deeply care about what the police are doing; we want

more of them on the beat in the community; and we want police on our streets, policing and securing them, not demonstrating on them.

**Mr. Foster:** I thank my right hon. Friend for those encouraging statistics, which show that we have indeed been tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. They are especially welcome after the rising crime experienced for so many years under the previous regime. However, people still fear crime to an alarming and perhaps unjustified extent. Will he suggest ways in which we might assuage the fears of people whose fear of crime is unjustified?

**Mr. Blunkett:** There was, of course, a doubling of crime in those years, so while acknowledging all the provisos and the need to avoid complacency, I believe that welcome progress is being made. The BCS also shows changes in reassurance levels and a decrease in fear of crime to the levels of 20 years ago, which is most encouraging. Some of the crime reduction measures that my hon. Friend has been advocating based on experience in the St. Leonards district of his constituency, which include getting more people on the beat in small shopping centres and using closed circuit television cameras, ensure that people not only feel safer but are safer under a Labour Government.

**Norman Baker** (Lewes): I welcome the Home Secretary's drawing attention to low clear-up rates in some areas and his sensible suggestions of how to deal with them, but I remain concerned about reliance on performance indicators. By placing too much emphasis on indicators, might we not encourage police forces to drive up clear-up rates by no longer devoting manpower and attention to the most serious crimes, which currently have a high clear-up rate, and concentrating instead on clearing up lots of minor crimes, which is far easier?

**Mr. Blunkett:** Sampling and according credit for the whole of the reduction rather than focusing on individual performance targets is important. I do not disagree that we have to be able to accord credit for things that are difficult to record, such as reducing antisocial behaviour and disorder, rather than simply measuring and giving credit for things that are easily monitored. We must get that serious issue right and ensure that the police are able to respond to the particular needs of their community.

## Ball-bearing Guns

5. **Mr. David Atkinson** (Bournemouth, East): If he will introduce legislation to control the *(a)* availability and *(b)* use of ball-bearing guns. [21148]

**The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham):** Any ball-bearing gun that is capable of inflicting a lethal injury is already regarded in law as an air-gun and is subject to the same range of controls. However, most are less powerful than air-guns and cannot be regarded as firearms, so it would not be proportionate to extend the firearms regime to them. We recognise, however, that it is often young people who use ball-bearing guns in an irresponsible and dangerous manner. As part of our determination to tackle antisocial behaviour by some young people, we are looking for ways to tackle that problem.

**Mr. Atkinson:** As the Minister acknowledges, the targeting of members of the public by users of BB guns is now a growing menace in many communities. Such weapons can wound, take out an eye, or psychologically traumatise the victim, especially if they are young. Why then did the Government Whip object on Friday 23 November to my private Member's Bill, which would have brought the use of BB guns within the law? Will the right hon. Gentleman meet me to discuss how my Bill can progress through the House?

**Mr. Denham:** I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the issues, but as I said earlier, we are not convinced that simply extending firearms legislation to BB guns is proportionate or right. There are two issues: one is increasing availability, the other is tackling problems of misuse and irresponsible use. The problem is essentially created by young people. We are determined to tackle the whole range of antisocial behaviour by young people, including issues relating to BB guns and air-guns.

**Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): Has not the time come to take another look at the regulation of air weapons, with a view to raising the age limit at which they can be used? They are the cause of a great deal of low-level mayhem in our constituencies. My right hon. Friend will have noticed that only the other day, for example, a young girl in Gateshead lost an eye after coming under sniper fire from an out-of-control, under-age youth with an air weapon.

**Mr. Denham:** I accept what my hon. Friend says about the nuisance caused by those weapons. We are looking to advice from the Firearms Consultative Committee on what further measures need to be taken. We must examine ways of tackling those who are abusing and misusing the weapons, as well as concentrating on the issues of supply and regulation.

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Minister talks about supply and regulation, but surely air-guns are available to virtually anyone who wants them. That is the problem with the regulations. Does he agree that we need to revisit the law in general on this subject, and, I suggest, raise age limits considerably, so that young people who are minded to create mayhem cannot obtain air-guns or ball-bearing guns, for example? We could increase age limits, and older people might be more sensible when using those weapons, if they had to use them.

**Mr. Denham:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that merely concentrating on supply and sale does not tackle the problem of misuse, which we must also consider. As we take forward our measures on antisocial behaviour, we recognise the concern on both sides of the House about the growing problem of those weapons, and we are determined to make inroads into that problem.

## Asylum System

6. **Mr. Piara S. Khabra** (Ealing, Southall): What plans he has to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the asylum system. [21149]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle):** Measures to increase the efficiency of the asylum system were announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in his statement to the House on 29 October. Further details will be published in the forthcoming White Paper.

**Mr. Khabra:** As the Member of Parliament whose constituency has the largest increase in case work in the country, I have noticed that the Home Office can take between four and six months to make a simple response. What steps will it take to reduce waiting times?

**Angela Eagle:** I have to agree with my hon. Friend that our current performance is not good enough. We are working hard to improve it, but I would be the first to say that we still have a long way to go. The immigration and nationality directorate has a strategy for putting more resources into this area and ensuring that we can provide a better service. I hope to return to the House in a few months with our targets met. This is a difficult issue at present, and we recognise that we are not doing as well as we should.

**Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): Will the Minister confirm that there are almost 100,000 asylum seekers either waiting for the initial decision to be made on their case or waiting for their appeal to be heard? Will she also confirm that whereas the Home Secretary originally hoped that this year 30,000 failed asylum seekers would be removed from the country, the number now is likely to be only 10,000? Can she give the House any indication when the minimum number of 30,000 will be reached?

**Angela Eagle:** The current backlog of outstanding asylum applications stands at 43,000. There was a 155 per cent. increase in the number of first-year decisions last year, and a 13 per cent. increase in removals. I can confirm that we are on course to reach the 30,000 figure by the financial year 2002–03.

The hon. Gentleman needs to realise that people cannot simply be sent back. We have to get papers for them and arrange their passage back to the country of origin. That is not simple. However, as I have said, we have increased the number of removals by 13 per cent., and because we are now bringing the new detention estate into being, we have three new sites that provide a further 1,500 detention places. That will enable us to ensure that we get removals working more effectively.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): Will my hon. Friend ensure that any strategy that she has for increasing the resources for asylum seekers' applications will not have an adverse effect on the section dealing with student visa renewals, which are now taking 12 weeks instead of the advertised three weeks? This is having an adverse effect on some of my constituents, who, having bought their air tickets, will not be able to get home in time for Christmas because their passports are locked up in the Home Office.

**Angela Eagle:** My hon. Friend is right to raise that issue. We are concerned about those delays, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has taken immediate action to put in more resources to ensure that we can avoid the inconvenience and disruption that she spoke about.

**Mr. Nicholas Soames** (Mid-Sussex): Will the hon. Lady go to Holland—*[Interruption.]*—but only for a short time? Will she look at the extremely efficient and effective way in which the Dutch handle such matters, which turns asylum seekers round quickly? Will she also make sure that the immigration people, who do a good job under difficult conditions, are reinforced when pressures build up? At the moment, Air Zimbabwe flights are a source of great anxiety to them. When pinch points occur, will the hon. Lady ensure that they are reinforced?

**Angela Eagle:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I have visited Holland; in the European Union, we all have to learn from one another what works and what is effective. The Dutch do a good job, but not always as good as they claim. The difficulties with asylum and immigration claims are not simple, or they would have been solved a long time ago. As always, I am willing to learn from other countries what works.

The hon. Gentleman is right to talk about pinch points: people traffickers finding new ways in, or the situation in a particular country may lead to a particular problem or worry. I can assure him that the immigration service is geared up and quickly applies extra resources when those pinch points occur. One example is the work that we have been doing with the Czech authorities in Prague. We always bear the problem in mind and, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, monitor patterns of arrival.

**Mr. Gwyn Prosser** (Dover): I welcome the proposed improvements to our asylum system and the retention of the dispersal system, which has eased things greatly in Dover and the rest of Kent. However, is the Minister aware of the high number of unaccompanied minors resident in Kent? Is she aware, for instance, that we look after, care for and protect more unaccompanied minors than any other county—and five times more than any London borough? Will she consider those matters, sit down with my local authority and find practical ways of sharing the responsibility across the country?

**Angela Eagle:** We are working closely with the Local Government Association to see what can be done about unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Authorities such as Kent have borne a great burden in the past, but they can now send those children to other authorities. For example, I have come across cases in which Kent has paid for accommodation for children in and around Manchester. Work is therefore already going on, but we need to get a grip on the way in which local authorities that are dealing with the interim scheme, rather than dispersal, are handling the number of children in their charge. I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that we are working closely with the LGA to see what can be done to bring about more co-ordination.

## Young Offender Institutions

7. **Dr. Andrew Murrison** (Westbury): What action he is taking to improve conditions in young offender institutions. [21150]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes):** With the creation of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales in April 2000, we are already beginning to transform conditions for young people under 18 in young offender institutions. There is also a manifesto commitment to build on the Government's youth justice reforms to improve conditions for 18 to 20-year-olds in custody. That group is already benefiting from money from the last spending review, including money for drugs treatment and offending behaviour programmes. In addition, the Prison Service has allocated a further £15 million over the next three years to improve standards in young offender institutions.

**Dr. Murrison:** Sir David Ramsbotham will no doubt feel that his newspaper article today is vindicated by the complacency of the Minister's response. How many prisoners and young offenders are in overcrowded accommodation? Does the hon. Lady agree that the prison health service is a desperately failing service, and that the only way to secure decent rehabilitation is through decency in custody?

**Beverley Hughes:** I do not have the figures for the proportion of young offenders being kept two to a cell designed for one, but I will write and let the hon. Gentleman have them. As for the prison health service, I know that he is new to the House, so he may not have been so aware of conditions in young offender institutions and prisons generally before he became a Member of Parliament. As a result of 18 years of Tory neglect of the Prison Service, it will take some time to improve conditions. Health provision in 1997 was dire, but we have begin to transform that. There is a new partnership between the Prison Service and the health service, and significant new money has gone into improving health care, particularly mental health care. We have a strategy for tackling the high number of suicides and cases of self-harm that took place 1997, and I am pleased to say that the number is coming down year on year. Unlike the Tory Governments of the past, the Government are implementing a commitment to decency in prison.

**Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): Does my hon. Friend agree that a lack of basic skills is often a contributory cause of the social exclusion that leads to offending, and that improving skills is important in helping young people to return to a positive role in society? Will she undertake to ensure that education continues to be given a high priority for young people in young offender institutions?

**Beverley Hughes:** My hon. Friend is right. Recent studies by the Youth Justice Board and Her Majesty's inspector of prisons revealed details that confirmed what we already knew impressionistically: more than a third of young offenders have a reading age of seven or lower, half are functioning below the numeracy level of a seven-year-old, and the majority were not in school before they came into custody. We are beginning to put that right, with a new partnership with the Department for Education and Skills and a variety of educational programmes and training, to make sure that when young offenders have to be in custody, they begin to address some of the failure to achieve educationally that was a characteristic of their lives before they came into prison.

**Mr. Humfrey Malins** (Woking): Let me remind the Minister that after nearly five years of a Labour Government, 19-year-old boys at the Feltham young offender institute are still getting less than three hours a day of purposeful activity, and are still spending 16 hours a day locked up in their cells. The Minister herself has described that as unacceptable, the head of the Prison Service has said that it is regrettable, and I think that it is utterly shameful. Is not the former chief inspector of prisons right to say that there is no direction in the Prison Service? Does the Minister accept that such uncivilised treatment of young offenders does nothing to help them become useful members of society on their release?

**Beverley Hughes:** The difference between the Governments whom the hon. Gentleman supported and the present Government is that we are doing something about the situation in Feltham. His own record does not bear much scrutiny, either. Because of his day job, so to speak, he knew for many years about the situation at Feltham and other young offender institutions, and he said and did nothing about it. Furthermore, his facts are wrong. As a result of additional resources and an action plan to improve the situation at Feltham, time out of cell in Feltham B—that is, for the 18-to-20-year-olds—is up to six and three quarter hours a day on weekdays, with purposeful activity averaging more than 20 hours a week. A new regime was implemented on 2 July to take that forward. I am not saying that Feltham is as we want it to be, but it has progressed a lot further than it ever would have done under a Tory Government.

## Traffic Wardens

8. **Mr. Derek Wyatt** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): If he will extend the role of traffic wardens to include all road and car matters; and if he will make a statement. [21151]

**The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham):** The White Paper "Policing a New Century" set out our proposals for creating community support officers who could be given road traffic powers. We will consider how police traffic wardens might most appropriately be integrated into those proposals and what additional functions they might assume in the light of responses to the White Paper. Any necessary new powers will be set out in the Police Bill.

**Mr. Wyatt:** The Minister will know that in Swale we have a form of joint provision, as Kent constabulary and Swale borough council are jointly running a sort of front desk for local community policing. If he is looking for somewhere for a pilot scheme, could it be introduced in Swale? The rest of the country could then follow.

**Mr. Denham:** We shall certainly be looking for progressive and far-sighted police forces and local authorities to propose initiatives that will help us to

implement the White Paper. Although final decisions have not yet been taken, it is fairly clear that a substantial number of the duties that currently tie up the time of full-time trained police officers—they include, for example, stopping the traffic so that traffic surveys can take place—could be competently done by a properly managed person with the right responsibilities. That is the sort of thing that we would be very willing to discuss with my hon. Friend.

**Mr. Andrew Rosindell** (Romford): I welcome any initiative that will increase the number of police on our streets, but does the Minister accept that traffic wardens are no substitute for properly trained police constables? Will he undertake to consider the situation in outer London boroughs such as Havering, where we have rising crime, fewer police and a yob culture? Does he not believe that we need more police to deal with that?

**Mr. Denham:** That is why I am confident that in the early part of next year, we will have record numbers of police officers in England and Wales. We are on target to have 130,000 police officers in England and Wales by April 2003, so there is absolutely no doubt that the Government are committed to delivering more police officers, and are doing so throughout the country. It is also the case, however, that some jobs that currently tie up the time of professional, fully trained police officers could be done by community support officers, traffic wardens and others. We must have more police officers, but we must also make the best possible use of their time.

## Extradition

9. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What recent discussions he has had with other Departments about the review of the extradition system. [21152]

**The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley):** The interdepartmental working group that was set up to review extradition law met recently to consider the responses to the consultation on "The Law on Extradition—A Review", which were published on 24 October. The Government intend to introduce legislation to modernise and simplify our extradition laws in this parliamentary Session.

**Dr. Lewis:** Given that the House of Lords European Union Committee has withheld approval of the proposed EU arrest warrant because it seriously fears that British citizens will not get a fair trial under its provisions, why was the Prime Minister in such a tearing hurry to sign up to the warrant on Friday, although only a fraction of the 32 crimes listed under it have anything whatever to do with terrorism?

**Mr. Bradley:** My understanding is that the House of Lords did not take the view that the hon. Gentleman describes, and that it was on the basis of a technicality that it did not proceed with the scrutiny. As he will know, the European arrest warrant was not adopted at Laeken, and the matter will be further considered through the European Parliament.

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend will know that there are considerable reservations about the implications of the European arrest warrant, which seems to include a list that would make people liable for the "crimes" of abortion, homosexuality—and criticising European institutions. *[Laughter.]* I hope that my hon. Friends will find that as funny when the warrant is put into operation. Is my right hon. Friend aware that I have received today a letter from his ministerial colleague saying that some of the information given to the Committee last week was inaccurate, because a retrial will not be guaranteed? If that is the case, can we please have an undertaking that Britain will not accept this very dangerous measure?

**Mr. Bradley:** My hon. Friend is wrong: the proposals do not include euthanasia and abortion. I hope that when we introduce the Bill, she will consider it carefully.

**Mr. Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset): Can we be clear? Do the Government intend to introduce the European arrest warrant in English law through the forthcoming Bill on extradition? If so, are they committed to ensuring that it will never be used to arrest someone for something that is not a crime in the United Kingdom?

**Mr. Bradley:** The situation is very clear. We shall wait until the European arrest warrant has been agreed, and then we intend to introduce legislation to effect it. When we do that, the hon. Gentleman will have adequate opportunity to consider the detail.

**Mr. Letwin:** I am grateful for that answer, which could be paraphrased as "No". Let me ask a second question. Are the Government committed to ensuring that the European arrest warrant is never used to arrest someone in this country to face trial in another country where there would be a presumption of guilt?

**Mr. Bradley:** I am tempted by the hon. Gentleman's questions, but I stress that we need to wait until the details of the Bill are published. He will then be able to consider it fully, and I am sure that he will.

## Drug-related Crime

10. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What recent advice he has given to chief constables in respect of reducing drug-related crime. [21153]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth):** Chief constables are responsible for determining what action should be taken to reduce drug-related crime in their areas, taking account of the nature of the problem and other local circumstances. The Home Office issued advice on measures to reduce drug-related crime through a circular on the communities against drugs programme sent to chief officers in August 2001. Advice was also issued in October on the piloting and evaluation of the drug-testing provisions that the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 introduced. General guidance on tackling drug-related crime is also available in the communities against drugs toolkit on the Home Office crime reduction website.

**Mr. Chaytor:** Does the guidance specifically refer to prioritising either drug dealers or drug users? Is there a

tension for local police commanders between the need to attack the root cause of the problem by tackling drug dealers, and the need to improve their crime reduction figures? It is easier to meet crime reduction targets by dealing with drug users.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** As my hon. Friend knows from my previous answer, we have repeatedly tried to ensure that priority is given to tackling class A drugs. We expect the police and the chief constables to pay the highest regard to the more serious crimes of trafficking and possession with intent to supply, rather than simply possession. Action must be proportionate. Class A drugs should be at the top of the list, and trafficking in any illegal drug is obviously far more serious than possession.

### Active Community Unit

11. **Phil Hope** (Corby): If he will make a statement on the work of his Department's active community unit. [21154]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle):** The Government want active, confident and self-reliant communities that are in control of their lives and well-being. To achieve that, we need to revitalise communities and build social cohesion so that everybody has a sense of belonging and that their views matter. The active community unit, in co-operation and partnership with Whitehall and the voluntary and community sector, drives that work forward.

**Phil Hope:** I thank my hon. Friend for her reply and for attending the parliamentary youth hearings that I chaired in the House last month. I draw her attention to the views of those young people, many of whose programmes are funded by the active community unit. They said that they wanted to be involved directly in the decision making of voluntary sector, local government and central Government programmes. Does my hon. Friend agree that involving young people directly in planning and providing those services means that they will be better able to meet young people's needs? Will she promote that principle throughout Government?

**Angela Eagle:** I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. The remarkable thing about the hearings that I attended the other day was how committed, focused and talented the young people involved were. The difference that they were making to their communities was also remarkable. Too often we see young people as a problem, but they are our future, and we need to engage them not only in the political process but in the process of building, changing and strengthening their communities. We all gain when they realise that society is made better by their own involvement.

## European Council (Laeken)

3.30 pm

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair):** With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement on the European Council which took place in Belgium on 14 and 15 December.

The fight against terrorism remains uppermost in the minds of all the members of the European Union. There remains unanimous support for the military action which has been taken in Afghanistan and a determination to continue our efforts to root out the al-Qaeda terrorist network. The recent video of bin Laden demonstrates his guilt beyond any reasonable doubt whatever. It brought home the sheer evil of bin Laden and his followers, and their sick pleasure in the murders that they have committed. I do not think that anyone can now dispute that ridding the world of the al-Qaeda terrorist network is a job that is in the interests of us all.

The European Council welcomed the Bonn agreement between the Afghan groups. It gave strong support for the deployment of an international security assistance force authorised by the United Nations Security Council, as called for by the Afghan parties in the Bonn agreement. The details of such a force must await the outcome of the meetings in Kabul between an international military team led by Major General McColl and the interim authorities in Afghanistan. But I can tell the House that Britain is willing, in principle, to lead such a force, which is likely to comprise troops from various countries, European and others.

Friday's meeting of potential troop-contributing nations was attended by a number of EU countries as well as Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Czech Republic, Jordan, Malaysia, Turkey and the United States. The British contingent is likely to be up to 1,000 to 1,500, though I stress that that has not yet been decided. We expect the resolution to be passed by the United Nations Security Council later this week. The United States has given its full help and support for the security force, and we would hope to have lead elements in place shortly.

The force was a critical part of the agreement reached in Bonn on 5 December for the establishment of a provisional Government in Afghanistan. There has been a brilliant victory over the Taliban, who have ceased to be the Afghan Government, and that, of course, is a welcome liberation, but we know that that is only the start of enabling Afghanistan to cease being a failed state and to become a responsible partner in the region. The situation in Afghanistan remains fragile; the new political process remains in its infancy. There is, therefore, an urgent need to ensure that, as the war is being won, we play our part in securing the peace.

The European Council also took stock of European security and defence policy. We are determined to finalise soon the EU's arrangements with NATO. That will enhance the EU's capability to carry out crisis management operations over the full range of the so-called Petersberg tasks.

The European Council met amid continuing and appalling violence in the middle east. In our view, and that of all our partners, the only basis for durable peace in the middle east is full recognition of Israel's right to live in peace and security, together with the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. The members of the European Council will continue to do all that they can individually and through the good offices of the Secretary-General, Javier Solana, to whom I pay tribute, to help create the circumstances in which the violence can be halted and the dialogue resumed.

The European Council's other main purpose was to prepare for discussion on the future of Europe. It now looks increasingly likely that 10 new countries will join the European Union in 2004, and we welcome that. Their accession will contribute to peace, stability and prosperity in Europe—ours as well as theirs. It is obvious, however, that the European Union cannot, with 25 and more members, work in the same way, with precisely the same constitution, as it has with 15. Decision making will need to be streamlined, and EU laws will need increasingly to take the form of framework legislation, with the details of implementation left to the member states.

It is already the task of the European Council to give strategic direction to the European Union as a whole. But carrying that strategic direction into practice will mean looking again at the size and role of the Commission, reviewing the workings of the existing presidency of the Union, which at present changes hands every six months, and managing the business of the various specialist councils in a more coherent way. That is why, at Nice a year ago, when we opened the way for enlargement, we also agreed that there had to be another intergovernmental conference in 2004, and why we are now going to set up a convention to prepare for that conference by detailed examination of all those issues.

The basic agenda for the conference was of course agreed at Nice. The sort of questions that will need to be asked are set out in the declaration of Heads of Government issued at Laeken at the weekend. That declaration, which I welcome, acknowledges not only the contribution that the European Union has made to peace, stability and prosperity in all our countries, but the extent to which it has to deliver results to the citizens of Europe on jobs, the single market, the fight against crime, a safe environment and so on.

The British view, widely shared, is that while it is right to co-operate ever more closely with our partners, democratic accountability is fundamentally and ultimately rooted in the member state. As the declaration says, what European citizens expect is

"more results, better responses to practical issues and not a European superstate or European institutions inveigling their way into every nook and cranny of life".

The Laeken declaration, and the convention, give us the opportunity to take a serious look at the division of competencies between the Union and the member states. For the first time in the Union's history, we shall be looking at the prospect of restoring some tasks to the member states. We now also have the chance to open up the European institutions to greater public scrutiny, and the role that we want to see our Parliament play in policing that process is now explicitly recognised.

The convention, which has now been established, will be chaired by the former French President, Mr. Valery Giscard d'Estaing, who, when President of France, played an instrumental role in bringing the European Council into being. The convention will work for a year. Each national Parliament will have two representatives as members of the convention. The regions will be represented as

observers and there will be ample opportunities for views from all sections of public opinion to be fed into the proceedings.

Consultations will, of course, be held in the usual way on who the parliamentary representatives will be. The convention will present options to Heads of Government who will determine whether those options should lead to changes in the treaty. Those ultimate treaty changes will be made by unanimous agreement of the Governments concerned.

In the aftermath of 11 September, the European Council welcomed the agreement that has been reached on a European arrest warrant. We also agreed to give fresh impetus to delivering our objectives on asylum and illegal immigration. That will mean return agreements with third countries and a new agreement on handling asylum seekers, including common standards on asylum procedures and reception. We have agreed to improve co-operation on our external border controls.

Those are all areas where we need common action within Europe, and the strength of a united European approach in dealing with the rest of the world. I hope that we shall see agreements concluded in the coming year on all those points.

Once again at this Council, Britain played its full part constructively and achieved the outcome it desired. Europe faces huge challenges ahead, as it enlarges to 25 and, over time, to more than 30 countries covering territory from the Atlantic to the Black sea, with 500 million citizens in the EU. Those challenges are clear: over the completion of the single market with a single currency; over economic reform; over making European security and foreign policy work; over giving Europe the institutional framework to allow it to function effectively.

Those debates matter to Europe, but they also matter fundamentally to Britain. The days of isolationism are gone, rightly. Our role now is to be a leading partner in shaping the Europe of the future, not following reluctantly the shape moulded by others. We are playing that role now. We will continue to do so.

**Mr. Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement on the Laeken summit and his words on the proposed United Nations peacekeeping force. If I may, I shall address the issues around peacekeeping first, as they perhaps have the most immediate significance for our troops.

The Prime Minister is right to talk about the success of the coalition against the Taliban. Events are still going on and clearly it is too early to say that the coalition has been fully successful, but so far it has been a dramatic success. Throughout, I believe rightly, we have supported the objectives laid out by the Prime Minister and by the President, and we remain committed to those objectives.

Our United States partners are cautious about deploying their troops in a peacekeeping role, as they think that that may be inconsistent with much of what they are doing in search and destroy on the ground in southern Afghanistan. The Prime Minister knows that I have deep misgivings about British deployment on a peacekeeping mission such as he described. My misgivings are based particularly on the reality that we already have troops on the ground with the Americans carrying out search and destroy against remaining elements of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. What concerns me and, I think, the House is that elements of the Pushtun are still unhappy about the settlement, and that members of the Taliban will find an opportunity to pick a target in the peacekeeping process to get their own back.

We have a number of questions for the Prime Minister arising from those deep concerns. Will he confirm the words of his official spokesman this morning that the initial deployment of a stabilisation force could be in Kabul before Saturday? Will he confirm to the House that any hurried deployment will overlap with British forces' involvement in search and destroy missions, as I have described?

Will the Prime Minister tell the House that military support—logistical support, airlifts and air cover—that peacekeepers will receive from the United States will be substantial? There are reports that a precondition for deployment was that the force will be under overall US command. Has that now been finalised and agreed?

What conditions will be met before our troops are deployed? What particular exit strategy has been decided on? Is there a time limit for their deployment, or is that to be open-ended and the subject of future discussions about when it will end?

As so many people in Afghanistan have weapons—pretty heavy-calibre weapons at that—what assessment has been made of the equipment necessary to protect the force? It may not be right to leave troops with the minimum equipment or light equipment, such as flak jackets and personal weapons. Heavy back-up support, even at the level of artillery, may be required.

Those serious questions need to be answered; otherwise the deep misgivings that Conservative Members and many others have about the deployment will remain. Our misgivings need to be assuaged, so that we can understand more fully that our troops are not being put into situations that they will be completely unable to control.

I shall now turn to the Laeken summit, about which the Prime Minister said:

"I believe increasingly that argument is moving in our favour."

If only it were. Unfortunately for him, we can read the declaration that he signed up to. Nation states coming together for specific purposes can solve problems, but the declaration did not seem to reflect any of that. The response to 11 September was not about transnational institutions, but about the ability of free nation states to deal with specific problems. Laeken should have reflected that, and my concern is that it did not.

I shall quote from the declaration:

"Over the last ten years, construction of a political union has begun".

Furthermore, the document asks,

"How can the authority and efficiency of the European Commission be enhanced?"

Is that really what the nations and the people of Europe have been crying out for: enhanced significance and power for the Commission and deeper political union? The declaration goes on to speak of the deepening and enhancing of European foreign policy. Does the Prime Minister believe, as I do, that the argument for a deeper foreign policy falls apart when we see how he and the United States were able to deal with the problems following 11 September in giving a lead to others who otherwise would perhaps not have been anything like as supportive? Should not that freedom continue rather than be sunk into a super-European concept?

*[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]*

Notwithstanding the Prime Minister's words, the document discusses dismissively the importance of national Parliaments. It says:

"The national parliaments also contribute towards the legitimacy of the European project."

I thought they were the legitimacy of anything in Europe, rather than just contributing to it. Again, for those at Laeken the European project came first. They go on to say that they

"want to see Europe more involved in foreign affairs, security and defence".

Yet again, deeper and deeper integration.

These decisions, I think, characterise a shift towards greater central authority; but there are three particular areas in which the Prime Minister agreed to things that the British people would not have wanted had they been at the table. First, he agreed to an EU-wide arrest warrant. That has done away with the principle of habeas corpus in regard to no fewer than 32 crimes, including crimes unrecognised in British law such as the ill-defined "EU crime"—a real thought police crime which will no doubt be drummed up in the future by someone in Brussels. Then there is falsification of means of payment, and, of particular concern, xenophobia. What exactly does that mean? *[Laughter.]* Labour Members laugh at xenophobia, but our concerns are generous. After all, what would have happened if crimes such as xenophobia and racism had existed over the past few weeks? The Prime Minister's poor Home Secretary himself might even now be languishing in a prison in Brussels. It is very unjust.

Secondly, the Prime Minister cannot believe that he has moved the argument into a federal Europe rather than away from it in signing up to what is becoming a European constitution. "Towards a European constitution" are the words; it is not a case of whether there should be a European constitution, or whether it is relevant. The Prime Minister agreed to that in the declaration.

I remember the Prime Minister saying in Warsaw last year—yes, last year: things move on—

"in practice I suspect that, given the sheer diversity and complexity of the EU, its constitution, like the British constitution, will continue to be found in a number of different treaties, laws and precedents".

Well, the Prime Minister seems to have caved in over that. He seems to have thrown that one away in the course of his agreement at the weekend.

Not only has the Prime Minister signed up to a constitution; he has allowed the charter of fundamental rights to be made part of it. This is the charter that he and his colleagues assured us would have no more legal weight than the *Beano*. Is it really the charter that he is now allowing to go into the constitution?

Thirdly, there is the creation of the European security and defence policy, better known as the Euro army. If anything is more meaningless than that, it is the fact that at this time, after 11 September—given the lack of any significant EU response to those troubles, in many senses—the Prime Minister has gone ahead and agreed to further and deeper powers and control over defence at a European level. That will add absolutely nothing to the process of defending us against the evils that exist around the world, and will add everything to the lessening of our ability to do so by weakening NATO. What a time to agree to that! What a pointless exercise.

We witnessed an unedifying spectacle at the end. The only time the leaders gathered around the table became really exercised and excited was when it came to carving up the agencies that would go to their various countries. There were rows about what they would get—whether they would get enough—and disagreements over whether Parma ham looked better than Swedish women. That was what exercised the whole institution. How ridiculous! *[Interruption.]* It is all here. For the first time we have broken the code of secrecy applying to such debates, and can see what each leader was horse trading for. They were all rowing about ridiculous issues such as whether their countries should get 19 people or 1,000.

One issue that was never addressed was Ireland's veto over the Nice treaty. We still cannot go ahead with the treaty, because Ireland has rejected it. No doubt the Government will acquiesce in a drive to bully it into ensuring that it gets the vote right the second time, as ever.

As the Prime Minister said, the future of Europe does matter: it matters immensely. The Prime Minister has agreed to the establishment of a convention that is supposed to involve a balance of agreement about where we are going on Europe. Will he now say whom he intends to put on that body, from the national Parliament? We have already heard that the hon. Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband) will be part of the praesidium, as they call it; and I read today that the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) might be on it. There seems to be no end of attempts to find a job for the right hon. Member for Hartlepool. Two weeks ago, he was going to be Mayor of London; now he will be on the praesidium in Europe. Is the Prime Minister prepared to open up the debate by offering such a post to somebody from the Conservative party, who would have a different view? *[Interruption.]* I challenge the Prime Minister: he says that he wants a decentralised Europe, so is he prepared to appoint to the praesidium somebody from the Conservative party who has a different view of the direction that we should take? If not, we know very well that he has no intention of seeing any change.

The Laeken Council was about a greater move towards a European state. I am reminded of the words of Humpty Dumpty.

"When *I* use a word,"

he said,

"it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less . . . The question is . . . which is to be master—that's all."

Over the weekend, we learned that the Prime Minister acquiesced, once and for all, in making the master of this process Europe, not the nation state.

**The Prime Minister:** May I deal first with the issues arising from the deployment of British troops as part of the peacekeeping force in Kabul? Although the questions that the right hon. Gentleman asks are perfectly reasonable—they are the obvious questions that we are in the course of answering—I very much hope that the Conservatives will support the deployment of British troops in the peacekeeping force, provided that those questions can be properly answered.

We have been looking at undertaking the mission at the direct request not only of the United Nations but of the United States. Of course, we have to make sure that our troops go to Kabul under proper conditions; that is

precisely what we are doing now. However, it would be very unfortunate if we walked away from the situation, having achieved so much, and given that the peacekeeping or security force in Kabul is vital in allowing the provisional Government to exist, to prosper and to start putting Afghanistan back on its feet. If the international community walks away from Afghanistan now, it will make exactly the same mistake that the west made 10 or 12 years ago, when it left Afghanistan to become, as it did, a failed state.

In answer to the right hon. Gentleman's points, the United States has made it clear that it will offer full logistical support, including air cover support. A specific time limit has not yet been decided, but people are talking of several months, so British forces would not be in the country on a long-term basis; they would simply get the security force going. That force will, of course, have all the equipment that it needs to do its job properly.

There was talk this morning about when we can put people into place. That depends on the agreements being tied down, but lead elements may be in place by 22 December, when the provisional Government begin their work. Of course, there is no question of the full force being in place by 22 December; it will take far longer to put that together. I hope that, once those questions are answered, the right hon. Gentleman will give the mission his support, because it is important and because we as a nation are best placed to give that leadership, which is why we have been asked to do so.

I shall deal with the right hon. Gentleman's questions about Europe in turn, if I may. He claims that the very talk of political union in Europe is beyond the pale. I have to point out to him that virtually every European treaty over the past two decades has talked about ever-closer union in Europe. He seems to think that there is something objectionable about even asking whether the Commission's power should be enhanced. That is one of several questions that will, of course, be raised during this debate. Another asks whether the European Council's power will be enhanced.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** How?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman asks how. That is one of the very issues to be debated in the course of the work on the convention.

In what I thought was a curious point, the right hon. Gentleman said that national Parliaments were somehow to be downgraded or that the claim that they merely contribute to European politics downgraded them. The fact is that, for the first time, Europe is looking actively at involving national Parliaments in the decision-making process, which is extremely important.

I find the Conservatives' opposition to the European arrest warrant absolutely extraordinary. For a start, the issues raised by the right hon. Gentleman are included in about 30 elements that will be defined specifically when we come to debate the matter in the House. Basically, however, this country has everything to gain from the European arrest warrant. At the moment, we are seeking people abroad for serious crimes such as drug trafficking, organised crime and serious sexual offences. We have an objective need to get these people extradited quickly. At the moment, it takes, on average, roughly 10 months to extradite them. Some have had extradition warrants outstanding against them for several years. It is therefore vital for proper law enforcement here that we make sure that those people can be extradited properly.

I do not understand the distinctions that the right hon. Gentleman was making. I think it a little unlikely that, in respect of xenophobia, he or anyone else is going to be extradited to any European country, no matter what he says. For a start, they probably would not want him.

It is absolutely extraordinary that the Conservatives should say that they are against the very concept of a European constitution when we already have in European treaties things that are set out concerning the relationships between members states of the Union. Surely it is entirely sensible to try to codify those and bring them into a proper and disciplined method that is simpler and easier to understand, allowing us for the first time to look at the competencies between the EU and the member states.

The right hon. Gentleman then went into his normal position on the European security and defence policy. He seemed to think that, somehow, agreeing to this would mean that our freedom to act as we have done after 11 September would be curtailed. That is the usual Conservative nonsense. There is absolutely nothing whatever in the European security and defence policy that would prevent us from acting in precisely the same way as we acted after 11 September.

**Mr. Michael Ancram** (Devizes): What does it mean?

**The Prime Minister:** I say to the shadow Foreign Secretary, it means this: it means that Europe should have the capability, if each individual country desires it to be so, to take part in peacekeeping operations—as we are doing now in Macedonia, in a way that is preventing civil war in that place and in the wider Balkans. Quite why the Conservative party should be against that, I do not know, but it is part of their usual European business.

I do not know whether the saddest thing about the end of what the right hon. Gentleman said was what he said or the support that he got from his Back Benches for saying it. I say to the Conservative party that, at some point, it will have to come back to its senses on Europe.

Let me give a classic example of what this country's diplomacy would be returned to were the Conservative party, in its present state, in government. There was a meeting of Conservative party leaders on Thursday night, which the right hon. Gentleman attended. One of the other Conservative leaders at the European summit described the meeting with the right hon. Gentleman—the first they had had—as "curious". He said that the right hon. Gentleman turned up for the first time with an eight-page letter—not written in green ink, at least—making a series of demands upon the European Conservative group. The right hon. Gentleman asked that those demands be accepted. They told him no. He asked to be able to raise them again in six months. They said that he could raise them as many times as he wanted. The right hon. Gentleman then left the meeting.

If we went back to that method of proceeding, this country would be where we found it in May 1997—isolated, marginalised and without any proper influence at all. On the issues concerning the future of Europe—economic reform, the single market, the institutional future of Europe, how we create the right security and

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foreign policy for Europe in the future—Europe needs Britain to be engaged and Britain needs to have influence in Europe.

If we went back to those days, it might satisfy some of the extremists in the Conservative party whose main motivation in politics now seems to be anti-Europeanism. But it would be a disaster for the proper interests of this country. I say to the right hon. Gentleman that his party will hopefully at some point come back to a realistic and sensible position on Europe. Until it does, frankly the Conservative party is barely qualified as an Opposition, never mind a Government.

**Mr. Charles Kennedy** (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): In welcoming the Prime Minister's statement and the outcome of the summit, I wish to point initially to the fact that too many of the European Union's detractors over the years have been able to make their cases precisely because it has not had an adequately defined constitutional settlement for the member states. The work that will now be undertaken on that matter is therefore to be welcomed. We will end up with a document that sets out what the EU should be doing and what it should not get involved in. Any sensible, candid friend of Europe—in this party, we are certainly that—would give a broad measure of welcome to such a development.

The need for such a development is underpinned by what the Prime Minister said about the process of enlargement. Those of us who were Members of Parliament a decade or so ago and remember that Monday afternoon after the weekend the Berlin wall came down—and the huge sense of political liberation that accompanied it—will remember that all the talk was of enlargement, but a decade later, the over-ossified structures have not yet enabled so many of the aspirant states to join. Something that will assist progress in that matter is to be welcomed.

As the Prime Minister acknowledged, that progress must also be accompanied by changes in our internal procedures here. Last week, the Leader of the House published modernisation proposals for the House to discuss. I commend to the Prime Minister an idea that does not appear in those proposals but on which we as a Parliament should reflect, and that is the need for more effective scrutiny on the Floor of the House of the monumental amount of legislation from Europe, which many of us have felt has never been adequately scrutinised. Is that something that the Prime Minister wishes to consider?

It is surely welcome that more priority will be given to openness. It is a sobering thought that the Council of Ministers is one of only three legislatures in the entire world to legislate in private, the other two being Cuba and North Korea. That is not something that Europe should seek to emulate much longer.

On Afghanistan, I wish to question the Prime Minister a little more about the extent of the mandate and, in particular, the nature of the rules of engagement for any British troops. How robust will the latter be? For example, will our troops be able only to defend themselves, or will they be proactive and able to intervene if a violation of human rights occurs? If our troops are committed to peacekeeping services in Afghanistan, does that rule out any future British involvement in, say, Iraq if the Americans decide to take that route?

Could the Prime Minister modify his over-caution on the euro by giving the House a clearer idea of any possible time scale vis-à-vis a referendum? Does he agree that in opening up the institutions of Europe, and the European Council in particular, we should apply what we applied to ourselves some years ago, and allow those proceedings to be seen in public?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sorry to disappoint the right hon. Gentleman, but I do not wish to say anything on the single currency other than what I have said many times before. The tests have to be met, and that is the position.

The UN mandate will be on a chapter 7 basis. The rules of engagement still have to be finalised, and they will need careful consideration to ensure that our troops are properly protected at all times. The Modernisation Committee will consider any proposals that the right hon. Gentleman wishes to submit on the scrutiny of European legislation. On the issue of enlargement and the simplification of the treaties, if the EU expanded from 15 to 25 or, in the end, to 30, it would obviously be necessary to simplify and change the process of decision making, which is one reason why the Conservative party's position is so ridiculous. That has to happen; otherwise Europe would be unable to take the necessary decisions.

Europe is trying to codify in a constitution exactly what the basic competencies of member states and the European Union are precisely because we need the right framework to develop in future.

As ever, the Conservative party asks completely the wrong question. The issue is not whether we have a constitution—we already have one through the treaty of Rome and other treaties. The issue is what should go into a constitution. That is where our main effort should be made. Rather than saying that we want nothing to do with the process simply because it is discussing the constitution, we should be focusing attention on how we manage to ensure that the constitution is drawn up in exactly the way that we want. We want a European Union of co-operating member states, not a federal superstate. The language of the Laeken declaration makes it clear that we are not going down the path towards a federal superstate.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Rather than listening to the Liberal Democrats squawking about the euro, the Prime Minister should remember that if it is a good idea to allow nation states to have more power, there is no point in having a single currency covering 25 different currencies. It will not be a good idea to rush into the euro. Even if he succeeds in deciding that we enter, at the right time, and after a referendum of the people, that decision would have a damaging effect at any forthcoming general election. Many Labour Members will gladly travel down that road, but I think that it is very dangerous indeed.

**The Prime Minister:** There are two positions on the euro—indeed, there are more than two positions, but there are certainly the two positions that my hon. Friend mentioned. We are doing the right thing by saying that it is, in principle, sensible for Britain to join a successful single currency, but that, in practice, the economic tests must be met. The euro will be a reality in the European Union in a very short time when the notes and coins physically come into being. It would be foolish to take the position of the Conservative party and say that we

should have nothing to do with the euro, that we should not even prepare for it and that never will Britain join. That foolish position might gain support in certain quarters, but it is not in the interests of the country.

**Mr. Ian Taylor** (Esher and Walton): The Prime Minister has come a long way since he stood on a manifesto in 1983 that offered to take us out of the European Union. That said, he is absolutely right that if we are in Europe, it must work effectively. Does he agree that when the Commission acts to uphold free trade in the single market, it acts in the British national interest? Does he agree that it therefore needs to be made more authoritative and that we need to know how it is controlled?

Does the Prime Minister also agree that the European Court of Justice, in enforcing decisions made by Ministers, is acting in the British national interest? Does he further agree that the Petersberg tasks in defence, which were agreed by Conservatives, are vital to Europe's interest and that it is therefore essential that Europe has a role in proceeding with them as part of a wider NATO commitment. On all those things, will the Prime Minister continue to raise his voice in Europe? We are in Europe, and we shall be run by Europe only if we do not use our influence in the sort of discussion that will culminate in the intergovernmental conference of 2004.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the Labour party has travelled a certain distance on Europe since 1983. I regret to say that his party has travelled a certain distance too, but in the opposite direction. *[Interruption.]* Well, look where it got us is all I can say to that.

On Court decisions and so on, the hon. Gentleman is right. It would not be possible for us to enforce our will on issues relating to the single market without the Commission and the Court acting in our national interest. The hon. Gentleman was also right to say that the European common defence policy was started under the previous Government. That was a classic example of a debate that, when we came to office, was proceeding without much British influence. Britain has since successfully shaped that policy to include two very important safeguards. First, it applies where NATO as a whole does not wish to be engaged.

**Mr. Ancram:** That is not true.

**The Prime Minister:** Secondly, there is not a standing army.

**Mr. William Cash** (Stone): Not true.

**The Prime Minister:** They keep saying that it is not true, but I can absolutely assure them that that is the precise position. The policy applies only where NATO as a whole does not want to be engaged. That is what the Council conclusions say.

Secondly, only in respect of each operation do we have to agree before our troops are used, so the policy is not a European standing army—it never has been and no one has ever wanted it to be. It is, however, for Europe to have the capability—where America, for example, does not want to be engaged—to undertake peacekeeping and humanitarian tasks. We can see from what happened in Bosnia in the early 1990s, for example, and from what happened recently in Macedonia how vital it is to have that additional string to our bow.

**Mrs. Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside): What action is the Prime Minister urging Europe to take to reduce the flow of financial and other support to Hamas and Islamic Jihad—terrorist organisations dedicated to ensuring that there is never peace in the middle east?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of how support gets to terrorist groups—Palestinian or others—wherever they may be. During the past few weeks, the European Union has, of course, agreed further financial regulation provisions on issues such as money laundering, in order to ensure that we cut off the sources of funding for those groups. Part of the problem is that they have been extremely well financed during the past few years. We have to ensure that those sources of finance are dried up.

**Sir Michael Spicer** (West Worcestershire): As the Prime Minister has given way at Laeken on almost everything that matters, how can we trust what he says about "Corpus Juris"?

**The Prime Minister:** First, we have not given away what is in this country's interest. In the end, on all these issues, we have to ensure that we go in and argue our case. When the European Union enlarges to 25 members, it is inevitable that we shall have to change the method of proceeding. We will not be able to be in a situation where, for example—

**Sir Michael Spicer:** What about "Corpus Juris"?

**The Prime Minister:** I am coming to that in a moment. We shall not be in the situation where, for example, there is a rotating presidency every six months. We shall have to change the way in which we work. At present, the Council meetings are not properly—

**Sir Michael Spicer:** The right hon. Gentleman gave way.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**The Prime Minister:** We are engaging in a debate. As for "Corpus Juris", again we have not given away anything. In respect of the debates in Europe, we have to make our views known.

I support the European arrest warrant. It allows us to get back from abroad criminals who have committed offences in this country and then fled abroad: literally scores of them are living in European countries. It takes us years to get them back and it is only today's Conservative party that could oppose such a thing.

**Mr. Nigel Beard** (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Does the proposal for an intergovernmental conference responding to the enlargement of the European Union and the preparatory convention chaired by Mr. Giscard d'Estaing imply that the treaty of Nice is, in essence, an interim measure?

**The Prime Minister:** No, it does not imply that, because the treaty of Nice said in terms that there should

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be an intergovernmental conference in 2004. It shows that there are two stages. First, certain changes were agreed at Nice in relation to, for example, the voting rights of the applicant countries. Then, there were a series of things that we agreed could not be decided at Nice but which needed a longer period of consideration, because the applicant countries will not come in immediately. That is the purpose of the intergovernmental conference. There are really two blocks of things. There are things such as voting rights and so on—the precise conditions under which applicant countries would come in. Secondly, there are the internal workings of the European Union itself—that is what the intergovernmental conference will consider.

**Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): How can the Prime Minister claim that the European Union has yet to deliver results? Is not it the case that most of British agriculture is almost bankrupt as a consequence of the common agricultural policy and that we pay some of the highest food prices in the world? Is not it the case that the British fishing industry has been decimated through the common fisheries policy? As for the commitment in Afghanistan, is not that posturing—an attempt to get into the victory chariot when most of the fighting is over? Are not British troops going to be there for an inordinately long time, for no clearly defined political purpose and at great risk to themselves?

**The Prime Minister:** As for the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question, the reason that the issue of a security force is raised in respect of Afghanistan is that it was part of the agreement for the political future of that country—concluded by all the parties in Bonn. It will be a real shame if the Conservative party now sets its face against supporting such a force.

Britain is talked of as the lead nation because it was specifically asked by both the United Nations and the United States to take on this role. The reason why it is important—*[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) is saying that the United States does not support Britain's role in this matter, he is simply wrong, and he will have been told that when he was in Washington.

I agree that the European Union, the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy need fundamental reform, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would find much support among, for example, the British farming community for unilateral withdrawal from the CAP. What we need are major changes to it. Again, we will get those changes only if we are inside Europe, arguing our case.

**Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston): The Prime Minister mentioned preparations for the IGC in 2004 and the convention. Will he say more on what role the accession states will have in discussions leading up to the convention, as it may involve some treaty changes that will affect them?

**The Prime Minister:** They will be fully involved in the convention. They will have the right to be there and to make the points that they wish. That is a very important element. The accession, applicant countries have a deep interest in the matter. The proposals made at Laeken for their involvement were broadly and widely welcomed by the applicant countries in the course of our meetings.

**Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): Although the emphasis on enlargement is indeed welcome, will the Prime Minister comment on the following concerns? First, if we are really to take all 10 applicant countries into the Union in two years' time, or just over that, will that not require for some, though not all, intensive and indeed expensive care and maintenance to ensure the stability of their economies? Secondly, will he ensure that there is no distraction from the task of making sure that the single market works effectively, of which we have had a conspicuous counter-example, which has been resolved in the European Court this week? It is essential that we keep on the pressure to consolidate the single market.

Thirdly—this is my real concern—the Prime Minister has spoken a number of times about decision making and said that it must be streamlined. Does he understand that there are concerns that we will not be faced with streamlining as much as steamrollering of essential national interests?

**The Prime Minister:** In relation to the 10 applicant countries, the hon. Gentleman is of course right to say that enlargement is a very big thing to happen in the European Union. There are, however, phasing arrangements for many of the most critical aspects, and I think that that will be of some assistance.

On the European Court and the completion of the single market, it is vital that the Court has the powers that it has and that, where its decisions go against particular countries, they are enforced by the Commission—as, for example, they will be in respect of France and the ban on British beef.

As for, as it were, streamlining versus steamrollering, what is clear is that there are two different views on how Europe should develop. One view is that, in effect, it should develop into a situation in which the Commission has very much more power and the European Parliament is the fount of democracy in the EU—a view shared by some countries. There is an equally strong view—I would say now predominantly rather stronger—that that is not the right way for Europe to go, and that, in fact democratic legitimacy is rooted in the member state.

That is a debate in Europe, and a very strongly fought one. My point is simply that the most important thing is that we end up ensuring that we are in Europe, fighting our corner, rather than retreating to the sidelines and saying that we are so scared of the debate taking place that we, Britain, do not believe that we can have any influence on it. In fact, we have been able on, for example, the issues of economic reform or European defence to secure many of our objectives precisely because we have been willing to be involved rather than marginalised. I am sure that in the end, as indeed the previous Conservative Government did with the single market, that is the right approach.

**Mr. Kevin Barron** (Rother Valley): I welcome enlargement in terms of the number of countries and the timetable. I hope that we will be in a position in three years' time to go some major way towards making Europe a safer place for future generations than it was for past

generations. The accession of Bulgaria will rely not only on the Bulgarian economy, but on the regeneration of the Balkan economy. Are improvements in that region likely in forthcoming years?

**The Prime Minister:** I know that my hon. Friend takes an interest in that area. We commend the improvements and progress made in Bulgaria. He is right to say that regeneration in the Balkans will be important to the stability of Bulgaria, Romania and other countries in the region. What is interesting about all the Balkan countries is that the prospect of EU membership has become a major focus for democratic and economic progress. People sometimes ask what good has come out of Europe in the past 50 years. Peace and prosperity are two pretty good results; furthermore, many of the nations in the most troubled parts of the European continent are not anxious to stay out of the European Union, but are desperate to get in.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray): Will the Prime Minister take the opportunity to confirm that he will not allow the full direct representation of the Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish Parliaments or Administrations as part of the UK delegation to the convention? Will he explain to the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland why he thinks we are not good enough to attend in our own right, unlike the German Bundesländer?

**The Prime Minister:** Relations and representation will be precisely the same as for the German Länder, so the hon. Gentleman is wrong.

**Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): May I take the Prime Minister to a narrow point relating to the appointment of parliamentarians to the convention? Does he agree that who is to represent Parliament is his business as a Member of Parliament, not as Prime Minister? Is not the question of who should represent us a matter for Parliament? Should not both the seats be for the House of Commons—the elected House—with the other place losing out? Will he give an assurance that the decision will be made by the House? My right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), my hon. Friends the Members for South Shields (Mr. Miliband) and for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson)—and others, no doubt—have already been mentioned as possible candidates. We in this place should elect our representatives. The Prime Minister is represented at the convention as Government; we want our slice of the action to be directed by the House and not influenced by either Front Bench.

**The Prime Minister:** We shall certainly consult very closely on the proper arrangements.

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield): May I return the Prime Minister to the important question asked by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition about the danger of confusion of British troops' roles in carrying out two separate tasks in Afghanistan? Does he understand that there is great concern, not confined to those of us who have served with United Nations peacekeeping forces, about the potentially greatly enhanced danger of British troops being engaged in peacekeeping operations in the same theatre as they are involved in offensive search-and-destroy operations?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course—it is precisely for that reason that we must tie down carefully the arrangements for Britain to participate in the peacekeeping mission in Kabul. The force is there, in effect, as a security assistance force for the new provisional Government. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the arrangements under which our forces participate will take full account of the issue he raises. However, to return to the point I made when answering the Leader of the Opposition, it would be unfortunate were we not to participate at all. The reason why we have not been giving all the details since the issue was raised some days ago is that those details are important and must be tightly bolted down before we give our consent to be the lead nation. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are currently addressing precisely those issues.

**Roger Casale** (Wimbledon): Will my right hon. Friend reflect on the fact that many Europeans will be looking to him and to other European leaders to bring the same dedication and leadership to a new international initiative aimed at retrieving the peace process in the middle east as they have shown in the international fight against terrorism? Does he agree that while it is right to condemn unreservedly the terrorist attacks on Israel and to call on Yasser Arafat to dismantle Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad networks, European leaders should also be calling on Israel to stop short of destroying the Palestinian Authority altogether, because without a Palestinian Authority there can be no peace process at all?

**The Prime Minister:** We have made it clear that anything that weakens the ability of the Palestinian Authority to fight terrorism is a retrograde step. However, it is important that we balance the calls that we make upon Israel with strong calls in respect of the Palestinian Authority, too. We cannot continue with a situation in which, literally week by week, there are appalling suicide bombings and terrorist outrages. We know in the House how we felt after the worst outrages of, first, the IRA and then things such as the Omagh bomb of three years ago: imagine if that were happening in this country literally every week or two weeks. People should have some understanding that that is the background against which Israel is acting.

It is important to get initial security steps in place and then return to a process. In the end, it is only through the political process that any of these difficult issues will be resolved.

**Mr. John Redwood** (Wokingham): Does the Prime Minister agree that an elected President of the EU would be incompatible with the sort of vision that he has set out of co-operating, independent democratic states in the EU, or has the Chancellor persuaded him that it could be an exciting vacancy for a man of his talents?

**The Prime Minister:** I am not in favour of a directly elected President of the European Commission, but that is exactly the type of argument that will be fought out over the next two or three years. Some people will say that all the power should be put into the hands of the Commission

*[The Prime Minister]*

and the European Parliament; others, such as ourselves, will say that the Commission must retain its independent right of initiative, but that we must consider how we strengthen the workings of, for example, the European Council and make it more effective, and how we deal with the issue of a rotating six-monthly presidency—a procedure that cannot be maintained in an enlarged European Union.

It is important to get into those arguments, participate in them and attempt to succeed in them. The trouble is, as the right hon. Gentleman's leader found when he went to the leaders' meeting in Laeken, that if the Conservatives are completely isolated—*[Interruption.]* The idea that the other Conservative leaders in Europe agreed with the British Conservative party is laughable. Over the past few days we have had a good example of the diplomatic position of the Conservative party, which ends in basic humiliation and failure. Our diplomatic position has secured all the objectives that we sought.

**Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reality of economic and monetary union will be brought home in the United Kingdom in two weeks' time by the circulation of euro notes and coins? People will be able to go into their local Dixons to buy a television set with euro notes and coins and to buy a pint in JD Wetherspoon on the same basis. That may not change the attitude of the owners, but perhaps the attitude of the people will be changed. Will my right hon. Friend take it from me that the European Central Bank misses the democratic accountability element? That is an important aspect if we are to bring the Union much closer to the people of the European Union.

**The Prime Minister:** It is important that the people understand that in a couple of weeks' time euro notes and coins will be in circulation; twelve of the 15 European Union member states will be using that currency. It is also important for British companies and British firms here, many of which will be trading in euros or using the euro in one form or another, even though Britain is outside the single currency zone. It is extremely important that we do not take the position of sticking our head in the sand and pretending that it will all go away. It is a reality, and in two weeks' time it will be an even greater reality.

**Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): Will the Prime Minister say which specific European competencies he wishes to see repatriated to national Governments, and do they include agriculture?

**The Prime Minister:** No, I think that, over a period, we should analyse carefully all the various competencies. We should decide on those things where Europe may, for example, want to integrate more and those that it wants to repatriate to member states. I do not think that it would be sensible for us to tie our hands at this juncture.

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): May I assure the Prime Minister that he has the support of all Labour Members for saying that he will not turn his back on the people of Afghanistan? He will be aware that the World Food Programme has estimated that as many as 3 million people may have been displaced because of the military action and for other reasons, and that camp Maslakh may be housing nearly 800,000 people in desperate circumstances. Even worse, in the remote rural areas, it is now being reported that some people have already died as a result of cold or hunger. Did the Council discuss ways to get emergency aid in, and will the Secretary of State for International Development make a statement on the position before the Christmas recess?

**The Prime Minister:** I do not know the precise arrangements that the Secretary of State for International Development may be making, so I am afraid I cannot comment on that, although I will find out and let my hon. Friend know. She is right to say that humanitarian aid is extremely important. Of course, the only reason that we can get that aid through now is that the Taliban stranglehold on many parts of Afghanistan has been broken.

Finally, my hon. Friend is right; we will not turn our back on Afghanistan because it is right to remain engaged—we promised that we would do so—and if we do not, Afghanistan may return to the failed state in which we found it after 11 September. The truth of the matter is that it was a state existing basically on terrorism and drugs, which subjected its people to vile oppression and was a source of instability in its own region and wider. For us to remain engaged in the reconstruction of Afghanistan is not merely right—it is manifestly in our interest.

**Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory** (Wells): Will the Prime Minister confirm that the summit written conclusions and the declaration are littered with references to the need to cut red tape and reduce labour market regulation but that, simultaneously, the European Union has signed up to the information and consultation directive, which will add red tape and extra labour market regulation? How can he and the European Union be taken seriously when the European Union continues to say one thing in those bits of paper while simultaneously doing something different?

**The Prime Minister:** In respect of the information and consultation directive, I do not accept that every single piece of European legislation is wrong. Indeed, it is not wrong in my view to make sure that people are properly consulted as a work force. In respect of the attitude of the European Union and how much it legislates and how much it does not, it is worth pointing out that that concern is raised in all member states. The European Union declaration makes it clear that that issue has to be on the agenda, but it is more than simply on the agenda in theory: the recent Mandelkern report was endorsed by European Union leaders and, if implemented, it will mean a much greater number of decisions at European Union level will be taken in principle but implemented in the way in which member states want.

I do not dispute the fact that there is an issue and a problem but, again, the body of opinion in Europe is moving towards an easier and lighter-touch process rather than the heavy-handed regulation that perhaps we had in the past. At least the right hon. Gentleman has read the conclusions and the declaration, but he will find that many of the statements in the Laeken declaration tie in with many of people's legitimate fears about the encroaching power of the European Union. I therefore hope that, in some senses, it is welcomed by Conservative Members.

**Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many millions of people are

still rightly anxious about what they perceive as Brussels interfering in the nooks and crannies of British life and that many individuals, including some Opposition Members, rightly need reassurance about a European superstate not being on the agenda? Does he accept that one of the best ways of providing that is to state clearly and baldly in a European constitution that nation states have their rights, and clearly define those rights and the concept of subsidiarity in the constitution? Does he not agree that Opposition Members do not fear a superstate or intervention in nooks and crannies as much they fear clarity?

**The Prime Minister:** I am afraid that they are just anti-Europe. It is as simple as that. The point that my hon. Friend makes is true. Part of the purpose of the declaration is to make sure that on issues of subsidiarity, we achieve clarity. That is important. The declaration, which was agreed by every one of the member states, states in clear language that they do not want a European superstate. A few years ago, voices would probably have been raised in protest against that.

I draw attention to the recent statements made in front of the French Parliament by Mr. Giscard d'Estaing on the same subject. There is a general view in Europe that as member states move together on certain matters, it is important that they decide not to go into other areas, and even to push back power in certain areas. That closer co-operation must be based on co-operation between member states, rather than on the obliteration of national identity.

The idea that a country such as France has lost its national identity is absurd. The countries of Europe are proud of their national identity. The idea that Poland, for example, which wants to come into the European Union, is not proud of Poland and Polish national identity is absurd. We—or rather, the Conservative party—must escape from that ideological straitjacket; otherwise we will be unable to protect the British national interest, which requires us to be engaged.

The British Conservative party is virtually alone of all Conservative parties in Europe in its views, so much so that the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) must write to them pleading to be allowed a different set of rules from Conservative parties elsewhere in Europe. That is an indication of how far away the Conservative party is from a realistic view of how people are living and working in the Europe of today.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. We must move on to the main business.

# Orders of the Day

## Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning (Amendment) Bill

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Mr. Speaker:** I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.37 pm

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I intend to begin by setting out what the Bill does. I shall then explain the political context for the Bill and why it is necessary to introduce it at this time.

The Bill extends the maximum length of the period during which legal immunity may be provided in implementing a decommissioning scheme. It does so by amending section 2 of the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997. Under that Act, the power to provide legal immunity expires on 27 February next year. Clause 1(2) initially extends the maximum period during which legal immunity may be provided until midnight on 26 February 2003. In other words, by today's proceedings the period will be extended by 12 months.

Under the 1997 Act, the Secretary of State has the power by order further to extend the relevant period. Such an extension may not run for more than 12 months after the order is made, or five years after the 1997 Act was passed. Subsection (3) does not affect the former condition: each order would still be subject to a maximum duration of 12 months and require parliamentary approval by affirmative resolution. However, it substitutes 27 February 2007 for the five-year period.

Subsection (4) provides for retrospective effect, if necessary. That means that anything done in accordance with a decommissioning scheme, even if the Bill is not enacted by 26 February next, will, once the Bill is enacted, fall within the legal immunity provided for by the 1997 Act. In short, the Bill extends the existing arrangements for one further year, with the possibility of further extensions, subject always to the approval of this House.

The background to today's proceedings will be well known to some of the participants who are present. Just over five years ago, when the now Lord Mayhew introduced the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill to the House, he observed that, in a democracy, politics and violence do not mix. I agree with that view and I assume that everyone else in the House agrees with it. We all know that in Northern Ireland, we are dealing with a peace, a process and a democracy that are all imperfect by those standards. That is perhaps an inevitable price of the transition from decades of conflict to a normal society. But no democracy can indefinitely tolerate the existence of private armies. No Government can allow people to advance their political objectives, however legitimate they may be in themselves, by the use or threat of violence.

An integral part of the peace process has been to convince those who were previously wedded to violence, including those brought up in the traditions of physical

*[Dr. John Reid]*

force republicanism, that there is another, better way in which they can pursue their political goals. Many of those so involved learned years ago that they could not achieve their ends by violence alone. It has inevitably been a more difficult challenge to get them all to accept unequivocally that bombs and bullets have absolutely no contribution to make to the work of a truly democratic movement. Indeed, violence is a self-defeating exercise even by the standards of the objectives that some of these movements proclaim, because so long as the use or threat of violence continues, it must follow that violence and the necessary response of society to it are the biggest obstacle to achieving a normal, open and democratic society—the very objective that those using violence so often claim to be pursuing.

It will therefore come as no surprise to anyone in the House that there is still a great deal to be done and more progress to be made, but it is worth reminding ourselves of what has been achieved. In recent years, the political landscape in Northern Ireland has changed beyond recognition. Huge strides have been made on the implementation of all aspects of the Belfast agreement and in improving the daily life of everyone in Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): I have agreed with almost everything that the Secretary of State has said so far. However, his speech would have been marvellous four and a half years ago, when the Belfast agreement was secured. The agreement stated specifically that all paramilitary arms would have to be decommissioned within two years. However, after two years, plus another two years, plus six months, he is now saying that we will give the paramilitaries another year and perhaps another four years. What is going on?

**Dr. Reid:** If the hon. Gentleman was being absolutely honest with the House, he would have read out the words precisely before those to which he referred, which dealt with a commitment by all the parties to use all their influence to see that all arms were put beyond use within two years. We have clearly not achieved that deadline. Nor did we achieve the deadline of June last year, which was given subsequently, and it seems to me likely that we will not achieve that of 26 February next year. That suggests that deadlines in themselves do not always achieve the objectives that they are meant to achieve. I shall return to that point later.

**Mr. David Trimble** (Upper Bann): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way on an important point. As he pointed out, the agreement set a target date of 26 May 2000 for the complete disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. Early in May 2000, the Government, with the consent of the other parties, substituted a fresh target date of June 2001. That has now passed. Under what target date are the Government operating for the full implementation of the agreement? Have they abandoned its full implementation as a target?

**Dr. Reid:** The right hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that I shall deal with that exact point later in my speech. I shall comment on deadlines, target dates and the extension that I have already mentioned. Today's action means that we shall debate the matter not at the end of five years, but one year after the extension for which the Bill provides.

**Mr. Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield): Clearly, we are considering a difficult issue. Does the Secretary of State agree that the one example of proper decommissioning by the IRA resulted from a deadline and massive international and national pressure? As he acknowledged, we must build on that if the peace process is to continue. Yet does not the Bill give the opposite signal—that decommissioning can be deferred indefinitely? It means reverting to quiescence, which, although one might hope that it would lead to decommissioning, has led to nothing in the past.

**Dr. Reid:** Several factors led to the act of decommissioning, but I do not believe that the pressure of a 26 February deadline was one of them. Pressure came from several sources, which may have included 11 September, the persistent application of pressure by Governments here, in Ireland and in the United States, and the resignation of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). In my view, the most important factor, and the most important sanction on those engaged in the process, is the possibility of its failure. Such failure is almost beyond imagination for all of us who are involved in it, including those who have embarked on moving away from conflict to dialogue.

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Grantham and Stamford): Let me take the Secretary of State back to an important point. He rightly cited the Belfast agreement as placing an obligation on the parties to decommission completely in two years. Does he accept that Sinn Fein-IRA was one party or does he buy into the fiction that Sinn Fein and the IRA are separate organisations?

**Dr. Reid:** No. Obviously Sinn Fein was a signatory to the Belfast agreement, and the hon. Gentleman knows that the IRA was not. Sinn Fein therefore committed itself to using all its power and influence to achieve decommissioning.

**Mr. Davies:** So the right hon. Gentleman accepts the fiction that Sinn Fein and the IRA are separate organisations, which make decisions separately and can be regarded as separate for the purpose of the Belfast agreement?

**Dr. Reid:** I do not accept that every member of Sinn Fein is a member of the IRA or that they are completely identical. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] With respect, that was the question. The hon. Gentleman appears to insist that the obvious relationship between them means that they must be identical in all ways. I do not accept that.

**Mr. Davies:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way yet again. He is at odds with the Prime Minister, who said at Balmoral on 14 May 1998:

"we know that for example Sinn Fein and the IRA remain inextricably linked".

**Dr. Reid:** The Labour party and the trade union movement are inextricably linked but they are not identical.

**David Burnside** (South Antrim) *rose—*

**Dr. Reid:** There is nothing incompatible between my comments and those of the Prime Minister, and if—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord):** Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Secretary of State, but the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) must not remain on his feet when the Secretary of State is responding to an earlier intervention. He must wait until the right hon. Gentleman has dealt with that.

**Dr. Reid:** The hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) is keen to catch my eye, but I assure him that I would not be discourteous enough to miss him, especially in the position that he has been in for the last minute or so.

I would say to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) that, of course, all of us recognise that there is an inextricable link between Sinn Fein and the IRA, but that is not what he asked me. He asked me whether they were identical organisations. Plainly, anyone who knows anything about the matter understands that they are not, any more than the trade union movement and the Labour party are absolutely the same. If he thinks that the only analysis can be complete identity or complete separation between the two organisations, he does not understand—indeed, he underestimates—the sophistication of the opponents that he is trying to deal with.

**David Burnside:** Does the Secretary of State accept that there is a single leadership in Sinn Fein-IRA, which is personified at the top by Martin McGuinness being chief of staff of the army council of the Provisional IRA?

**Dr. Reid:** I have no information that Mr. McGuinness is chief of staff of the army council of the IRA, if that is what the hon. Gentleman is asking me. His sources might be better than mine and, if so, I would be extremely obliged if he would make them available to the state security apparatus. We do not have that information. If he is asking whether the leadership of the republican movement is known to all of us, then I would say that it is. We can carry on with a discussion of how many republican angels can dance on the head of a pin, or we can address the subject in front of us. I suggest that the second option might be more productive for the whole House.

**Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire): Does the Minister accept that, given that Sinn Fein and the IRA are clearly linked, the main point is to recognise the momentous symbolic importance of the first step that they took in the decommissioning process? We should discuss the Bill in that strategic context, rather than in the tactical context in which we have been discussing it for the last few minutes.

**Dr. Reid:** I entirely agree. That is what I am trying to do. We must remind ourselves that, although there have been huge imperfections in the transition period, huge strides forward have also been made on all aspects of the Belfast agreement. These are not esoteric or academic matters, because they are the very advances that make so much difference to the lives of millions of ordinary people in Northern Ireland and, to some extent, here in Britain as well.

It is also worth reminding ourselves that since 1998, we have witnessed the establishment of the democratic institutions, not only in terms of the north-south dimension, but of the stronger British-Irish relationships. We have seen the principle of consent enshrined in the agreement, thereby putting Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom beyond doubt, and the removal of the Republic's territorial claim to Northern Ireland, which was previously enshrined in articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution.

Those are gains that I believe all hon. Members would warmly welcome, as is the incorporation of human rights in all aspects of life by the introduction of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Human Rights Commission. We have also seen the advancement of equal opportunities for all in Northern Ireland, irrespective of their background, by the implementation of the equality provisions and the establishment of the Equality Commission.

In addition, since 1998, we have made a new start on policing and criminal justice, with the completion of significant reviews of policing and the criminal justice system. These are merely some of the major strides forward that have been made. None has been easy; all have required the participants to challenge their preconceptions. Those challenges have, however, been met and overcome in the course of this process, however difficult or impossible they seemed. Despite all the difficulties, the progress continues.

It is natural in a debate of this nature that people will have in their minds some of the scenes that we have witnessed on television over the last six months. There is no reason why they should not do so; indeed, it is probably essential that we all bear them in mind. However, even in the last six months, some of those headlines have camouflaged significant steps forward in the peace process.

There is formal cross-community support for policing for the first time in Northern Ireland's history. There is successful recruitment to the new police service, drawn from both traditions, and it is worth remarking on the cross-community support for the new police service badge, as shown by the Policing Board last week—another seemingly impossible challenge, which was met on the run by the new Policing Board. In deference to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, I should say that he has a theory that the Policing Board was able to reach a conclusion so quickly on a cross-community basis because the designs that I gave to it were so awful as to drive everyone else into agreement. There has been further progress towards normalising security arrangements, and the criminal justice Bill and the draft implementation plan have been published.

In that context, and perhaps most relevant of all to today's debate, following a four-year ceasefire and arms dumps being opened up to inspection, there has been an unprecedented act of decommissioning by the Provisional IRA. Whatever hon. Members, or, indeed, those who deny the significance of that, may think about the timing, let us recall that we were told that it would never happen, that it was impossible, that it was too huge a challenge even

*[Dr. Reid]*

to contemplate and that it was not worth waiting another six months for it. I believe that it clearly demonstrates the enormous progress made in such a relatively short time.

**Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh) *rose—*

**Dr. Reid:** Before I take this intervention, I must say that I hope that that shorthand style of delivery on those issues on which we have made progress does not detract from the fact that each and every development that I listed has in itself been hugely significant.

**Mr. Francois:** The Secretary of State described the act of decommissioning as truly significant. To allow the House of Commons to judge whether that is right, will he tell us, very simply, what the IRA gave up to be decommissioned? If he will not tell the democratically elected House of Commons what it was, will he describe his rationale for not doing so?

**Dr. Reid:** The hon. Gentleman may not be aware of this fact, but the House of Commons decided how those matters would be dealt with when it decided that there would be an international commission under General de Chastelain. The House of Commons decided the schemes under which decommissioning would be carried out. The House of Commons placed General John de Chastelain's remit in statute, so the hon. Gentleman already has his answer.

The manner in which the most delicate and difficult of all the challenges facing any society in the transition from decades—indeed, in some cases, centuries—of conflict through to the route of peace was precisely arranged by the House of Commons so that it would be dealt with by General de Chastelain. Finally, it was not my word that the act was significant but that of General de Chastelain, to whom Members entrusted the task of reporting, through the Governments, to the House.

**Mr. Stephen McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green) *rose—*

**Mr. Francois** *rose—*

**Dr. Reid:** I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe).

**Mr. McCabe:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, because I am concerned about the tone of the previous intervention. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if it is not the intention of the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) to undermine confidence in General de Chastelain and the commission, he should make that clear?

Does my right hon. Friend further agree that that intervention departed from the position of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), who told the House that it was vital that we have faith in an independent international body, and that of the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), who said:

"I am not too fussed about the way in which the weapons and explosives are decommissioned . . . provided that General de Chastelain and his staff can police them at all times."—[*Official Report*, 25 January 2000; Vol. 343, c. 191.]

Is not that the central issue on which we should concentrate and is not it important for the hon. Member for Rayleigh to make it clear that he is not seeking to undermine General de Chastelain or to depart from the positions adopted by two respected right hon. Members?

**Dr. Reid:** I cannot speak for the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), but I am sure that he would not seek to undermine the status, role, remit or integrity of General de Chastelain. I understand the natural frustration at these circumstances, but I caution people that, having given General de Chastelain such a difficult role, having set the remit and statute by which he should carry it out and having agreed the scheme under which he would be able to verify it, we should not let our natural inquisition into the course of history in any way impute to the general a lack of integrity. It is General de Chastelain himself who referred to the event as significant.

**Mr. Francois:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dr. Reid:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me make a little progress, because I have taken quite a few interventions.

**Mr. Francois:** The right hon. Gentleman said he would give way again.

**Dr. Reid:** I did not say that I would give way to him. I said that I was sure that he would make his view clear. I have no doubt that he will have a chance to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I cannot devote my whole speech to the hon. Gentleman's or other interventions. If I can make a little progress, I shall take further interventions.

I believe that all the developments I referred to have been hugely significant in building trust, in building confidence, and in building a new Northern Ireland, where local, accountable politicians are working towards a better future for all the people of Northern Ireland supported by a modern and efficient system of justice and policing, capable of engendering the trust and confidence of all sides of the community. That has been underpinned by a robust rights and equality agenda, and reinforced by a steady, though slow, move away from the politics of the bomb and bullet towards an inclusive, democratic and peaceful pursuit of political ends.

If people ask me whether the process is complete, perfect or even almost perfect, the answer is obviously no, but it is significantly different and in advance of anything that we previously experienced and that most people reasonably thought possible, given the history of Northern Ireland. The fact that we have not achieved everything should not lead us to believe that we have not gained anything. There has been huge and historic movement. However, despite these improvements and important developments, our efforts to bring an end to the conflict that has blighted Northern Ireland's past is not yet over by far.

As I said earlier, the nightly scenes of violence on our television screens during recent months, the harassment of school children, the unwarranted violence of the Sinn Fein youth movement last week and the continuation of paramilitary punishment beatings all testify to the

ingrained nature of a culture of violence that persists, even in those areas where a commitment has been made to move to a democratic and peaceful resolution of our conflicts.

Above all, there remain those elements, both dissident republican and rejectionist loyalist, who absolutely refuse to acknowledge the democratically expressed will of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland, and who seek to impose their own will by nothing but force and violence. With their sectarian bombs and blind hatred, they are the true enemies of the people of Northern Ireland and will be opposed by all means by the people of Northern Ireland.

In the face of all that, I am sure that the entire House will wish to take the opportunity to give grateful thanks especially to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and to the Garda Siochana, for their excellent work and considerable recent successes against those organisations. I remind the House that in the past two years alone the efforts of the police service, formerly the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and their colleagues in the Republic of Ireland and on the British mainland have thwarted numerous potentially deadly attacks. In just the past few months, they have intercepted bombs at Londonderry and Six Mile Cross, and only last month they intercepted a fully primed, 220 lb car bomb in County Armagh, probably en route to a police station, and arrested the driver. Any one of those bombs could have decimated innocent civilians as well as security personnel.

The security forces are resolute in their pursuit of those people, and we will continue to do everything we can to support them in that.

Such republican dissidents, and violent loyalist organisations, are becoming increasingly isolated. As is demonstrated by the developments I described earlier, the tide has turned irrevocably against them. Their only role now is as the most major impediment to the completion of progress towards an open, democratic and normal Northern Ireland. However, crucially, the IRA has carried out the significant and unprecedented act of decommissioning. Only a few years ago, such a thing would have been inconceivable.

Not only is that act a measure of the transformation that has taken place in Northern Ireland; I believe that in itself it helped to further improve the political climate. It came at a crucial time, when the political institutions established under the Belfast agreement were facing their stiffest test. It has now been possible for those institutions to restabilise, and they are established on a firmer basis than ever before.

In putting a quantity of arms and explosives beyond use, the IRA has sent the clearest possible signal, not only to the House but to the international community, that it is moving away from violence. That process must continue; but it goes without saying that it is time for the loyalists to follow suit. It is a source of huge regret to me that some of them are not even engaged in the process—that they remain wedded to their violent past and seem unable to take any steps towards a peaceful path, even short of decommissioning.

In the face of IRA decommissioning, I cannot see what possible reason loyalists now have for retaining their weapons. They certainly need not do so for the protection of their communities, which is the rightful preserve of the police and the security forces. They used to argue that they would decommission if the IRA made the first move. Well, the first move has been made: the crucial act has been carried out. It is now up to loyalist paramilitary organisations to demonstrate their support of peaceful and democratic ideals.

We want to see loyalist decommissioning; we want to see further decommissioning by the IRA and, indeed, other republican organisations; and we want to see dissident groups outside the process brought to the point of realising that democratic dialogue is the only way forward, so that they too decommission their weapons. It goes without saying that until they do so, we will robustly counter their violent activities.

Of course, we all recognise that if it is to be effectively sustained, the decommissioning process must be a voluntary process. Ultimately, the Government can resist violence—we can pursue robustly those who engage in violence—but we cannot force any paramilitary organisation to give up its weapons, and to dismantle or refrain from renewing its apparatus of terror. Where the will exists, however, the process has begun. We want to, and must, see it sustained.

**Mr. Francois:** I thank the Secretary of State for his courtesy in giving way to me again, but I think we need not over-complicate what is actually a straightforward matter.

It is perfectly proper to be able to tell everyone what has been given up, but as far as I am aware, having checked, no definite resolution of the House states that what has been surrendered will remain secret. If the Government argue that this was a significant act, they should put the information in the public domain and—in a free society—allow everyone, from all traditions, to judge just how significant it was. Is not the truth quite simply that what was given up was so minuscule that Ministers were embarrassed to admit it?

**Dr. Reid:** The hon. Gentleman has made a completely unsubstantiated assertion for which neither he nor anyone else has any evidence. It is impossible to conduct any rational discussion on the basis of a series of unsubstantiated assertions from Members on both sides of the House. I make no such unsubstantiated assertion; I make an assertion based on the evidence provided by the person to whom this job was given by the House, who was witness to it, and who said that it was a significant event.

If the hon. Gentleman is saying that he does not agree that General de Chastelain should have been given the job, that he does not agree with General de Chastelain's judgment and that he does not agree with General de Chastelain's estimate, he is perfectly entitled to say so. People in the country and the House can then decide whether to believe General de Chastelain, who was given the job, who is acting within a remit and under statute and who witnessed the event, or the hon. Gentleman, who seems to have a propensity for making unsubstantiated assertions, pertaining to a remit that he has not been given and contrary to the remit of the House, about an event that he did not witness. I have no doubt on whose side the vast majority of people would come down. All I have said about the event is what General de Chastelain himself said about it.

**Mr. Frank Field** (Birkenhead): It is clear that the House is not to be told how substantial—or not—the surrender of arms was, but has the Secretary of State been told the extent of the arms that were surrendered?

**Dr. Reid:** That is entirely a matter for General de Chastelain. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] The answer is that I have not been told, and I accept the word of General de Chastelain. If the hon. Member for Rayleigh does not want to accept his word, that is entirely up to him. The reason that the quantity was not made public has been explained by General de Chastelain himself, the person to whom the House entrusted the job.

For the first time, the Irish Republican Army has been prepared to put weapons beyond use. If people in this House, or indeed other politicians, feel that that historic progress would have been better achieved by the intervention and judgment of partisan politicians, all I can say is that they are wired to the moon. They know nothing of history and are far removed from the reality of the problem with which we are dealing.

**Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Dr. Reid:** I will, provided that the House will accept that my speech will last a little longer.

**Chris Grayling:** I thank the Secretary of State for giving way and apologise for having missed the first few moments of his speech. Does he not understand the difficulty faced by Members on this side of the House? This week, we are being asked to make significant decisions about the future of decommissioning and the future of Parliament's relationship with Sinn Fein-IRA, but we are being asked to do so in a vacuum because we have no clear idea about whether what has happened is a single step or the first of many steps. Our concern is that we are being asked to move further and further on, but we have no clear indication of what comes next and nor, apparently, does the Secretary of State.

**Dr. Reid:** I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. Indeed, I said at the beginning of my remarks that I understand hon. Members' concern and frustration. However, if the hon. Gentleman is asking whether this House, before it embarked on a monumental project, should have had a guarantee of success in any area, I can tell him that if that had been the case, none of us would have embarked on it. If, however, he is asking for a review of what has happened since we embarked on the process, I can tell him that I have spent an inordinate amount of time explaining that. On decommissioning, the process has moved from a ceasefire, through weapons dump inspections, to a historic act of decommissioning, but that has happened alongside progress in many other areas.

I cannot guarantee to the hon. Gentleman that there will be success on any given aspect of the Belfast agreement. I shall turn later to a number of other issues that have still to develop as part of the process. It is not within my power to promise the hon. Gentleman that there will be success on all those issues, whether we are talking about criminal justice, policing, the Assembly or decommissioning. All I can say is that, in the past two and a half years, we have achieved things that were beyond the imagination of anyone in the House when we set out on that journey.

Is it possible that the process will continue? Yes. Is it necessary that the process continues if the Belfast agreement is to hold together? Yes. Will we bring whatever pressure we can to bear on all aspects of the process? Yes. But can I guarantee that there is an inevitable route to success in all aspects? No, I cannot; nor can anyone else in this House. But it is a damn sight better to try and to succeed as far as we have done than never to have tried and to have languished where we were.

One of the commentators in yesterday's press told those who thought that there was an alternative to the political process that there was one, which was not to have a political process. If we wanted to see where we might end up with that, the commentator said, one needed merely to look at the middle east.

I cannot guarantee success, but obviously the greatest sanction on all of us will be if the process fails, because we will all have lost, including some of those who are engaged in the process of putting arms beyond use. If anyone in this House honestly believes that we can realistically say that all decommissioning can be finished by 26 February next year, let us know. If not, and if we are to continue the process, we must look to provide the legal framework as well as the democratic framework to make decommissioning a reality.

In plain terms, we cannot ask those groups to hand in their weapons if, by so doing, they would be breaking the law. This is exactly what we would be asking if we did not renew the legislation to continue past February, which is when the legislative cover in the 1997 legislation to provide legal immunity for those decommissioning weapons expires; that is why I am bringing the Bill before the House today.

**Mr. Andrew MacKay** (Bracknell): Clearly, there are grave reservations among Conservative Members about the potential for five more years of leeway, albeit with an annual review and vote, which we appreciate. The Secretary of State has rightly said that pressure must be put on paramilitaries, that there must be decommissioning quickly from the so-called loyalists who have not decommissioned and that the Provisional IRA should decommission further. Will he give a guarantee that if, in February of next year, there has been no further decommissioning, he will not bring forward the order for extension for a further year?

**Dr. Reid:** Every Conservative speaker today seems to demand from me and seek to instil in me some foresight, whereby I have a crystal ball that can dictate the circumstances. Whether I bring the order forward in February would depend on the circumstances at the time. I do not think that anyone here would say that many of the aspects of the Good Friday agreement, including decommissioning, have progressed as quickly as we would have liked, but that does not diminish the fact that what has happened is of huge significance. I would have liked the stability of the Executive and the Assembly to be up and running and flowering more quickly than it has done. That is a regret. I would have liked decommissioning from the Provisional IRA to move more quickly than it did, and I would have liked decommissioning from some others who have not even started to decommission.

However, I cannot predict to the right hon. Member for Bracknell either what is likely to happen six months' ahead or my automatic reaction to that. That will depend

on the circumstances and that is a sensible way to proceed. This issue will be brought to the House regularly because, even with tonight's Bill, the measure must be brought before the House, as the Bill would merely extend by 12 months, in the first instance, the legal immunity for decommissioning. It will then have to be discussed, debated and decided by this House again.

We cannot allow the great potential that we have to make further progress to be simply thrown away because we have come across what is largely an arbitrary deadline. Given the considerable developments that I have outlined today, we have to be realistic and provide the legal framework to enable further progress to take place.

I recognise that some say that we need to have deadlines and that without pressure the Provisionals will not move. To some extent, that addresses the point raised earlier by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), and that may reflect a difference of emphasis on that point. I do not know whether that is the case, but I shall be as honest as I can with the hon. Gentleman and the House. Some people will point to occasions in the past few years when we have achieved progress only by taking matters right to the wire. I understand that argument, although I have to say that the Provisionals are not the only people in Northern Ireland who regularly take matters to the wire.

However, the Bill includes a provision for Parliament to approve any extension beyond a further year. Though it is not set up as a deadline in any way, there is, therefore, a point at which the matter will have to be discussed and approved again by the House. Notwithstanding that, the simple point is that we will not sustain the peace process merely through deadlines and public ultimatums. Hon. Members constantly point to deadlines that have been passed, and by definition the objective has not been achieved, even through the power that some hon. Members seem to assume lies in deadlines.

**Mr. Paul Goodman** (Wycombe): The IRA argues that it is not bound by the agreement because it is not a signatory to the agreement. On this side of the House, it has been argued that the IRA is a signatory to the agreement because Sinn Fein-IRA are inextricably linked. Is not it clear from the debate that the Secretary of State is accepting the IRA's definition, not the definition put by hon. Members on this side of the House?

**Dr. Reid:** No, I am accepting the Belfast agreement. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman can assert that the IRA signed the Belfast agreement. He can assert that Santa Claus signed the Belfast agreement, but that does not make it true. It is, however, obviously the case that Sinn Fein's signature of the Belfast agreement gave rise to a reasonable expectation that since Sinn Fein had signed that agreement, there would be full decommissioning within the specified period, during which people would work towards a target. That is partly why there was such disappointment. I wish that that had happened at the specified time, and I also wish that it had happened by the end of the further extension in June.

I wish that the Provisional IRA and all the loyalist groups will have decommissioned by next February, but I cannot wish away the fact that it is now extremely unlikely that that will be accomplished. Therefore, the choice before the House is whether to make it illegal, by voting against the extension, for people to decommission after 26 February, when the legal immunity will end. Yes, it will take continual pressure, but it will also take patience and—obviously—it will take time.

It will take time to complete every aspect of the Belfast agreement, including the changes that we have inaugurated in policing, and the full flowering and stability of the Assembly and the Executive. I hope that more powers can be passed to the Assembly and the Executive. It is only with time that we will see the normalisation of Northern Ireland society, and that will mean a reduction in the military presence to levels found in the rest of the UK. We need to continue to make steady progress on all of the issues covered by the Belfast agreement, but we cannot exclude decommissioning and the putting of arms beyond use from that. Decommissioning is an integral and essential part of the progress that has to be made. As ever, if we stop moving forward, we will not stand still but will start sliding back.

It would not be helpful to dictate that there must be an absolute, and by definition arbitrary, end, to just one aspect of the agreement. To pretend that that would deliver the objective that we seek would be neither an honest nor a practical application of our experience. I am firmly convinced that that is not likely to be a sensible or effective way to proceed.

I have already paid tribute to General John de Chastelain and his colleagues in the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning. I extend to them my heartfelt thanks. Their integrity, diligence, skill and, above all, perseverance have been instrumental in bringing us this far. Whatever disappointment hon. Members may feel about how far we have come, they will, at least, have the dignity to accord due thanks to John de Chastelain for the significant distance that we have come.

The commission's life is not time-bound. Its mandate comes from the Belfast agreement and the pursuit of the objective of decommissioning all arms can and must be continued. Many hon. Members will no doubt concentrate tonight on what has yet to be achieved. That is, perhaps, natural, and I understand their concerns and frustrations and the occasional anger that accompanies them.

Legitimate debate remains to be held on the matter before us tonight, but it is worth recalling the nature of the project on which we have embarked. We are addressing a problem whose roots lie deep in decades—indeed, centuries—of conflict. We are addressing it through a process that seeks nothing less than the reversal of that history in Northern Ireland and in the island of Ireland. The Bill is central to that purpose, and I commend it to the House.

5.26 pm

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Grantham and Stamford): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Bill because it provides for such an extended deadline for decommissioning which it does not believe will be conducive to the completion as soon as possible of the process which is already more than a year overdue."

I move the amendment more in sorrow and anxiety than anything else. My anxiety has been considerably enhanced by what we have discovered this afternoon

*[Mr. Quentin Davies]*

about the Secretary of State's extraordinary gullibility in buying the Sinn Fein-IRA line that they are somehow separate organisations.

**Dr. Reid:** I did not say that they were separate organisations.

**Mr. Davies:** The right hon. Gentleman seemed to agree with me when I put it to him that that was what he was saying. He then made the most inappropriate analogy with the trade union movement and the Labour party. Perhaps he would like to think about that again.

**Dr. Reid:** I did not say that they were separate organisations. I said that they were not identical organisations.

**Mr. Davies:** The right hon. Gentleman is somewhat confused and is taking refuge in jesuitical and retrospective reinterpretation of what he said. I am anxious that he should put the record straight if he wishes to do so.

**Dr. Reid:** I must refer to semantics, because the hon. Gentleman seems not to realise the difference between two things that are entirely separate and two that are not identical. Something can be linked to something else, or can overlap with something else, without being identical to something else. If the hon. Gentleman studies a dictionary when he leaves the Chamber, it will all become clear to him.

**Mr. Davies:** Let me put to the Secretary of State my conception of the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA so that he may tell me whether he disagrees with it. They are two facades of the same organisation. The distinction is an entirely artificial one, contrived with typical and cynical ruthlessness to enable Sinn Fein-IRA, for it is one organisation, to advance its cause with, in its favoured phrase, the Armalite rifle in one hand and the ballot box in the other. It is absolutely terrifying to know that that strategy, duplicity and artificiality should have been so successful as to bamboozle the Secretary of State.

**Dr. Reid:** The recent exchanges raise an extraordinary question. If, because he is not so gullible, that is entirely what the hon. Gentleman believes, why in God's name did he support the Belfast agreement? Has he signed up to support an organisation that he believes is not committed to moving away from violence but continually committed to its use? That does not leave me embarrassed, but it leaves the hon. Gentleman in an extraordinary position.

**Mr. Davies:** The right hon. Gentleman is trying to change the subject, but I shall certainly answer him very directly indeed. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I support the Belfast agreement. We recognise that one of the parties to it is—and must be—Sinn Fein-IRA, which is certainly a former terrorist organisation. I trust that the word "former" is appropriate. We wish it to cease to be a terrorist organisation. We wish it to give up its arms and to pursue its objectives in future by democratic and peaceful means. That is precisely the effect of the Belfast agreement—or what its effect ought to be.

**Dr. Reid:** The hon. Gentleman should follow Healey's first law of holes: when in a hole, stop digging. I do not believe that the Irish Republican Army is a former terrorist organisation—it is a terrorist organisation which is on ceasefire. It is a terrorist organisation which is moving away from that description. However, the hon. Gentleman is in an extraordinary position: he believes that the IRA is only former terrorists but that it is still committed to terror, and yet—with all those deep misgivings—he apparently supports the Belfast agreement. The hon. Gentleman should get his thoughts sorted out.

**Mr. Davies:** I said—*Hansard* will bear me out, so I hope that the right hon. Gentleman listens carefully—that I hoped it was a former terrorist organisation. It certainly was a terrorist organisation and it certainly was a unified terrorist organisation, which operated with two arms to bamboozle the innocent—such as the right hon. Gentleman. In his negotiations, he no doubt believes it when Sinn Fein says, "Oh no, we are awfully sorry, although we'd like those concessions and we'll pocket them thank you very much, we cannot deliver the IRA". No doubt he falls for that line, and it is a fascinating but very, very depressing indication of what has gone wrong with the peace process over the past two or three years. If this debate achieves nothing else, it will have made clear that the Government have been operating under an extraordinarily facile and naive illusion in an extremely dangerous situation.

That error of judgment completely eclipses another one that has arisen during the past few weeks and which I also regret, although it has nothing like the importance of the matter to which I have just drawn attention. That error of judgment was committed at a time when there has been some good news, as the right hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, in that there has been a first act of decommissioning by Sinn Fein-IRA—I repeat: Sinn Fein-IRA. There is also encouraging news, which has nothing to do with Sinn Fein-IRA, on other fronts; for example, other nationalist organisations—especially the Social Democratic and Labour party—the Catholic hierarchy and the Gaelic Athletic Association and so forth have all accepted the new police service. It is extremely good news, which I strongly welcome, that the Policing Board has been able to agree on a new cap badge for the new police service in Northern Ireland.

It thus seems extraordinary that, instead of allowing that good news to sink in, the right hon. Gentleman and his Government have set about deliberately eclipsing it by making a series of extraordinary proposals, one of which is included in the Bill, while another—even more pernicious and abhorrent—is to come before the House with a Government motion that I trust we shall be able to debate tomorrow.

The situation is unfortunate and sad. It is a matter of considerable anxiety to everybody who cares about the future of the peace process—the future of peace in Northern Ireland and successful, devolved democratic government in Northern Ireland.

I had not anticipated, nor indeed had I ever conceived, coming to the Dispatch Box to disagree with the terms of a decommissioning Bill. I had expected, as we had all

expected, that it would be necessary to extend the regime under which General de Chastelain operates for a few months beyond February, perhaps for a year. I thought that the exact timing might be a matter for consultation. There has been no consultation whatever—at least none with Her Majesty's Opposition. There may well have been consultation with much more sinister forces, including those that the right hon. Gentleman thinks are not part of a terrorist organisation. Perhaps he would like to let us know to what extent the deadlines in the Bill have been negotiated—or whether the motion that the Government are to move tomorrow has been the subject of discussions or negotiations with Sinn Fein-IRA.

**Dr. Reid:** On the first one about decommissioning, none; on the second, discussions have been going on for over two years, including discussions with the hon. Gentleman's party.

**Mr. Davies:** I can testify that there has been no discussion with my party on the timing of deadlines in the Bill. The deadlines were a bad surprise and a shock, and we had absolutely no reason to suppose that they would be in the Bill. If the right hon. Gentleman has been discussing some of those things, including tomorrow's motion, with Sinn Fein-IRA, it will be interesting to know what, if anything, he has been able to get as a counterpart to some pretty extraordinary concessions.

In the absence of clear answers and consultation beforehand, we must simply look at the Bill as it stands. It contains a fundamental error: it extends the deadline for decommissioning, for whatever reason, to five years from February. For some reason that I do not understand, instead of the Bill stating five years, a particular date in February 2007 is given, but the effect is exactly the same and the Bill's purpose is absolutely clear. I believe that to be a disastrous mistake, for two separate reasons. It will have bad consequences of two kinds. Unfortunately, they will reinforce each other and both contribute to damaging rather than supporting the peace process.

The first mistake is that extending the regime for decommissioning for another five years sends the wrong signal to Sinn Fein-IRA, loyalist paramilitaries and others with arms in Northern Ireland. The signal is, "Relax. Take your time. You are not up against a deadline; there is no particular urgency." I am as aware as anybody that deadlines may not be met, but the idea that extending a deadline will speed up the process seems hardly credible. Not only does it seem hardly credible: the Secretary of State himself does not believe it. He has said this afternoon that Sinn Fein-IRA and other groups in Northern Ireland go down to the wire, taking at least the time that they are given under the deadline whether they meet it or not. It follows, therefore, that extending the deadline extends the time that they take. The right hon. Gentleman is not even willing to learn the lessons of his acknowledged experience. I find it extraordinary that he should come to the House with a Bill extending deadlines, and then tell us that that will have no effect on the time taken by those concerned to fulfil the commitments under those deadlines.

**Mr. McCabe:** Will the hon. Gentleman assure the House that what we are hearing is exactly what he said to Lord Mayhew in 1997? Did he tell him that a one-year period with the extension of up to five years was the wrong deadline? Did he disagree in this House? Is there a record of that in *Hansard*? Does he think that any of the loyalist groups, including those which are not even currently engaged in the process, could decommission within a few months? What deadline did he think in 1997 was appropriate? How long does he now think it would take loyalist groups to decommission?

**Mr. Davies:** Unless the hon. Gentleman has been asleep for the past five years, I can only imagine that he has deliberately come to the House to produce manifest absurdities. In 1997, we did not have the Belfast agreement. We did not have the beginnings of a mechanism to produce decommissioning. Since then, in case he has not noticed, we have had the Belfast agreement. In case he has forgotten, that agreement provided a deadline of two years, as we have heard from the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). Nothing happened under that deadline; it was extended for a year, but still nothing happened. Eventually, some progress was made after 11 September.

In producing a regime under which decommissioning might take place—if initial agreement between the parties is secured and if the international commission and the other organisations required can be set up—to start off with a five-year period may well be reasonable, but once four or five years have elapsed, deadlines have been missed, people have failed to live up to the commitments they made, and the law-abiding and peace-loving people of Northern Ireland have been disappointed, to go back to square one and start again with another five years seems less absurd than irresponsible.

**Mr. McCabe:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Lembit Öpik:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Davies:** The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) is trying to waste time by pretending that he does not know what has happened in the past five years, so I shall not give way to him again this afternoon, but I shall give way to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik).

**Lembit Öpik:** I thank the hon. Gentleman. Given that the Good Friday agreement did not exist when the Conservative Government decided to create an amnesty, does he not agree that that required a greater act of faith on the part of Parliament than this Bill, which we are discussing in the context of the Good Friday agreement?

**Mr. Davies:** Yes, that is true. That took place right at the beginning of the peace process launched by the Conservative Government and it required a considerable act of faith. I take the hon. Gentleman's remark to be a compliment to my right hon. and learned Friend Lord Mayhew, who I am sure will be pleased to have the approbation and recognition of the Liberal party and its official spokesman for once.

**Mr. Goodman:** Does my hon. Friend not agree that the most remarkable feature of the debate has been the Secretary of State's statement that under the terms of

*[Mr. Goodman]*

the Belfast agreement the IRA is not obliged to decommission—a position exactly the same as that of the IRA?

**Mr. Davies:** I am sorry to have to say that I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend. The Secretary of State's statement is enormously significant—and enormously depressing.

**Dr. John Reid:** I am sorry to keep intervening, but Opposition Front Benchers appear to be genetically incapable of either hearing or understanding words. I made no such statement—that the IRA were not so obliged. I said that they had not signed the Belfast agreement, and that is a statement of fact, not of opinion.

**Mr. Davies:** Fortunately we in the House have the institution of *Hansard*, so we need not spend any more time on that issue. I sincerely hope that when I read my *Hansard* tomorrow morning I will find that the Secretary of State is as fully aware as other reasonable and experienced people in Northern Ireland of the fact that the distinction between Sinn Fein and IRA is a complete fraud, and that when he speaks to any representatives of either organisation he is probably speaking to individuals who hold positions in both organisations and represent them both.

**Mr. Robathan:** May I take my hon. Friend back to deadlines for decommissioning? Is it not true that when an organisation determines to give up its weapons, that can be done relatively quickly? In Macedonia recently, there was a 30-day limit, and I recall that 20 years ago in Zimbabwe—an enormous country with fighters out in the bush—there was a two-month limit. If an organisation is determined to give up its weapons, surely it does not need a rolling five-year programme?

**Mr. Davies:** I totally agree. It is ironic than on a day when we have discussed sending 1,000 British troops to Afghanistan to participate in a peace process—the decommissioning of what remains of the Taliban and the establishment of peace in that country—that is supposed to be completed in a matter of months, we are extending by a further five years the deadline for getting rid of terrorist arms in our own country, and doing so apparently thoughtlessly and on the basis of an extraordinarily sanguine acceptance of Sinn Fein-IRA propaganda about its operations and structure.

The Secretary of State would be extraordinarily naive to think that offering an extending deadline is likely to get the action he requires sooner. He made an absurdity of that notion when he said that everyone in Northern Ireland tends to go to the wire, but it would be absurd in almost any context. Suppose that the right hon. Gentleman wanted to buy a house, and he thought that he might get it for £100,000 and the most that he was prepared or able to pay was £150,000. Does he think that he would be more likely to get a bargain, or more likely to get any deal at all, if he signalled to the vendor that if pressed he would go to £500,000? That is precisely what he has done by offering five years. It is thoroughly reckless.

It is deplorable for another reason. I said that there were two reasons, and the second is a matter of even greater concern than the first. The right hon. Gentleman has sent the wrong signal to those who have to decommission—Sinn Fein-IRA, the loyalists and other paramilitaries. He has also sent the wrong signal to the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland who are peace loving and law abiding and desperately keen to get the gun and Semtex out of politics in Northern Ireland. They are now being told that after all the sacrifices, all the delays, all the disappointments of recent years and all the enormous concessions to paramilitaries, they must wait a lot longer. They must wait for another five years. That is the time they were told in the first place would be required for the framework to get the process started and completed.

It is an extremely depressing signal to send to the people of Northern Ireland. It can only undermine people's confidence and their hopes in the peace process producing the dividends for which they all hope. The signal will inevitably have a particularly devastating effect on morale in the Unionist community. That concerns me very much.

The Secretary of State may recall that when I responded to his statement on 24 October I said that we should take into account

"the concerns and feelings of all the people of Northern Ireland in both communities."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 304.]

A few weeks ago, the right hon. Gentleman made a speech about Northern Ireland not becoming a "cold house" for Unionists. I welcome his use of that phrase. I welcome also what appeared to be the spirit behind it. Although the right hon. Gentleman managed to say a few words in the right direction, however, it is easy to say a few words. After the tragedies of the past 30 years in Northern Ireland, we can hardly expect words to be sufficient to influence anybody very much.

Apart from that easy declaration, what have the right hon. Gentleman or his predecessors done? There has been an endless stream of concessions. There have been the release of prisoners and the abolition of the RUC—extremely difficult concessions for Unionist sentiment to accept. We have said and I have said that we must accept those moves, reluctantly of course. There is no question but that they stick in the gullet, but they are a necessary part of the process.

It is important that the Belfast agreement is implemented. I have done my best to counsel patience and forbearance. What has happened? The Government have gone endlessly further. As if the release of prisoners and the implementation of the Government's obligations under the Belfast agreement were not enough, they went to Weston Park and made a new raft of concessions that were not required under the Belfast agreement. In recent weeks, they seem to have gone almost berserk with the concessions that they are offering.

We have before us the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, which includes a proposal to remove the royal coat of arms from new courthouses in Northern Ireland and to abolish the loyal oath for judges. Those concessions are deeply offensive to Unionists. They are deeply worrying to anybody who takes seriously the idea, as at least we all do on the Opposition Benches, that we are part of one kingdom in this country.

The matter has not stopped there. At Northern Ireland questions on 5 December, I put to the Secretary of State the article that had been written by his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). I will

put to the Secretary of State his right hon. Friend's predictions, or assertions. The article stated that the Government were proposing

"an amnesty for former terrorists on the run".

That is in the Weston Park agreement, but it had no basis of approval from the House. The article refers to

"the dismantling of British security facilities . . . further inquiries into past British security 'misdeeds'".

As I said then, there was no suggestion of any inquiries into other people's misdeeds or atrocities.

The article also refers to "further changes"—I underline "further" again—

"'to the new police service, the successor to the RUC, on top of those reforms already agreed to make the police acceptable to nationalists and Republicans.'"

In response, the Secretary of State did not deny that at all; he did not deny any suggestions that new concessions were to be made. I greatly regret the fact that he came close to being disingenuous by saying that the measures were not new; he said that I was wrong to say that they were. I emphasised "further inquiries", "further changes" and the phrase

"on top of those reforms".—[*Official Report*, 5 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 318.]

If "further" and "on top of" do not mean incremental—something added to what is already there—and if that is not fairly described by the word "new", with which the Secretary of State took issue the other day, he will have to spend his retirement revising the Oxford English dictionary.

**Dr. John Reid:** Having had problems with semantics, the hon. Gentleman now has problems with his chronology. There were no new promises made after or around the time of the publication of that article; there was nothing that was not entirely in the public domain, including the inquiries. I take it that the hon. Gentleman has read the Weston Park communiqué, which does not exclusively comprise inquiries demanded by republicans. In fact, it consists of three inquiries long demanded by those of a loyalist and Unionist persuasion, as well as three demanded by those of a republican or nationalist persuasion. There was nothing new at the time when my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) was writing; there was nothing that was not fully in the public domain. To say that my remarking on that made me almost disingenuous is a bit unfair, to say the least.

**Mr. Davies:** I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman thinks that I am being unfair to him; I have simply quoted for him—twice now—the words of his right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool. If his right hon. Friend was wrong, it would have been simpler to say so; perhaps the Secretary of State does not want to quarrel with him because, as we know, he is such a powerful personage in his party and has the ear of the Prime Minister. That may well be the explanation.

We must get back to the position that I put to the Secretary of State before, which he does not seem to want to acknowledge. He acknowledged it once with two or three words but, as far as I know, he has never acknowledged it with any deed. The Unionist community in Northern Ireland understandably feels that the process is a one-way street; everything that the Secretary of State has done, every statement that he has made, all the concessions to which I have just referred, all of Weston Park, the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill which is now before the House and, worst and most obnoxious of all, the motion that the Government will introduce tomorrow, only reinforce and re-emphasise the impression that the process is a one-way street without end. The Unionist community believes that the Government have embarked on a limitless and uncontrolled process of making concessions to republicans.

The Government now acknowledge that there is some kind of distinction between Sinn Fein and the IRA, so they make concessions to Sinn Fein, but the IRA does not deliver on the other side. If that situation should not worry everybody, not merely Unionists, in Northern Ireland—and, indeed, everybody in the United Kingdom—I do not know what should.

If the Secretary of State does not already know—he certainly acts as if he does not—I must tell him that one cannot build successful peace in Northern Ireland, establish successful devolved institutions and democracy and normalise that part of the United Kingdom without the support of the Unionist majority. He seems to believe that the Unionist majority can be taken for granted and will end up accepting just about anything he comes up with. The course on which he has embarked is extremely dangerous and that is reflected in the Bill. Once again, there is an open-ended approach to the IRA or Sinn Fein-IRA delivering its side of the agreement; more and more concrete concessions are made at the expense of Unionist concerns and sentiment, as well as justified Unionist pride.

The strategy of making concessions without any quid pro quo was flawed from the start. I have no hesitation in saying that the Government's decision to let out all the prisoners within two years of the Belfast agreement being made without the IRA decommissioning a single weapon or giving up a single ounce of Semtex was a colossal mistake. That was recognised at the time by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), who wisely and sensibly tabled amendments to the census legislation for Northern Ireland that would have established that linkage. Those amendments were resisted by the Government but, had we established the linkage, we would have an instrument of leverage on Sinn Fein-IRA; all those instruments of leverage were thrown away by the right hon. Gentleman's predecessors.

It is hardly surprising that two years passed without decommissioning. Why should people decommission when there was no particular reason why they should? In fact, the Government deprived the Sinn Fein-IRA leadership of any arguments to use among its membership. It could not say that it had to decommission to get its prisoners out because they had been let out anyway. The strategy was extremely naive and incompetent, and it damaged the peace process. A third year passed, but still there was no decommissioning. The Government panicked, went to Weston Park in desperation and made a whole lot of new gratuitous concessions, which were not required at all in the Belfast agreement, to somehow appease Sinn Fein-IRA and hope that nevertheless they would come up with some decommissioning. Even then, they did not do so. Two weeks after the talks at Weston Park, the IRA went back on the agreement on the methodology of decommissioning that it negotiated with General de

*[Mr. Davies]*

Chastelain at the time of Weston Park, and publicly withdrew it. That was a real blow in the eye for the Government and, much more important, for the peace process.

As the right hon. Gentleman acknowledged earlier—I do not know whether he always remembers what he says 10 minutes after he has said it—but he certainly accepted that the situation changed only after the autumn, with the exposure of the IRA's involvement with FARC in Colombia and particularly after the events of 11 September, to which he rightly referred in this context. The position changed as there were new international pressures on Sinn Fein-IRA, particularly from the United States, which were unanswerable. I agree that another major factor was the threat that the whole process was about to break down, but that was nothing to do with what the Government did; it was entirely to do with what the right hon. Member for Upper Bann did with what I have previously referred to in public as the three Trimble sanctions—first, withdraw Sinn Fein members from meetings of all-Irish bodies, secondly, withdraw Ulster Unionist Ministers, then resign himself. Pressures brought to bear elsewhere by political parties in Northern Ireland, the Irish Government, no doubt, and particularly the United States brought about decommissioning.

Nobody could have anticipated—the Government certainly did not—that the international context would be transformed tragically and appallingly by the events of 11 September and that that would have a critical and decisive knock-on effect on the situation in Northern Ireland. The Government must not allow themselves to continue down their previous path. If they want to continue with unilateral concessions, the House must not allow them to do so. Tonight, we have the opportunity to prevent them from acting in that way by changing the Bill, sending it back and getting the Government to return with a much more limited deadline, which will impose greater discipline on the whole process. I hope that the House will take that opportunity.

I shall draw conclusions both from the way in which the Government handled the process which I have just detailed and their extraordinary illusions about Sinn-Fein, which have been startlingly and dramatically revealed in our debate, which will go down as an historic debate for that reason alone. We need a fundamental rethink of the position in Northern Ireland; we must consider the right approach and strategy that the British Government should adopt to maximise the chances of a succesful peace process and successful decommissioning. There are two aspects to that. First, it must be made clear what the deal and price will be ultimately to achieve complete and full decommissioning, which will be defined by General de Chastelain saying that the process that he has been supervising has been completed.

How do we get there? How do we bring in all the other parties as well as Sinn Fein-IRA, including the loyalist paramilitaries, to which the right hon. Gentleman was right to refer? We all know that Sinn Fein-IRA thinks that its opposite number is not the loyalist paramilitaries, but the British Government. It likes to think it is dealing with the Government on an equal basis. The right hon. Gentleman's illusions about dealing with Sinn Fein-IRA will greatly have comforted it in that belief.

In an exchange at the Dispatch Box on 24 October, I suggested the negotiation of

> "a programmed process leading to full decommissioning"—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 305.]—

a balanced process, a global package—so that it is clear to all concerned what needs to be done by whom by when, and what the price will be. If General de Chastelain can negotiate such a process, that would be ideal. If he feels that that goes beyond his remit, the Government—in conjunction with the Irish Government, no doubt—should take the initiative.

That is important for at least two reasons. One is that only on that basis will it be clear how far the concessions go and what we will have to pay for decommissioning, and it will be clear what must be done by when. There will be some rigour and discipline in the process. Secondly, only by such an open, transparent deal will it be possible to restore confidence in Northern Ireland that we are not engaged merely in a process of endless appeasement of terrorists or former terrorists—commonly known as, and often called in Northern Ireland, a sell-out. By definition, a sell-out will not have the support of the great majority of law-abiding people.

The Bill provides us with the chance to introduce a tighter, more disciplined and more transparent process. I hope that the House will take that opportunity. If we do not, we are left with the prospect that, if decommissioning happens at all, it will happen because others have made the moves that the British Government ought to have made. We will not know how many moves need to be made or how long it will take until we get arms out of politics in Northern Ireland.

I can well believe that Sinn Fein-IRA may be under pressure from other sources. It is generally expected in the Republic of Ireland that Sinn Fein-IRA will need to make at least a cosmetic further act of decommissioning before the Irish elections in May, in order to maximise its respectability and chances of picking up seats in Ireland. I do not know whether that is true, but if so, it in no way absolves the British Government from doing everything possible to facilitate the process and make decommissioning more likely, rather than slowing down the process or leaving it to an indefinite future.

Above all, the British Government must make a new effort to ensure that they carry with them all the communities in Northern Ireland. They must explain to the Unionist community, as well as to the nationalist and the republican communities, what needs to be done, why it must be done, how the concessions that need to be made are limited and what their purpose is. That aspect of the peace process has been dangerously neglected by the Government.

I am not in the business of criticising the Government without making positive and, I hope, helpful suggestions. The issue of changing symbols will arise in connection with other Bills in the near future. Let the Secretary of State think about the matter before then. If he considers it necessary to change symbols in order to create the feeling that they are part of the new constitution in Northern Ireland among communities that up till now have felt disadvantaged, let the right hon. Gentleman bring in new symbols, but let him not destroy old ones. Let him add. Let him show the same respect for the Unionist tradition as he is showing in order to

accommodate or appease other traditions. That is the way forward. We need greater balance, rigour, discipline and fairness in the process.

6.4 pm

**Mr. Stephen McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): When I came to the Chamber this afternoon, I assumed that we would hear genuine concerns and anxieties being expressed by some of our friends from Northern Ireland. I expected that that would be difficult and that ground that had already been covered would have to be covered again. I understand that for people who have worked hard for peace, the length of time that the process takes is disturbing, and it is difficult for them to keep others on board.

Anyone who has listened to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) will realise that the focus of the debate lies elsewhere. We are back to the old question of deadlines and the position that the only decommissioning that should concern us is decommissioning by the Provisional IRA. That is extremely regrettable.

**Mr. Davies:** I cannot let the hon. Gentleman misquote me so soon after my remarks. I made it clear that it was extremely important that all the organisations with arms in Northern Ireland should be part of the decommissioning process. On several occasions I referred specifically to the loyalist paramilitaries.

**Mr. McCabe:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for setting the record straight. I must have slept through that part of his speech. Were I judging it on quantity, I would recognise the number of references that he made to one group in particular.

Back in July 1999, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said of the decommissioning scheme:

"It does not refer to timetables. . . there is no explicit reference in the decommissioning scheme to a timetable."

He went on to say that the decommissioning scheme states:

"'The Commission may make such arrangements as it considers appropriate to facilitate the decommissioning of arms.'"

He continued:

"I repeat:

'such arrangements at it considers appropriate to facilitate'

decommissioning."—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1999; Vol. 335, c. 189.]

I welcomed that statement by the right hon. Gentleman, as the issue of timetables has bedevilled the process.

Listening to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford, I came to the conclusion that the Opposition amendment is not a reasoned amendment. It does not seek to alter the process. It does not recognise that we are dealing with an amnesty. It is an attempt to renege on the agreement. It represents the end of bipartisanship. I am shocked and horrified by the comments of the hon. Gentleman and of the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), who is no longer in his place.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford said—I listened carefully to this part of his speech—that nothing had happened in the first two years of decommissioning. I recall that on 18 September the LVF decommissioned a small quantity of weapons, which General de Chastelain described as a significant event. To my recollection, no one queried those remarks.

**Mr. Nigel Dodds** (Belfast, North): The LVF gesture was made in the full glare of publicity—in front of the television cameras. In the case of the latest so-called gesture of decommissioning, no one has seen it and no one knows what it amounts to, not even the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister.

**Mr. McCabe:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. There is a record of decommissioning and it is verified. Unless the hon. Gentleman is joining others in saying that he does not trust General de Chastelain and his commission, he should accept that there is a record of the IRA decommissioning and it has been verified. Most hon. Members were prepared to accept the procedure when the commission was established. There have been two significant acts of decommissioning. The first occurred in 1998 and was a very early and welcome gesture. I entirely agree with those who suggest that we waited far too long for the second such act; none the less, a second important act of decommissioning has occurred.

We must make a simple choice before we consider the Bill any further. We must decide whether the House will continue to place faith in General de Chastelain. If hon. Members are saying that they are not prepared to do so, the whole process will come to an end, as that is the basis on which agreement was struck and on which they said they would have confidence in the process. Now that General de Chastelain has announced that a second act of decommissioning has occurred, that basis has been challenged.

**Chris Grayling:** Does not the hon. Gentleman understand that the issue of concern is not General de Chastelain, but the continuous process in which the Government have made concessions during the past two to three years without any response from Sinn Fein-IRA? We have seen the process of releasing prisoners, the creation of the new institutions and the reform of policing, and we are now dealing with the issue of accommodation in the House of Commons for Members who have not taken their seats. There has been concession after concession, but we have had only one item in return, and we are being asked to take it on trust that that is sufficient. Does not he understand that the concerns arise from the continued process of give but very little take?

**Mr. McCabe:** I am tempted to ask the hon. Gentleman to give way.

As I understand it, we are dealing with the question of extending an amnesty for those who are prepared to decommission weapons on the loyalist and republican sides. That is what we should be considering now. I accept his concerns, which are genuine, but not his analysis of events since the Good Friday agreement was signed. It seems to me that General de Chastelain's remit has not expired. As I understand it, his remit is established by treaty, so nobody should be querying his right to continue in his current role. However, we are entitled to ask what will happen when we hit the 27 February deadline. If people to whom an amnesty applies are poised and ready to decommission weapons, are we prepared to turn our backs by not agreeing to take another step to allow them

*[Mr. McCabe]*

to do so? I cannot believe that any reasonable human being in this place who wants to see peace and decommissioning in Northern Ireland would come to that conclusion, which is utterly wrong.

I want to make it absolutely clear that I recognise that decommissioning must be one of the crucial elements of the peace process. I was in South Africa with other members of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs a couple of years ago. We witnessed first hand some of the problems that had occurred in that country despite the peace process there, because of the failure successfully to decommission weapons. If the entire peace process in Northern Ireland is to succeed, successful decommissioning must be a part of it. I do not take the view that we should put unnecessary obstacles in its way. Whatever people feel should have happened in the first two years, tentative moves have been made. They are insufficient, more is required and it is to be hoped that we can persuade those involved to deliver more, but tentative moves have been made—one on each side—which show that the process can work, given the right encouragement.

Unfortunately, we must recognise that the UDA, a specified organisation, is not currently prepared to engage in the process. How on earth we could expect it to decommission before 27 February or within three months of that date—I think that that is the preferred time scale of the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford—I do not know. I think that that is utterly absurd. We know that the UVF and the LVF are currently engaged in discussions with General de Chastelain, although I do not think that there is much information about exactly what stage the negotiations have reached. It is possible that they are considering the time scale for further acts of decommissioning, but the hon. Gentleman is prepared to sweep that possibility aside unless such an act takes place within his three-month time scale. That position is frighteningly absurd and I think that we are entitled to expect better from Her Majesty's official Opposition.

On decommissioning by the Provisional IRA, I want to make this simple point: we know that it has taken the first vital step and we hope that a succession of steps will follow. I share that view with my colleagues from Northern Ireland. I dearly want such progress to happen soon and I hope that we might even see more of it before 27 February. I also want total decommissioning, which can happen only if we retain faith in the process. That is why I am shocked and disturbed to be told that the official Opposition spokesman wants to rewrite the de Chastelain brief. He is not content to accept what his predecessors and this whole House were happy to accept: that the onus is on General de Chastelain and the commission to say that they are happy and satisfied, that they have a record and that they were able to verify the process. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford does not want that. He wants a new set of conditions and timetables, the result of which would be to undermine General de Chastelain at the very stage when we have seen what he describes as the first significant act. I cannot for the life of me work out how any reasonable individual would come to that conclusion.

**Chris Grayling:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. He said that he did not understand how any reasonable individual could come to the conclusion that he described, but surely the evidence of the past three years shows that every time Sinn Fein-IRA sees an opportunity to string the process out or grab an extra concession, it does so. The message of a five-year time frame is that decommissioning is anything but urgent. I put it to him that it is urgent and that we need a tighter time frame and tighter guidelines in respect of Sinn Fein-IRA to try to encourage it to come to a resolution.

**Mr. McCabe:** The evidence of the past few years is that we have been engaged in a stop-go process with regard to the whole Good Friday agreement. Sometimes we have had the Executive and the Assembly, sometimes there have been deadlines and sometimes we have moved away from them. However, despite all those difficulties, we have seen two significant acts of decommissioning. We should now be doing everything we can to encourage further such acts. There is nothing wrong with the proposals in the Bill, which contains no provision saying that a further five years are necessary. It states that a further 12 months are necessary and that, beyond that time, the Secretary of State can extend the time scale by 12-month periods, if necessary, for up to five years.

Given where we were when Lord Mayhew made the original proposals, it is clear that we have moved forward. An agreement is in place and various acts are occurring, many of which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford. Any reasonable individual would regard them as progress. Not enough progress has been made, there is anxiety about the future and concerns have been expressed about how quickly we move forward; none the less, progress has been made that was inconceivable 10 years ago.

At the very point when we could be in a position to generate further and, I hope, much more rapid progress, the official Opposition claim that they want to defeat the Bill that would allow an extension for the minimum period required to complete the job. That is not bipartisanship, and the Opposition's actions are not those of people who believe in the peace process or have decommissioning at the top of their agenda. For that reason, they are wrong. We should therefore reject the amendment and get on with removing the bombs and guns from Northern Ireland.

6.20 pm

**Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire): We need to discuss the Bill in the context of what all parties, including the former Conservative Government, have created. To some extent, the process is an act of faith, but we can also examine the evidence when we determine the Bill's merit.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) presented a fluent and logically argued case for the Conservative party. He made two core points. First, he said that the Bill weakened the bargaining hand of the Government to speed decommissioning. Secondly, he claimed that the Bill extends to five years the minimum period that the people of Northern Ireland have to wait for significant decommissioning. Those points lie at the heart of whether we support the Bill.

It is a contradiction for the Conservatives to argue that the Bill weakens the Government's bargaining ability. As the hon. Gentleman correctly pointed out, the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997 came into force on 22 February 1997, during John Major's

Administration, before Conservative Members lost their hold on the Government Benches. Clearly, if the Bill weakens the Government's hand, the 1997 Act must have weakened that of the previous Government, especially as we did not even have the structure of the Good Friday agreement for pursuing lasting peace and normalisation in the Province.

If the hon. Gentleman's logic holds true, it was a worse mistake for Conservatives to argue in favour of the amnesty in 1997.

**Mr. Peter Robinson** (Belfast, East): The hon. Gentleman is missing an important distinction. Because of the Belfast agreement, no decommissioning now means leaving in government the chief of staff of the Provisional IRA with an army at his beck and call that is totally armed.

**Lembit Öpik:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will attempt to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, to expand on that. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford implied the same. It is a legitimate position, but to take it, one must argue primarily from principle rather than from judging the best way forward to normalisation in Northern Ireland. It may be such a controlling principle for the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) that the gentleman to whom he referred is in power in Northern Ireland that any softening of the position on decommissioning is unacceptable. That is not where I stand.

In my view, the fundamental principle is finding the best way forward to normalising life in the Province. The evidence of 1997 suggests that the argument for repeating the gesture in 2001 for another five years is compelling. It is up to hon. Members to decide whether to adopt the position of the hon. Member for Belfast, East—I believe that it is a position of principle—or that of the Liberal Democrats. An amnesty was set previously, and we believe that nothing suggests that we should go back on it.

The earlier amnesty was established in a political vacuum when there was no process. The Bill re-establishes the amnesty after the Good Friday agreement has provided an imperfect but nevertheless tangible structure for us to compare the performance of the organisations involved in decommissioning. If the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford condemns the timetable, he must condemn what happened under Lord Mayhew in 1997 even more. I did not hear him make such a condemnation. He implied that I had praised Lord Mayhew and the former Conservative Government for their actions. He is right.

I have previously praised John Major for his visionary and courageous decisions when he was effectively forced to deal with terrorists who were bombing our security forces. I also praise Lord Mayhew, who made a courageous decision that could have backfired, but was one of the necessary if insufficient conditions for the subsequent success of the Good Friday agreement and the ceasefire.

**Chris Grayling:** Surely the difference between 1997 and today is that actions in 1997 were a genuine attempt to open a door to the process. Today, an agreement is in place, the British Government and the Irish Government have made concessions, but Sinn Fein-IRA has not yet fulfilled the decommissioning terms in the Belfast agreement. Extending the time for five years does not apply the thumbscrews to make it deliver.

**Lembit Öpik:** That is a good link to my second point. The hon. Gentleman asked the right question. Is there a difference in 2001? Could we achieve a stronger position by not renewing the amnesty? Tonight's debate is not about creating pressure to ensure that the paramilitaries decommission, but about whether we want to close a door on them. It is about whether we want to provide a gateway through which they can decommission.

In 1997, the amnesty was a necessary but insufficient condition to achieve decommissioning. In the same way, the Bill is a necessary but insufficient condition. It makes it legally possible for paramilitary organisations to decommission, but I do not believe that that is an incentive to doing it. However, I sure as hell am convinced that if we make it illegal and create the possibility of prosecuting for decommissioning, it will be harder to find mechanisms to provide the political pressure for it.

As the hon. Gentleman suggested, some hon. Members may believe that the debate is about applying positive pressure by making it illegal to decommission. On the other hand, some of us believe that the Bill keeps a door open so that we can move on through dialogue and other means to find pressure points that will cause the IRA and others to decommission. I suspect that the Secretary of State was also arguing that.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford claimed that the measure would extend the process by another five years. Again, I take a different view. Paramilitary organisations have been bombing, killing, maiming and destroying property for decades. I do not believe that they will be persuaded to decommission by 26 February 2002 simply because we tell them that we will prosecute them if they do not. That is not real-life politics. Such people do not worry about not owning gun licences, but they probably worry about the political implications of making it difficult for linked organisations such as Sinn Fein to achieve the sort of concessions for their communities for which they allegedly got involved in the troubles. I therefore take issue with the hon. Gentleman, not because he did not argue cogently but because my premise is different. I believe that the Bill is a gateway measure rather than a pressure.

The evidence suggests that the Liberal Democrats and the Government are correct. As I said earlier, I genuinely believe that the roots of the successes lie in the former Conservative Administration's decisions. There is all the more pressure now, therefore, for the current Conservative Opposition not to impugn one of the few great triumphs for which they can justly take credit. A few individuals such as the former Prime Minister and Lord Mayhew are worthy of special mention in that context.

Let us be honest, the driver behind the first limited act of decommissioning in October was not the amnesty. The key driver was probably 11 September, in that the IRA—and perhaps Sinn Fein as well—could foresee its funding from the United States drying up, as well as an unquantifiable military response being made against it in the post-11 September environment. In addition, the IRA scored a tremendous political own goal in Colombia, where it was found to be carrying out activities wholly in

*[Lembit Öpik]*

contravention of the alliance against terrorism that was being established across the world. The drivers were, therefore, external to Northern Ireland.

I suspect that it would have been somewhat more difficult for the IRA—and those Sinn Fein politicians who, I am pretty sure, have sway over it—to meet its goals and to achieve the first act of decommissioning if the de Chastelain process had not been in place. Let us not pretend that that process could continue after 26 February if the Bill were not passed. There would be no structure within which to achieve a logical de Chastelain-type procedure to manage decommissioning if we did not pass the Bill. I have not heard what alternative proposals the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford would put forward if he were Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and did not allow the Bill to go through.

I have some questions for the Minister on the mechanics of the Bill, and I hope that she will be able to answer them in her summation. I agree with the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford that we need clarification on certain questions, one of which concerns the degree of contact between the IRA and the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning since October. After the IRA's symbolic gesture, everything seems to have gone rather quiet. It has always been recognised that decommissioning is a process, but it is not a one-incident process. Pressure must be brought to bear on the IRA to do more than simply make a gesture to cover its own financial backside one day when it was clearly under the hammer to do so. We need to know what has happened since October. That was an important step, but is the Minister aware of any further steps that we can expect from the paramilitaries? Secondly, to what extent has the IRA met de Chastelain since October? Have there been any bilateral meetings, and has any pressure been brought to bear by Ministers to achieve that?

Thirdly, to what extent have loyalist paramilitaries been in contact with the IICD? The incidence of loyalist attacks is increasing, and steps must be taken to reduce them. As hon. Members, including Unionist and Conservative Members, have rightly pointed out, there is an underlying level of violence in Northern Ireland that is unknown on the mainland of the United Kingdom. For many people in Northern Ireland, the peace is not a peace. They are still living under paramilitary regimes that are far from our concept of peace. Will the Minister enlighten us as to whether we can expect a statement from the loyalist paramilitaries as well? We cannot expect a real dialogue on decommissioning by the loyalists while such violence is continuing, but the aim must be to achieve a total decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons. Strategically speaking, we have to recognise, while focusing primarily on the IRA for obvious reasons, that there is a pressure elsewhere too.

I would like to make a suggestion as to how we should generate the kind of pressure that could create genuine decommissioning. Clearly, the Bill is part of that process, in that it will leave the door open for that pressure to be applied. Secondly, it is necessary now to start moving in the direction that we all hoped that we could, and to make it clear to the paramilitaries that they will maximise the benefit to their communities and achieve the goals that they have been bombing and shooting for only through their political representatives.

As the hon. Member for Belfast, East rightly pointed out, there are some very senior members of the republican movement who have, at the very least, formerly served time on account of being actively involved in a paramilitary operation and who now enjoy a great deal more power than they could ever have dreamed possible when they were operating in a paramilitary environment. So long as the success of the Stormont Assembly in giving power on a genuinely bipartisan basis is sustained, and so long as the Stormont Assembly really means something to the people of Northern Ireland, we can be confident that it is the right vehicle to show those paramilitaries who are serious about their communities that they should move forward in that way.

There has to be balance in these matters. Unionists and loyalists can rightly be nervous about what they perceive to be an endless series of concessions to the republican and nationalist communities. I agree with what the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford said about that. Whatever my personal views on the degree of balance, perception is everything. The current perception is that the Unionists have given too much, and that the republicans have given too little back. Does the Minister agree with the concern that I am raising now, which has already been raised by Conservative Members? Is there anything strategic that the Government can do to ensure that both sides feel fairly treated?

It is also necessary to remember that there is public pressure in Northern Ireland to eliminate the maiming and killing. As we have said so many times before, the overwhelming majority of the people in Northern Ireland oppose violence. They have got used to peace, although it has been more successfully achieved in some areas than in others. Will the Minister tell us how we can harness the increasing intolerance of violence among the large sections of the public who have benefited from the peace, to make it clear to the paramilitaries—and those politicians involved with them—that violence will no longer be tolerated and, more to the point, that if the violence restarted, there would be a tremendous political price to be paid, which would have a direct consequence on the communities allegedly being protected by the paramilitaries?

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): The hon. Gentleman said that there would be a political price to be paid. The reality is that the main parties in this House would not have to pay that political price, because they do not stand for election in Northern Ireland. Does he recognise that, despite his placid idea that people are against violence, there is now more criminal and terrorist violence in ordinary everyday life in Northern Ireland? The shops on the Lisburn road are attacked day after day, but the police and security forces cannot deal with it. The clear-up rate for crime has been lower over this last year than ever before. Is it not time for him to come down from cloud cuckoo land and deal with reality?

**Lembit Öpik:** The hon. Gentleman's point is exactly the one to which I hope that the Minister will respond. He expresses a genuine and sincerely felt concern that things are getting worse in the Unionist communities in an area of Belfast that I know something about, having lived there myself, although not for some time. Regardless of the perceptions of those of us who think that things are getting better, we have to build confidence in the

communities in which people think that things are getting worse. He says that I am living in cloud cuckoo land. I accept that I am an optimist—and, as a Liberal Democrat, perhaps even an idealist—but I do not have time to fantasise to that extent. I dare to think that the points that I am making are practical enough to warrant a significant response from the Minister, and the Unionist community, in particular, deserves a response to the points made by the hon. Gentleman.

It is possible to put forward a case, on the basis of principle, that we should not extend the amnesty for decommissioning—there has been at least one speech to that effect—but that is not the argument that I heard from Conservative Members tonight. In the interests of consistency, therefore, I suggest that it would be wise for Her Majesty's official Opposition to do in 2001 what they did in far less favourable circumstances in 1997. In the absence of anyone in this or any previous debate in the last few years coming up with a better alternative to decommissioning than the content of the Good Friday agreement, I suggest that voting the Bill down would simply close a door without providing an alternative to the Good Friday agreement and the de Chastelain procedures. The Conservatives were right to introduce a very similar proposal to this in 1997. The Liberal Democrats think that it would be right for them, and for us, to support the same proposal, for very much the same reasons, in 2001.

6.40 pm

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): I agree with a great deal of what was said by the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), especially in connection with the need to respond to Unionist concerns without throwing the Bill out. That would not respond to those concerns. However, the speech of the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), the shadow Secretary of State, was quite amazing. He huffed and he puffed a great deal, although I may have misinterpreted him, because his style rather obscured the content. For about three quarters of his speech, I thought that he had jettisoned any last remnant of bipartisanship and moved into the No camp and alliance with the Democratic Unionist party, although it became obvious that he is not in that position.

The hon. Gentleman supports the reasoned amendment, which means that he wants the Government to attach a different timetable to the Bill. Although the arguments for amendment can be made on the Floor of the House, they can also be made in Committee, so all the strident opposition turns out to be almost nothing—a minor position that ties him in with some views that the Conservative party held in the past—and Unionists of different persuasions should not be misled by all the noise that he made in producing that particular view.

The hon. Gentleman seems not to realise that water has flowed under the bridge as certain measures have proceeded. My strong opinion is that the Government should not have been involved in the prisoner release programme in the way that they were without digging in and using that involvement as an avenue to gain movement on decommissioning by loyalist and republican paramilitary groups. Unfortunately, that was not done and we have to consider that reality of the current situation.

More water has flowed under the bridge, because a certain number of arms have been put beyond use by the IRA. Of all organisations, the Provisional IRA, because of circumstances round about it and pressures from different areas, has jettisoned one of its distorted principles, to which many of its members said they would always adhere. That change needs to be taken into account.

**Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley): The hon. Gentleman mentions the prisoner release scheme. He is aware that the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 provides for prisoners to be returned to prison should they default on the terms of their release licence. Does he agree that the Government should consider extending that provision to cover paramilitary organisations that breach their ceasefire or whose ceasefire has been declared null and void and that the Government ought to consider a measure to return to prison all prisoners associated with such an organisation should it fail fully to reinstate its ceasefire and decommission its illegal weapons?

**Mr. Barnes:** Perhaps there should be greater surveillance of the activities in which released prisoners become involved. They may not strictly re-enter fully fledged paramilitary activities, but introducing measures on association with organised gangsterism and other stuff that goes on in Northern Ireland should be considered seriously. I am in favour of being tough in connection with the rules that have already been determined.

**Mr. Robathan:** The hon. Gentleman has a long and honourable record of trying to find a new dialogue in Northern Ireland, but does he not think that his position and his criticisms of the Conservative party are essentially a triumph of hope over experience? The experience following the Belfast agreement is of giving way, giving way, giving way—on prisoner releases, as he says—yet we have received nothing. What is his determination of when all weapons must be decommissioned by organisations such as the IRA and loyalists who are currently, allegedly, on ceasefire? Is it 2007, 2010 or 2020?

**Mr. Barnes:** It is not correct that there has been no progress in pushing back the position of Sinn Fein and its links with the IRA. Many measures have been introduced and we have just discussed one on the Floor of the House: the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill is directed almost entirely against Sinn Fein's manipulative activity at the ballot box and we in the House should be proud of its introduction and development.

Perhaps it needed the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to produce a report and press for the measure, and pressures had to be placed on the Government to respond, but the Bill has been introduced. It is clear that Sinn Fein was benefiting most from electoral fraud. We took that on board and some of us are keen for the Bill to function properly, so we shall look to see whether it is strong enough to push back the Sinn Fein position, as far as it manipulates in the political game. I have no illusions about the techniques and tactics that it will be involved in.

An interesting exchange took place between the Secretary of State and his shadow on the matter of Sinn Fein and the IRA. My right hon. Friend argued that, although those organisations are not identical, that does not rule out the argument that they are inextricably linked.

*[Mr. Barnes]*

He used the interesting example of the link between the Labour party and the trade unions. That analogy can be carried so far, and it has relevance to the situation involving the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein. Provisional Sinn Fein came out of the Provisional IRA; it is the political wing of the organisation that was established in order to act.

The analogy falls down in respect of the Labour party, because the trade unions were not the only organisations involved in its development. Political manipulators, organisers and activists such as Keir Hardie in the Independent Labour party also had a considerable say. When Labour came out of the trade union movement, it changed, although many of us would say that there is now a problem with how far the trade unions are involved.

Interestingly, the Labour party altered, and if the Sinn Fein party comes out of the Provisional IRA, we may be at the start of a process of change, which means that, in time, those close links and what is seen as identity will begin to disappear. It is likely that the Provisional IRA and those left in it will move to Mafia-type activity and manipulation of their own and away from the political game. We must hope that, as a result of being more and more involved in the political process, Sinn Fein will detach itself from those activities.

**Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): Is not the whole point of the Belfast agreement that Sinn Fein can deliver the Provisional IRA. The worst thing that could happen would be for Sinn Fein to become divorced from the Provisional IRA and for a split to occur? Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA are one and the same, but on the hon. Gentleman's assumption, a split would leave the Provisional IRA as an armed terrorist group able to go back to violence.

**Mr. Barnes:** I was not necessarily envisaging such a split. I drew an analogy with the Labour party and the trade unions. Just as the trade unions have become somewhat distanced from the Labour party, I hope that the Provisional IRA will become distanced from Sinn Fein. There may be a formal break. There was a formal break between the official IRA and the body that was known as the workers' party. Those who represented the democratic left in the Republic of Ireland had a battle inside the workers' party, which they failed to win and had to establish a separate organisation. Heaven knows what the future holds for the activity and organisation of Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA.

Why did the Provisional IRA put a certain number of arms beyond use? Unfortunately, it was not the pressure of deadlines. Pressure was put on the IRA by the Leader of the Ulster Unionists because of his party's position, which was an important part of the network of pressure that was brought to bear. However, the essential element was the pressure from the United States, especially that in connection with the Colombian incidents, although the events of 11 September increased the pressure.

What does that tell us about Sinn Fein-IRA? It will act as an organisation to maximise its political advantage or minimise its disadvantage according to the circumstances. That is not the position that the Provisional IRA has traditionally adopted. Sinn Fein-IRA stood to lose heavily in elections in the Republic of Ireland, where it was hoping to hold the balance of power in the future, and it was being pushed back in the republican community in Northern Ireland, so it was willing to consider minimising its disadvantages. Therefore, it was responding to those pressures.

More pressure may be put on Sinn Fein-IRA from America as a result of Gerry Adams's visit to Cuba. I do not usually criticise Castro, but he seems to have made a fundamental blunder in inviting Gerry Adams to Cuba and to celebrate provisions dealing with the problem of the people who died in the Maze. That political responsiveness and interest in gaining political seats is of considerable importance, and alters Sinn Fein's position on the situation in the island of Ireland and our response to it.

I have no illusions about Sinn Fein and the IRA. I want to undermine their political stance. We should all try to engage with the electorate and people of Northern Ireland to ensure that Sinn Fein is not able to make progress. I regret the fact that the Labour party refuses to organise in Northern Ireland. It is the one place in the world where a person is not allowed to be a member of the Labour party, which is not only an injustice, but is politically naive. We should be there arguing these alternative positions.

**David Burnside:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that Sinn Fein took 51 per cent. of the so-called Catholic-nationalist community—I do not like using that term—at recent elections, and overtook the SDLP because of the amount of concessions from Her Majesty's Government towards republicanism and not towards unionism?

**Mr. Barnes:** I was concerned about the concessions that were made, as I showed with the point I made about prisoner releases. However, I do not want to keep going over yesterday's arguments. We must move from our current position. Much advantage has come out of the agreement and the progress that has been made under it. If I had had control of or great influence over the situation, I would have operated it differently and would have brought different values to the fore, and I think we might have been in a stronger position. I did not have such control, and the role that the present Government and the previous Conservative Government have played has been honourable. We must now move on.

We must stress to the Unionist community in Northern Ireland that the IRA and Sinn Fein have shifted their position. They have more or less given up the military struggle—their paramilitary activities. Unacceptable activity still takes place, and the loyalist and republican paramilitary groups have much control over their communities. They want to retain that control. We should enable people in exile to return and ensure that the paramilitaries back off. Such matters should be brought forward on behalf of the Unionist community so that the Government can respond. That is the other side of the coin. I do not entirely accept the argument that there should not be a balance of concessions to both sides. It has always been a matter of trying to get people involved.

There has been a dramatic change in Sinn Fein-IRA's principled attitudes. They were distorted principles, but it adhered to them. It would not involve itself in the institutions of the Republic or of Northern Ireland, because it was a divided Ireland. Now, not only is it keen

to manoeuvre to win whatever seats it can in the Republic and in Northern Ireland, but it is on the Executive. That poses problems because of the nature of its links, and it is trying to get rid of its past connections. It would take its seats in the United Kingdom Parliament if it were not for the problem of the Oath. That is a dramatic change from any position it has held in the past, but it means recognising the body that it believes has divided Ireland into two. It sees the possibility of advancing politically by engaging in the De Valera technique.

Those who were associated with paramilitary activity at one stage and lost out should switch to the ballot box. When they do so, they will take a constituency with them—a constituency that never wanted them to engage in such activity, but will support them now because they have proved that they are the stronger, as it were, republicans through the very activity that they engaged in before.

That is the avenue that those people are going down, the avenue that they should be encouraged to go down, and the avenue in which we should defeat them politically by saying that there are alternatives that will give people in Northern Ireland a better life. I am thinking of Labour's provision for pensions and welfare generally—for instance, its attempts to improve health services. Such matters should form part of day-to-day discussion of politics in Northern Ireland, and it would help if we engaged in the tussle.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall): As my hon. Friend knows, more than 100 Labour Members agree with his last point. How quickly does he think we could give all United Kingdom citizens the right to be members of the Labour party?

**Mr. Barnes:** That involves an internal battle in the Labour party. It is not a question of constitutional positions, unless some feel that human rights are infringed when people are not allowed a say and an involvement in a body that forms the Government of the country, but must sit and watch on television a Labour party conference that will affect their lives. The sooner my comrades do something about that, the better.

**Lembit Öpik:** Is the hon. Gentleman aware that those Labour supporters could register their protest by joining the Northern Ireland branch of the Liberal Democrats?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal):** Order. I think we are straying rather wide of the Second Reading debate.

**Mr. Barnes:** I agree, Madam Deputy Speaker. When we talk of joining the allies of the Liberal Democrats, we are moving very far from the politics that need to develop in Northern Ireland.

I said earlier that certain moves had been made to tackle Sinn Fein and its links with the IRA, and referred to the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill. I think that discussion of the basic building block of a democratic system—the right to a vote—is tremendously important. I know that democracy cannot be secured merely through votes; there must be the proper pressure groups and other organisations, there must be some freedom of expression, and there must be an end to pressures that have existed for too long in Northern Ireland communities. I think, however, that we are beginning to move in that direction.

What I have said does not mean that I will agree entirely with everything in the Bill if it is given a Committee stage, but the general principles strike me as necessary at this stage. I am not sure what the objections in the amendment are meant to be about, apart from an attempt to establish some political link with various members of Unionist communities and to carry them along—and to sound as though something very different is being said from what is actually being said.

We could have a much more sensible and open debate today about what, in Committee, could be added to the Bill to deal with problems that still exist in Northern Ireland, such as the increasing Unionist disillusionment with the whole process. We must be very aware of the need to do that, but we can do it without damning the Bill.

7.5 pm

**Mr. David Trimble** (Upper Bann): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), who, as always, made a serious speech—although I fear that his keenness on the trade union movement and its relationship with the Labour party led him to stretch an analogy a bit too far, in a way that was not entirely helpful.

The Bill relates to arms decommissioning, and in that context we must first welcome a first act of such decommissioning by the IRA. *[Interruption.]* It is important. Those whom I hear offstage to the left should bear in mind, when trying to cast doubt, that they are undermining their own case. They want to see the transition of organisations away from paramilitarism; they want to see an end to terrorism; they must want to see decommissioning. Therefore, they should not try to undermine the progress that has been made.

I have no doubt that the decommissioning did occur, and I have no doubt that it was significant. Indeed, I suspect that it was more than just significant: I think it was substantial, and that that should be welcomed. The act of decommissioning was carried out by the IRA, and after a beginning of decommissioning by the IRA—a beginning that we hope will lead to a continuation; indeed, must lead to a continuation—it is appropriate to make a couple of points. First, we hope the decommissioning will indeed continue. Secondly, it returns the focus to loyalists.

Until the IRA's act of decommissioning, loyalist paramilitaries hid behind the IRA—engaging in discussions with the international commission, agreeing the modalities of decommissioning in general terms, but not actually doing anything, and saying that they would not do anything unless republicans did. Now republicans have acted, and consequently I think loyalists need to think very seriously. I hope they will think very seriously not just about their relationship with the agreement and the political process in Northern Ireland, but about their relationship with society in Northern Ireland as a whole.

Over the last year or so, we have observed with great sadness the lack of coherence in certain elements of the loyalist community, and the continued and increasing violence perpetrated by some of them. There have, however, been a few hopeful signs in recent weeks and months. The fact that some loyalists helped to resolve the difficulties in north Belfast with regard to Holy Cross is welcome, and they should be congratulated. There are other signs of an effort to bring about coherence and

*[Mr. David Trimble]*

serious thought in loyalism, which should also be welcomed. I think the Secretary of State could do a bit more to encourage the process.

Nevertheless, there is a difficulty involving loyalists, which others have mentioned today. A certain leverage can be exerted in the case of republicans. Sinn Fein participates in the Administration, and is therefore vulnerable to political pressure. Loyalist paramilitaries are not vulnerable in the same way because they are not part of the Administration; indeed, a whole segment is not represented in the Assembly. The only pressures that can be exerted are pressures of a different kind, one of which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson). If the Secretary of State were to look more closely at the prisoner release scheme and the legislation, he would find that they contain means whereby he could exert pressure, so I hope that he will consider that.

The Bill can be regarded as a technical measure to facilitate decommissioning, because if decommissioning is to occur, there must be a legislative framework for it and a provision whereby the Commission can, when it is appropriate, grant amnesties for those engaged in decommissioning. However, I can understand some of the frustration of Labour Members because it is clear that, despite its being a technical measure, the Bill's consideration this evening has become a point of controversy, leading to the tabling of a reasoned amendment. I have signed that amendment and will support it, along with my colleagues, in the Division Lobby.

The reason for that controversy over what would otherwise be a technical measure is simple. When the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act was passed in 1997, providing a five-year period in which renewable intervals could be set for amnesties, it was not controversial. The Act itself does not contain any element of timetabling, any deadlines or any target dates. Those came separately, from the agreement. We had hoped that they would come from the original report by Senator Mitchell and his colleagues way back in January 1996, but it was not until we had the agreement in 1998 that we had a framework that gave targets.

As I said in an intervention, those targets were in the agreement itself, which set a deadline of 22 May 2000, which was extended to June 2001. Now, there is no target, and that is where the Secretary of State is making a serious mistake. That is why we have to register our position through tabling and voting on the reasoned amendment. We need targets.

The Bill would not have been controversial if the Secretary of State had done what I thought the Government were going to do a few months ago. They should have responded positively to the ideas expressed by Mr. Mark Durkan, now the leader of the SDLP, when he said, after the first act of decommissioning, that it was necessary to get together the parties that support the agreement so that they could recommit to the decommissioning process to General de Chastelain. Inevitably, a fresh target would have had to form part of that recommitment. That target, like the original one in the agreement, would have been endorsed by all the parties, which is important because it would have been better than a target that does not really exist. The best that the Secretary of State could say in response to my intervention was that the target is implicit in the date that has been set, which is 27 February 2003. That is where the mistake has been made.

The Secretary of State made comments with which I profoundly disagree. Unfortunately, they are almost an accepted part of the normal discourse on this matter. He said that deadlines do not work and that there should be no pressure. That is absolute rubbish. No other word can be used to describe it. Of course pressure works. Of course deadlines are important. Targets may not always be met, but if we do not set them, we do not have the opportunity to say to certain parties, "You are in default." It will not now be so easy to tell republicans that they are in default, and being able to say that is the beginning of being able to apply pressure to them. That is the Government's mistake.

Over the past three years, there has been movement by republicans on decommissioning. They started off, in April 1998, denying that they were under any obligation from the agreement. They were wrong, but worse was the error made by those who supported republicans in their error. *[Laughter.]* We hear them laughing, but the agreement placed a clear obligation on republicans and we moved them, by stages, to a point at which they accepted that obligation. At the first Hillsborough meetings, Sinn Fein accepted that an obligation stemmed from the agreement. In May 2000, the IRA accepted that obligation. It was on the basis of their acceptance of it and their promise to fulfil it that the Government, with the consent of the parties, shifted the timetable.

Those moves were achieved only as the result of pressure. We got the IRA's promise to decommission only after devolution was suspended in February 2000. That produced movement. The IRA were dilatory in carrying out its promise, thus confirming our suspicion that, given time, it would spin things out and Mr. Adams would waste that time. That is precisely what he did. It was necessary then for me to take action. Are the Government going to hide behind me again? Are they going to leave it to other people to start to take action?

The Government need to think about this very carefully. It is primarily their responsibility to achieve decommissioning. It should not be up to us to carry that burden, to a large extent without support from others. Tonight the Government are shirking their responsibility. They should have faced up to it, and could have done so by taking the opportunity offered by Mr. Durkan to bring the parties to agreement on the way in which the process would continue.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** I am listening to the right hon. Gentleman with great attention and in great agreement. Does he agree that if the Government abdicate their proper duty to take the lead in pressing for decommissioning and applying pressure using whatever instruments are available, rather than simply throwing them away as has too often been the case up to now, pressure will need to be applied by himself or the new institutions in Belfast, which will guarantee a series of political crises that could destabilise those institutions every time a new act of decommissioning is needed? Surely, that would be a fatal recipe for achieving the peace, stability and decommissioning that we all need.

**Mr. Trimble:** I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said. If the Government reflect on the matter,

they will realise what a bad thing it is for the development of the political process to have these recurrent crises. Those are not good for the development of the Administration or of confidence in it. One has to ask why the Government are sitting back and adopting the approach that they will do nothing until a crisis occurs. A responsible Government should be acting in advance, particularly as the development of such a crisis is clearly predictable and should be anticipated by them. It is not responsible government, nor is it desirable, to bring about a situation in which such a threat to the political process in Northern Ireland is inevitable.

I find the Government's attitude disappointing. They know that people in Northern Ireland compare the supine attitude that the Government have adopted to events there with the hyperactivity that we see on other fronts, and they are not encouraged by it. If the Government wanted to increase confidence and a sense of community in Northern Ireland, they would address the disparity between their domestic policies and their international policies. The continued gap between those approaches deepens the crisis of confidence in Northern Ireland, and a sensible Administration would not allow that to develop.

Our experience in dealing with republicans reinforces the need for clarity and firmness. We are dealing with an organisation that does not operate on the normal principles that we understand; it does not reciprocate; it never displays any generosity; it acts only when it has to; and if given an opportunity to wriggle out of anything, it will do so. There is a clear need for firm lines. That need is based on pragmatism, but it should not just be based on that. There are principles here that have to be vindicated. In terms of the level of confidence within the community in Northern Ireland, the Government must show that there is no moral vacuum in their approach to the issue, that they understand the basic principles and that they will be firm on them. Those basic principles come back to the underlying point of the Good Friday agreement; that it is there to support peace and democracy and to support the democratic process.

The comments made by the hon. Member for North–East Derbyshire on electoral fraud were significant and I hope that the Government listened and will act. We must support the democratic process, but the objective at the end of the day is to produce a normal society in Northern Ireland that operates by normal, peaceful and democratic methods. That necessarily means an end to paramilitarism; we should be clear about that. Weapons decommissioning is part of the process, but that process must continue with the dissolution or the transformation of the paramilitary organisations into something that is entirely peaceful and democratic.

We may find that some elements, individuals or even organisations are not prepared to make that progress and wish to continue racketeering. As the hon. Member for North–East Derbyshire knows, the Official IRA started a ceasefire in 1972 but, 25 years later, we discovered there were still elements of it in parts of Newry and West Belfast, simply in order to maintain rackets in which they had been engaged over the years. There will be a need to deal with racketeering, and the Government have come across a good example of how that can be done in recent weeks. I hope that the response is positive.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) has pointed out, there is a need to tackle the criminal activity that has developed; again, probably largely from former paramilitaries who are now lining their own pockets. All those things need to be done to produce the situation that we want, but we will not be able to move paramilitary organisations down this path unless a firm framework is put in place and it is made clear to them that they need to move that way. Essential to that is the setting of some form of target date. The Government have failed to do that, and for that reason I am afraid that this measure, which would otherwise have been a technical one, has to be opposed.

7.22 pm

**Mr. Eric Joyce** (Falkirk, West): It is a privilege to be called to speak in this debate, which represents the latest incremental step in what has been a long progress towards normalisation in Northern Ireland. I am aware that many hon. Members here tonight have a detailed knowledge of the subject at hand, particularly those Members with constituencies in Northern Ireland. However, they, too, will be aware that many of us with constituencies outside Northern Ireland have constituents with a great deal of interest in the subject. My constituency is no different.

That makes the comment of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth)—that the Labour Government have nothing to lose in Northern Ireland—seem a bit cheap, given that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) spent several minutes saying how large the responsibilities were of the Labour Government in Northern Ireland. *[Interruption.]* I did not miss the point. The hon. Gentleman said that the Labour Government had nothing to lose in Northern Ireland.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** In an intervention on the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), I said that there was no political price to be paid by the parties in this House because they did not stand in Northern Ireland. I was talking about parties, and not the Government.

**Mr. Joyce:** I appreciate that, but the Labour Government have a great deal of responsibility in Northern Ireland and therefore a great deal to lose in terms of the interpretation of constituents, including my own, of what happens in Northern Ireland.

The technical purpose of the Bill is to extend the Northern Ireland arms decommissioning process and associated amnesty, initially for a year, in order to maintain the momentum of the decommissioning process. It is essentially a technical Bill.

Of course, on one level it is disappointing that this measure is required at all. We might think that, in an ideal world, the violence, and the arms that have represented the means for maintaining it, would have disappeared from Ireland by now, but that would be a false construct since in an ideal world the violence would not have started in the first place. We should temper our disappointment with the knowledge that, for most people, not only is Northern Ireland a far more hospitable place to live today than it was 10, 15 or, indeed, five years ago, but that, in the more immediate sense, there has been some real progress recently in the decommissioning process.

It might not always be the wisest thing for a politician to apply the term "optimism", as the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) did in relation to Northern Ireland. I would not go that far, but there is room for a real sense of progress when we reflect on the historic

*[Mr. Joyce]*

act of decommissioning, witnessed by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and reported on 23 October of this year.

That single act of decommissioning may or may not have been modest in terms of volume—it certainly satisfied the commission—but its significance lay in the fact that it represented an acceptance by people formerly of violent intent that their methods had to change for good. I would not wish to say today that these individuals do not desire the same political ends as they ever did, but the important thing is that their recent action serves as powerful evidence that they recognise they can pursue their objectives only through peaceful and democratic means. That is why it would be a wholesale failure of peaceful governance if the decommissioning momentum—achieved, most notably, in recent months—were not maintained by means of the legislation under debate this evening.

Of course there will be other objections to the extension of the decommissioning process. One objection is that, in negotiations of any kind, it is sometimes useful to be able to put those on the other side of the table under some form of time pressure, or constrain them to given time horizons. That is the essence of the amendment tabled by the Opposition today and supported by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann.

But surely it is clear that, in the circumstances that pertain today, even if all paramilitaries agreed tomorrow to decommission, it would not be possible by February 2002. That is not a practical proposition, and it should lead us to the not unreasonable conclusion that what is important is that things are steadily moving forward, rather than to attempt to present artificial and unhelpful time frames.

Indeed, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann agreed with the broad principle that artificial time frames are unhelpful in 1999 when he said

> "It would be beneficial if people looked carefully at the decommissioning scheme. It does not refer to timetables. Timetables have been mentioned, but there is no explicit reference in the decommissioning scheme to a timetable."—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1999; Vol. 335, c. 189.]

Another objection sometimes made is that the act of decommissioning witnessed by General de Chastelain and his colleagues was somehow bogus—a very weak objection indeed. Like all of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I take the integrity of the members of the commission as axiomatic and I would suggest that people who wish to doubt it prove by their very approach the wisdom of removing from the political arena the physical process of verification itself.

A wider objection is to argue—as the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) has done before today—that the IRA has control rather than peace in mind, and would simply return to violence if the Good Friday agreement as a whole did not provide acceptable outcomes. That objection seems to miss the point that, in a democracy, people and groups can have whatever objectives they want, provided the means by which they pursue them are peaceful and lawful.

The objection also ignores the way in which the world has changed, even since the events of 11 September, so as to make a return to the bullet and the bomb unacceptable to all but a tiny splinter of people who will, in due course, be mopped up by sound policing in the Province and elsewhere.

Our concern this evening should rest with progress in the short to medium term. This debate is not so much about the ultimate constitutional structure that is to pertain in Northern Ireland, but rather with the processes that ensure that, however the people of Northern Ireland choose to order their affairs, guns and explosives have no part in the public, or indeed private, discourse. The recent history of Northern Ireland has sometimes been characterised by the rejection of arguments based on process on the grounds that they could lead to political solutions not in accordance with the views of one group or another. However, in the 21st century, and post-11 September, that is not a view that even many former paramilitaries find sustainable.

Indeed, 11 September, when a similar number of people died in one day as have died in Northern Ireland in 30 years, is likely, through its apocalyptic scale and effect, to have helped to force the hand of the Provisional IRA by closing off the remnants of support for terrorism in any form that may have existed outside Britain or Ireland. It is true that that argument allows for the fact that without the violence in New York some in Northern Ireland—other than the splinter groups I mentioned earlier—may still have considered violence to be a feasible option. It is also fair to say that Ministers must make fine judgments regarding who among the several groupings in Northern Ireland with a history of violence is to be specified and who is not. At the end of the day, the finer points of detail surely have to yield to common sense. The bare fact is that there has been progress, and there is good evidence to suggest that it will continue. It is therefore now time for loyalist paramilitary groups to enter the decommissioning process, too.

Specification is not a one-way street and the decommissioning process is therefore a most fundamental part of the process of ensuring that competing visions of Northern Ireland's future are reconciled in democratic, rather than lawless, fashion. It is essential that all sides are able to press their cases, and it is fairly clear that if loyalist groups are to come on board, there is no real possibility—as hon. Members on the Opposition Benches know full well—of the process being completed before February. That is why the Bill is so important in helping to ensure a peaceful future for the people who live in Northern Ireland. It is pity that some hon. Members cannot see that and prefer to put up mindless opposition for its own sake.

7.32 pm

**Mr. Andrew Hunter** (Basingstoke): I hope that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) will forgive me if I do not pursue the points that he made, although I listened to his speech with interest. I strongly agreed with the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) when he said that decommissioning was essentially the responsibility of Government. It is an issue on which the Government to date have been defective. I was also intrigued by the right hon. Gentleman's assertion that the IRA's decommissioning event was substantial. The rest of us are unaware of any evidence that supports that view. If I may say so somewhat lightheartedly, we look forward to him sharing that evidence with us.

It has been predictable for three or so years that one day this Bill or something like it would come before the House. It was only a matter of time before the Government reflected in legislation their lamentable failure to deliver meaningful decommissioning. Further, nowhere is the saga of our surrender to domestic terrorism more clearly illustrated than in successive Governments' handling of the issue of decommissioning. I say successive Governments, because I am mindful of the retreat on that point that was made between 1993 and 1997. The unpalatable truth is that what started as a peace process long ago degenerated into a process of appeasement. The Bill is largely the consequence of capitulation to the threat of terrorist violence and fear of renewed terrorist violence.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** I appreciate the hon. Gentleman giving way on that point, because it was earlier argued that the Conservative party is going back on 1997 in the reasoned amendment. Does he agree that when one realises a mistake has been made, the best thing to do is to rectify it?

**Mr. Hunter:** I strongly agree, but I have also been intrigued by the frequent references to the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997, because I remember clearly its passage through the House and the arguments in the Chamber and behind the scenes. That Act was aspirational. It prepared the way, controversially, for the recommendations of the Mitchell committee and it came at a time when the Conservative party was still uncertain how strongly to insist on decommissioning as a precondition for entry to the talks. So the climate was very different from today.

The Bill will lengthen the timetable for decommissioning and, therefore, represents the Government's failure to deliver an integral part of the Belfast agreement. It is an expression of that failure, the reasons for which significantly lie in the agreement itself. During the past three or so years, my hon. Friends and I have lamented the absence of linkage. We lamented the absence of linkage between early release and decommissioning and between places on the Executive and decommissioning. If only that linkage had existed, the situation today could have been very different.

There was no linkage, and far from decommissioning being completed by February 2001, another five years will be allowed in which it may take place. That will bring the entire decommissioning process even further into disrepute and it will make fraudulent nonsense of Sinn Fein's position at the heart of Government in the Province.

A simple principle is at stake and we lose sight of it at our peril. It cannot be morally right to sustain a system of democracy in which one side reserves the right to use force if its will does not prevail. How can a power-sharing Executive possibly work when parties are asked to share power with political opponents who have kept open the option of recourse to violence?

I am sorry that the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) is no longer in his place, because I listened to his speech with interest. He got close to saying that decommissioning is like the icing on the cake, or an added attraction. That is not true. It is a core imperative for the maintenance of democratic society.

A long time ago, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) said:

> "You cannot negotiate with people who have guns on the table, under the table or outside the door."

If one cannot negotiate with such people, one most certainly cannot share power with them. The requirement that terrorists must decommission their weapons embodies a basic democratic principle, and that principle has been diluted by the Government's failure to achieve meaningful decommissioning and is diluted further by the protracted timetable that the Bill provides.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) said, if the Bill had provided for a reasonable and limited extension of decommissioning of, say, one year, we might have been prepared to support it, but five years is totally irresponsible. A state that agrees to give executive power to people who are members of an armed body is undermining the rule of law on which its stability rests. That principle seemed to be understood by British and Irish Governments at the beginning of the process. So great, however, has been the desire to appease domestic terrorism that they have regressively diluted that principle.

Let us consider the past few years. We were told that decommissioning would be resolved by May 2000. That did not happen, and a new deadline was set for June 2001. It did not happen then, and the deadline was extended to February 2002. The Bill gives a new date—February 2003—and makes further extension available. The point is that if we extend the deadline, we shall extend the time until decommissioning becomes reality. That is the fundamental flaw in the Bill.

I remember that, shortly after the agreement was signed, the Prime Minister wrote to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann to say that decommissioning should start straight away. A few weeks later came the Prime Minister's handwritten pledges to the people of Northern Ireland. On the basis of what proved to be worthless pledges, the majority of voters in the Province backed the agreement. They were essentially conned.

So it has gone on—fudge after fudge after fudge. There came the joint communiqué in April 1999, which the IRA's Brian Keenan described as an Easter bunny. There followed the Prime Minister's initiative and his article in *The Times* in June 1999, then "The Way Forward" document in July. The Mitchell review of the process followed, and then the IRA's so-called seismic change of thinking. So it has gone on.

The objective has been to secure Unionist acceptance of Sinn Fein's participation in Government without decommissioning. The Government have largely succeeded in that. I find it wholly unacceptable that they should now seek more time for decommissioning when they have squandered so much and shown themselves incapable of delivering the goods. The Bill should be rejected.

7.42 pm

**Mr. Peter Robinson** (Belfast, East): Some weeks ago the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland seemed to say that he understood something of the alienation in the Unionist community. He seemed to understand—given the results of recent elections, he could hardly have done otherwise—that the Unionist community did not support his agreement. He referred to the cold house that seemed to exist for Unionists in Northern Ireland.

*[Mr. Peter Robinson]*

The Secretary of State has done himself no favours in his performance today. He demonstrated clearly that he was prepared almost to be a spin doctor for Sinn Fein-IRA and to put the best possible gloss on Sinn Fein-IRA activity. He could have said that Sinn Fein-IRA is full of despicable people who have failed us time and again. He could have said that they had made us promises and pledges, and then broken them. He could have said that they were still going on with their violence, but that the Government feel that we should give them a final chance. We could have disagreed with that judgment, but at least it would have been clear that he did not think that anything in the behaviour of Sinn Fein-IRA was worthy of commendation.

As it was, however, the Secretary of State came to the Dispatch Box, and the worst that he could say of Sinn Fein-IRA was that there had been massive imperfections in the way in which it had operated within the so-called peace process. By and large, he referred to the great significance of what Sinn Fein-IRA has done.

Before I turn to what Sinn Fein-IRA has done, let me leave one fact with the House. Any Member who has not been following events in Northern Ireland may be unaware of it. The Provisional IRA has more weapons and explosives in its stockpiles and armouries today than it had when it declared its ceasefire: so much for decommissioning.

The security forces will make it clear to those who inquire that the IRA has continued to bring weaponry into the country. Indeed, it was caught bringing weapons in via Florida when its network was uncovered by chance by a scanning machine in Great Britain. The IRA has continued to bring in weaponry while talking of the great need for decommissioning, its great desire to see that happen and its preparedness to be part of such a process. Rather than reducing its number of weapons, it has, during the so-called peace process, increased the weapons at its disposal.

It is essential to consider the backcloth against which our debate takes place. Several hon. Members have mentioned that the Provisional IRA and others have given a number of commitments over the past few years. The Government's position before 1994 was that there had to be complete decommissioning of weaponry before Sinn Fein-IRA could be part of any talks process. That position was weakened during the period of the three Washington principles. Lord Mayhew, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, changed the position so that if Sinn Fein-IRA started on the road to decommissioning, Sinn Fein could be part of the talks process.

The position was weakened further when the Government brought in Senator Mitchell to consider decommissioning. His report said that some people wanted decommissioning to happen before talks could take place, but the IRA did not want to decommission until after the talks were over. Perhaps we should do something in the middle, he said, and he judged that decommissioning should occur during the talks process. Of course, it did not. After the talks took place, we had the Belfast agreement, and all that it gave was a commitment on the part of all participants to use best endeavours to bring about decommissioning by May 2000.

When that date came, another change was made. It was decided that June 2001 would be the appropriate hour. In June 2001, the Government stretched the deadline until February 2002. The measure before the House tonight will take us right through to 2007.

We are told that there is great reason for hope today because there has been a decommissioning event. We are told that that event was of some significance, not because anyone knows what was decommissioned, but because General de Chastelain thought that it was significant. If his judgment is to be used, we should consider just what General Chastelain has said. His statement talked about our having witnessed an event that "we regard as significant".

In the desire to know and to test what the general considers significant, my colleagues and I went to see him. We asked if the commission considered the amount of weaponry to be significant, or whether the fact that anything at all had occurred was significant. He replied that the fact that an event took place was, to him, significant. He said that he had seen written on the gable ends of walls in republican areas, "Not a bullet; not an ounce". In that context, what had happened was significant, he said.

I asked whether the general regarded his meeting with us that day as significant. He said that yes, it was. That might give the House some idea of how easily he is persuaded that any event is of significance. I then asked him whether, if the IRA had decommissioned one gun—just one—he would have considered that to be significant. He said, "Yes, I would." It would thus have been significant if the general had seen only one weapon put beyond use. We are asked by some hon. Members to take as evidence of the Provisional IRA's bona fides—its willingness to see total decommissioning—the fact that in some unspecified place an unspecified event took place, whereby an unspecified amount of weapons of an unspecified classification was put beyond use in an unspecified way, with no suggestion that there would be a further act to put weapons beyond use.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** In the light of the "Not one bullet, not one ounce of Semtex" slogan, one might accept that meaning of "significance". However, is it not more significant that people talk about seeing decommissioning although they did not see it, and that the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Irish Republic demands further steps from the British side so that demilitarisation—knocking down the watch towers and so on—is visible? Surely, what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

**Mr. Robinson:** I could not agree more. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said that we saw that act of decommissioning, but we saw nothing at all. The only people who saw it were a bunch of IRA men and three people from the international decommissioning body, who left the site of the so-called act of decommissioning, while the IRA men stayed behind with whatever weaponry was there.

**Mr. McCabe:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not intend to mislead the House, but when he says that the general said that he would regard the decommissioning of

one gun as significant, is it not the case that the general's report stated that a quantity of guns, arms and explosives were decommissioned?

**Mr. Robinson:** It would not be correct to say that. The report said that arms, ammunition and explosives were included—no quantities were given. My reference to the statement that one gun was significant was intended to show Members how easily the general is persuaded that something minor is of significance—something that might also be considered minor by the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members.

In a legal context, we are often told by respected members of the judiciary—people whom we have learned to trust—that for justice to be done, it has to be seen to be done, yet we tell a bunch of gangsters, "Oh well, we don't need to see it." Why should we need to see weapons destroyed? If the whole idea of decommissioning is to build up confidence within the Unionist community, to let it know that the IRA has changed its ways for ever and that it has left its horrible past behind, it is essential that people see decommissioning take place.

However, all we have is that unspecified event—and no timetable. We specifically asked the general whether he had any indication as to when another act of decommissioning might take place and he said, "No, there is no timetable for further decommissioning." Indeed, the Bill is testimony to that fact. If there had been a timetable for decommissioning, the Bill could have fitted into it, but the Secretary of State, on a wing and a prayer—if he either flies or prays—tells us that we shall let the process go on for another five years and then see what happens.

The shadow Secretary of State turned the arguments of the Secretary of State back on to him in a way that was evident to everyone. If the Secretary of State says that it is in the nature of deadlines that people in Northern Ireland—the Provisional IRA and others—will take things to the wire, that must also apply to the Bill. If he shows them that five years are available, we can be dead sure that, when that five years come around, either the Provisional IRA will be looking for more concessions to meet the demands placed on it, or the Secretary of State or his successor will have to come to the Dispatch Box once again to extend the period.

It is clear that the Secretary of State has the difficult task of convincing people in Northern Ireland and throughout this kingdom that the Provisional IRA deserves that further chance. The reality is that the Provisional IRA has not been acting solely as democrats since the signing of the Belfast agreement. The House needs to know something about what a ceasefire means to the Provisional IRA. During that period, the Provisional IRA murdered 12 people—the last of them only last week. The Provisional IRA shot 150 people. They carried out so-called punishment beatings on 250 people during that ceasefire period.

As I pointed out earlier, the Provisional IRA has been running guns in from Florida. It has been involved in its usual gangsterism throughout the Province, including major robberies when millions of pounds worth of goods were stolen. As everybody knows, it has been engaged with the FARC in Colombia, attempting to improve its terror machine. As recently as this weekend, we heard that it was leaving manuals so that FARC could learn the deadly business of terrorism at the feet of the masters—the Provisional IRA.

That is the record of the Provisional IRA—still engaged in terrorism. Who are these people? They include, as chief of staff of the Provisional IRA, the Minister of Education. Let us think about that for a moment: the Minister of Education in Northern Ireland, as chief of staff, sits down in the army council of the Provisional IRA and sanctions the murders that take place. That is the reality. That is what he did last week when a person was killed in south Armagh at the hands of the Provisional IRA, when the IRA was sent off to Colombia and when the guns were being run from Florida. While that same Mr. McGuinness was talking to the general and, indeed, Senator Mitchell, about decommissioning, he was sanctioning the bringing in of weaponry from Florida.

That is the organisation with which we shall be rubbing shoulders in the corridors if the Government have their way during the next few weeks. Three of its four Members of Parliament are members of the army council of the IRA: the head of its southern command, Pat Doherty; Gerry Adams, former chief of staff of the IRA; and its present chief of staff, Martin McGuinness. Those are the people we are dealing with—people with high positions in the Government of Northern Ireland.

That is the difference from the position adopted by the Conservatives in 1997. They took that position when the Provisional IRA did not run Departments in Northern Ireland—but now it does. The Secretary of State urges us to allow the IRA to continue its ministerial role in Northern Ireland without handing over its weaponry for five years, because everyone knows that for the IRA that deadline has become a period of relaxation.

It is essential to consider a further factor. The measure takes us beyond the last possible date for the next Assembly election in 2003. In theory at least, that means that the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister—whichever of those positions is held by Sinn Fein after that election—will have the power, under Government-sponsored legislation, to appoint High Court judges. At the same time, they will be in command of an armed terrorist organisation. That certainly should give people some cause for concern.

The Bill shows that the Government are not really serious about imposing deadlines on decommissioning. They have relaxed, taken a laid-back approach and shown that they have no bottom line when it comes to dealing with Sinn Fein-IRA. The Bill removes the pressure from the IRA and shows that it has until 2007 to bury the issue. The Government have made it fairly clear—this Bill is evidence—that they have not agreed with the Provisional IRA a timetable for decommissioning, which proves that the event that took place was nothing more than a stunt and a con. Indeed, it makes a mockery of the Prime Minister's statement that the event was in some way historic.

The Bill is evidence of weak government. There is nothing that requires the scheme to run for five years. The legislation could say one year just as easily as five; it could say two or 10. The Secretary of State chose five years so that he can stretch out the process and allow the IRA even more time in government.

It ill becomes the purported Northern Ireland First Minister to indicate to the House that, as far as he is concerned, the burden of ensuring decommissioning rests on his shoulders. The purported First Minister would not have done anything if it had not been for the reality of

*[Mr. Robinson]*

facing the electorate. As he faced the consequences of the concessions that he made to secure decommissioning, he was forced to take some action by way of putting the matter to Sinn Fein-IRA.

I agree with the comments of hon. Members across the Floor that by far the most relevant issue to the IRA's event—whatever it may have been—was it being caught out in Colombia, and the fact that it was losing support in the United States, losing its funding and losing the gentrification that its leadership had been given over the previous months. The bottom line is of course that, since then, the events of 11 September have shown clearly that there is a view in civilised democracies across the world that those who engage in violence to advance political causes are persona non grata and that to a much greater extent it is hard for Sinn Fein-IRA to peddle its argument across the world.

The Government, by this Bill, have become complicit in Sinn Fein-IRA's charade. If the Secretary of State had meant what he said and shown that he felt that the Unionists were in a cold house, he would have approached the Dispatch Box very differently today. Indeed, I recall it being said—I think by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), although it may have been the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies)—in reply to the Secretary of State, that words simply would not be enough to do that. If, as I believe, that is right on that point, is it not also right on decommissioning?

To a community of people who were born under the threat and actuality of IRA violence and witnessed its activities over many decades, words simply are not enough. The general's few lines in a press statement will not convince them. Opinion polls have shown that the majority of Unionists are not convinced that the event is one of some significance, so decommissioning needs to be seen to be believed.

Nothing that the Secretary of State has said will have convinced by one iota any Unionist in Northern Ireland that he is right in giving the IRA a further period of time. It would be far better if it did what the Prime Minister indicated should be done. If it does not meet its obligations on decommissioning, we shall have to make proposals to ensure either that it does so or that its representatives are put out of Government until it does so.

8.5 pm

**Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): I come to this debate in disappointment as much as anything else, as it is a very sad day. Those of us who want a lasting and just peace in Northern Ireland—I hope that includes everyone present—will agree that there must be concessions and some pragmatic ways of making progress, because to get an agreement one must be pragmatic. Unfortunately, experience of the past three to four years teaches us that the pragmatism is all on one side and that a long history of appeasement began with the Belfast agreement.

I was in the Chamber when the original Bill was passed in February 1997. It implemented a framework to allow an amnesty for people handing in weapons in the future. It did not say that people could have an amnesty. That was nearly five years ago, and as some Labour Members have said, a lot of water has passed under the bridge since then. Sadly, we have since seen nothing, apart from an event that General de Chastelain believed was significant. I do not think that that is really what anybody expected when the Belfast agreement was trumpeted as such good news in April 1998.

I say with sadness, not with anger, that this Bill is another step down the road of appeasement. I remind newer Members of the Mitchell principles and what Senator Mitchell said in 1996 for John Major's Government. He produced six principles and said in the second that to be involved in all-party talks, participants had to agree to

"the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations".

Talks occurred in 1997–98, but I do not think that all participants did so agree. That was a pity, but of course we were being pragmatic and as a result went one step down the road.

Then we had the Belfast agreement. It is now getting on for four years old and some hon. Members may not have read it. I remind Members present that it says on page 20:

"All participants . . . confirm their intention . . . to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsements in referendums North and South".

**Mr. Stephen Pound** (Ealing, North): On a recent television programme on Ulster Television, the hon. Gentleman stated that he did not support the Good Friday agreement and said that that view was shared by many members of the Conservative party. Will he take this opportunity to clarify once and for all whether he is with his party or without his party?

**Mr. Robathan:** There must be some mistake; I do not remember doing any interview in the past year or so with Ulster Television. I have done one in the past, but I think that that was before the hon. Gentleman became a Member of the House. I will clearly state that the Belfast agreement was entirely reasonable. I did not agree with everything in it. There are disagreements in all parties, but that is why there is a coming together to form a consensus. My point has always been—I do not think that I said it on Ulster Television—that all parts of the agreement had to be implemented. Indeed, the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Marjorie Mowlam, said that we cannot "cherry-pick" the agreement and that "all parts" must be implemented.

The two years ran out in May or June 2000—some time ago. The two years came and the two years went. There was then another year of extension, and then another six months. There is still 10 weeks left to decommission all loyalist as well as IRA weapons. Apparently, the IRA has made the decision to decommission. How long does it take to tell everybody? There are all sorts of ways to let people know—telephone, e-mail, even snail mail. How long does it take to tell the fighters in the field—or whatever those ghastly terrorists call themselves—to hand in their weapons? Surely not longer than 10 weeks. As I said previously, it took only two months in Rhodesia, as it then was, in 1980, and 30 days in Macedonia. It does not take very long to organise the handing in, the destruction or the decommissioning of weapons.

**Mr. Pound:** I do not want to trespass on the House's patience, but is the hon. Gentleman really positing Rhodesia-Zimbabwe as a model of a peaceful, pacifist democratic state?

**Mr. Robathan:** No—I would not insult the hon. Gentleman's intelligence by pretending anything of the sort. My point is that the handing in of terrorist weapons in 1980 under the Lancaster House agreement was given a total of two months—it might even have been less, and the process certainly took less than two months. That was a far more difficult situation, with fighters out in the bush, not a country that has e-mail, television and other means of communication.

The hon. Gentleman is clearly unhappy, so let me help by quoting from his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. In February 1996, before the Mitchell principles were published, in reference to the IRA attack on the tallest building in London—he was very firm on that, as he was on the attack on New York's twin towers—the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said:

"On this matter, we shall stand foursquare together in the cause of peace."

He added:

"Decommissioning weapons was one way. In our judgment it is, and remains, the obvious way."

Two years later, on 22 April 1998, in reference to the Belfast agreement, he said:

"We said that we want the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations . . . Meanwhile it would obviously be a travesty of democracy if parties associated with paramilitary organisations held Executive office in the Assembly while they continue to be engaged in or threaten terrorism".

We know that McGuinness, Adams and the IRA are still engaged in intimidation, in threatening terrorism and possibly—as the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) says—in carrying out acts of terrorism. The IRA has continued to commit terrorist acts while McGuinness sits as a Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I hope that everyone agrees with the Prime Minister on how that is a travesty of democracy.

It is important that we all understand what it is we are to vote on. Last Thursday, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) pointed out that when he interviewed Martin McGuinness in 1974, McGuinness told him that

"he had had a dozen Catholic informers killed."—[*Official Report*, 13 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 1-17.]

I do not recall Mr. McGuiness ever being put on trial for that. He remains a member of the Provisional Army Council of the IRA—if the Minister has any intelligence that says otherwise, perhaps she will tell us about it. We all know that he is deeply involved, as is Adams, yet the Secretary of State says that we must give those people more time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) made an excellent point about whether the Secretary of State was again trying to distance Sinn Fein from the IRA, as he appeared to be doing. The right hon. Gentleman said that Sinn Fein had no power over the IRA, yet on 22 October—seven or eight weeks ago—Gerry Adams and Martin McGuiness both made statements indicating that they had asked the IRA to begin the decommissioning process and, amazingly enough, General de Chastelain put out a statement on 23 October saying that the IRA had decommissioned some weapons. Is the juxtaposition of the two events mere coincidence, or is it conceivable that Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams have significant influence on—or might even be the same people as—the IRA?

The Government are being disingenuous in the extreme, they are being economic with the actualité, they are guilty of dissembling. I shall not name individuals, because I would be ruled out of order. We are fighting a laudable war against terrorism in Afghanistan—a war that most hon. Members present support—yet we will not fight a war against the terrorists who have killed British citizens on British soil on the mainland and in Northern Ireland. We will not fight a war against those who attacked the tallest buildings in London, but we will against those who attacked the tallest buildings in New York. I am not arguing that we should fight such a war; I am saying that we must be honest with ourselves.

In the Terrorism Act 2000, at the top of the list of proscribed organisations we see "the Irish Republican Army". In March last year, when asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) whether that meant the Real IRA, the Provisional IRA or Continuity IRA, the then Home Secretary said that it meant all the Irish Republican Army: Provisional, Continuity, Real, Official if that still exists—the lot. That Act specifically states in section 11:

"A person commits an offence if he belongs or professes to belong to a proscribed organisation."

We know that Martin McGuinness is a member of the Provisional Army Council—the Secretary of State is free to intervene to tell me otherwise. The Act further states in section 12:

"A person commits an offence if he arranges, manages or assists in arranging or managing a meeting which he knows is . . . to be addressed by a person who belongs or professes to belong to a proscribed organisation"—

or—

"if he addresses a meeting and the purpose of his address is to encourage support for a proscribed organisation".

I seem to recall Gerry Adams visiting America once or twice to collect money. There seems no doubt that those people should be prosecuted under the Government's own Act, yet they are not.

I am willing to accept that the Real IRA and Continuity IRA are splinter groups—different from the IRA. However, the truth is that the explosives used in Omagh had been in Provisional IRA stockpiles. Anyone with knowledge of Northern Ireland knows that in the organisations in which Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness are involved much is known about where those explosives came from, and that they might be able to help. They could show good faith, as we are doing by giving them an extra five years, by letting us know who committed that outrage and providing some evidence, instead of shedding crocodile tears. They could help us to nail the bombers who murdered those 20-odd people in Omagh.

We have seen little good faith from the IRA since the Belfast agreement, except for the fact that, although they have not stopped killing people, they have, very decently, killed fewer people than they killed before. They have not stopped intimidation beatings, nor have they ceased organising. We all want peace, but the Government—motivated by the good intentions with which the road to

*[Mr. Robathan]*

hell is paved—have acted shamefully. They have, as a Government, been dishonest and dishonourable. Ministers should hang their heads in shame over their appeasement on decommissioning.

The Prime Minister has been quoted as saying:

"as the Agreement expressly states, the ceasefires are indeed complete and unequivocal; an end to bombings, killings and beatings, claimed or unclaimed; an end to targeting and procurement of weapons; progressive abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures actively directing and promoting violence".

None of that has happened. We should be honest about that. Although the end may desirable, we should remember that only rarely is an end justified by dishonest means.

Unbelievably, in their appeasement, the Government intend to allow public funding for IRA propaganda by allowing four Sinn Fein MPs to take the generous—over-generous, in my opinion—office allowances. The money will be public funding for propaganda on behalf of an organisation that commits murder—an organisation that has in the recent past murdered Members of Parliament, as every one of us remembers.

It will allow terrorists with access to illegal weapons to walk the corridors around us all. Surely that can give no one any pleasure, and should worry everybody. I know the Sinn Fein office in the Falls road. I used to walk past it with a rifle quite often. I was well protected by several other people. It was known then, and now, that that office acts as a nerve centre or control centre for intimidation and beating. People could be found who have been beaten and knee-capped. They are taken there first to be told—

**David Burnside:** The hon. Gentleman has referred to one Sinn Fein office in west Belfast. Is he aware that there are now 18 such offices in west Belfast? Does he agree that the Government's decision to allow fundraising and to make Sinn Fein an exception from the other political parties in the House has allowed the financing of one of the strongest organisations in western Europe?

**Mr. Robathan:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am out of date. I did not know that there are 18 offices. That surely makes my case. Fundraising is still allowed in America and, more terrifyingly, British taxpayers' money will be funding the offices of a terrorist organisation. Surely that should worry us all. It is disgraceful, shameful and dishonest. All Ministers should recall from their days at school, if they learned any history, that we do not buy peace by paying danegeld, and that is what we are doing tonight.

8.21 pm

**Mr. George Howarth** (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): I apologise for the fact that I was unable to be present at the beginning of the debate, but I had a previous engagement elsewhere in the House. I think that the entire House respects the views of the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on these matters, especially given that he served in the armed forces in Northern Ireland, although I think that by overstating his case he has undermined it somewhat.

I turn to the underlying analysis of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). He quoted the statements that were made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State a few weeks ago that for Unionists, Northern Ireland had become a "cold house". There is much truth in that. Many of the examples that the hon. Gentleman quoted are evidence that it has, indeed, become a "cold house".

I accept that people such as Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, Mitchell Mcloughlin and many others have made the psychological adjustment from terrorism to politics, but the activities of the IRA have not necessarily always followed that course. That is all the more regrettable because I believe that, certainly in the case of Martin McGuinness, and almost certainly in the case of Gerry Adams, they have the authority within republicanism to deliver what was meant to be delivered in terms of decommissioning in the Good Friday Agreement.

It is a matter of regret that, for whatever reason, they have not been able to use, or have chosen not to use, that authority to exercise the leadership that is undoubtedly theirs within republicanism—especially in terms of the IRA, with which they are intimately connected—to deliver everything that was promised. There is an interesting contrast between the way in which they behave on decommissioning specifically and the leadership that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has exercised as the leader of his party.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann has often been some way ahead of his party in this context. He has been willing to accept difficult situations. He has also been willing, often with a great deal of reluctance and a great deal of concern, almost to take a leap in the dark. He has been willing to accept stepped progress as it moved forward. That has often been difficult for him within his party, and it has certainly been difficult for him in acting as a spokesman for Unionism within Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, he has done that in a party structure that is far more democratic than the structures of republicanism, and in a climate of public opinion that has often been doubtful, afraid and worried. He has kept the process together. So far as he was capable of delivering all of the things that he was meant to under the Good Friday agreement, and so far as he has been able to provide leadership as First Minister, he did so and has done so.

That record stands in marked contrast to the leadership of republicanism. As I have said, I accept that it has made the psychological shift from terrorism to politics. However, it seems not to be able to make the organisational shift that all of us believe is necessary.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East made a good speech that was based on a long involvement in politics in Northern Ireland and on an intimate knowledge of all of the events that we are discussing, but he was not able to provide an answer to the "What if?" question: for example, what if we did not extend tonight the legal framework within which decommissioning can take place? What would happen next?

There is much criticism of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about some of the activities that have allegedly been carried out by the IRA since the time of the Good Friday agreement. Specific allegations have been made about certain incidents of violence, which have been well recorded and well documented. The hon.

Member for Belfast, East alluded to the continued so-called punishment beatings. The word "justice" is used, which I find bizarre.

**Mr. Pound:** Community justice.

**Mr. Howarth:** Yes. Community-administered justice is a bizarre way of defining justice.

There have been occasions on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had to consider extremely carefully whether to specify organisations in relation to which some of the activities that were taking place were close to the line. I know that that was true of my right hon. Friend's two most recent predecessors. There were times when the determination as to whether the IRA could continue to be regarded as being on ceasefire was on a knife edge. The hon. Member for Belfast, East was right to point out that those incidents are of great concern.

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who played a constructive role in Northern Ireland during his time in office. He chided me for not answering the question, "What if?". The House has already decided that question in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, when it determined that there would be a consequence if parties associated with violence did not commit themselves to exclusively peaceful and democratic means. The answer to the question, "What if?" is that they are put out of government.

**Mr. Howarth:** I acknowledged that that was the case just before giving way to the hon. Gentleman. I made the point that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the two Secretaries of State preceding him came close to acting on that basis. Indeed, my right hon. Friend has specified one of the loyalist organisations and, as far as I am aware, that still stands.

The hon. Gentleman was right to say that that power is available. I was not chiding him; he knows that, although I do not agree with him, I respect the view that he and his colleagues share as a view within the Unionist community that needs to be discussed. If I had to choose between different political grounds of Unionism, I would go with that espoused by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann every time, because his approach is more constructive and, in the long term, more likely to bring about peace. However, it is important that we are aware of the different views within Unionism and, indeed, the wider community in Northern Ireland.

I come back to the question, "What if?". What if my right hon. Friend or one of his predecessors had excluded Sinn Fein from the process? They made a careful study of the facts available at the time before determining not to do so; it was not an easy decision to make. Had they excluded Sinn Fein, it is possible that the peace process in which we are involved, imperfect as it is—and I entirely accept that—would have been derailed, and the consequences of that are too horrendous to imagine.

I would not have wanted to do what we are doing tonight 12 months ago or at the time of the Good Friday agreement; I do not think that any of us would. I am not absolutely certain that, by approving the Bill tonight, as we are being asked to do, we shall ensure that everything is delivered in the specified time, but I hope that that is so. The fact that I can still hope that it will deliver is sufficient reason for me to support the process. I honestly believe that it would be dangerous to take any course of action that results in someone saying, "Too late. We are not accepting decommissioning unless you decide to do it voluntarily—and then we will consider what action we shall take in recognition." All those things are uncomfortable and difficult; nobody pretends otherwise.

I do not wish to chide any hon. Member from any quarter of the House, and I am making this statement because I believe it to be true: frankly, there is not another way available to us. I shall therefore vote for Second Reading without any difficulty, not because I have infinite trust that Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness or anybody else will now walk a rose-strewn path to a better tomorrow—they may choose at some point not to do so, although I do not think that they will—but because I do not think that there is a viable alternative.

**Mr. Robathan:** The hon. Gentleman may be pleased or perhaps surprised to learn that I respect him also. However, if he believes that decommissioning is important—it is in the Belfast agreement—when should it take place? There has to be a deadline, the purpose of which is to achieve an objective by a certain time.

**Mr. Howarth:** One reaches a point in one's career where praise from any quarter is welcome; I like and admire the hon. Gentleman, and his praise is well taken. He asked me when the deadline for decommissioning should be. I am somewhat detached from all the discussions that are taking place, although I have seen a great deal of to-ing and fro-ing on the subject in the past, so for me to specify a time would not be helpful. The only answer that I can give the hon. Gentleman is not a satisfactory one, but it is the best that I can give: decommissioning should happen as soon as possible. There cannot be a balanced political system in Northern Ireland while one of the major political partners in that system is still intimately involved with an organisation that has a large quantity of arms available to it. If I were a member of the Executive or the Assembly in Northern Ireland, I would still look with suspicion at Sinn Fein because of that connection and the continued existence of those arms.

Imperfect though it is, and unable though I am to give a realistic deadline, the proposal before us is better than any conceivable alternative that I or any other hon. Member could offer.

8.35 pm

**Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley): The Secretary of State will be aware from the briefings that he received when he entered office that decommissioning has been a major item on the Northern Ireland political agenda for a number of years. I was involved in the negotiations that culminated in the Belfast agreement; decommissioning was discussed at length in those negotiations.

The Mitchell commission, which had the task of considering the decommissioning issue, drew up proposals for decommissioning to take place alongside those negotiations. As each party entered the negotiations, it committed itself to what became known as the Mitchell principles of democracy and non-violence. It is worth recalling that one of the principles to which all the

*[Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson]*

parties—including the Progressive Unionist party, linked to the UVF; the Ulster Democratic party, linked to the UDA; and Sinn Fein, linked to the Provisional IRA—committed themselves was the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. That commitment existed even before the agreement was concluded.

The agreement itself reiterates the commitment, albeit in language that I felt did not go far enough towards ensuring that decommissioning was not only a commitment made by parties and thus, in a sense, an aspiration, but that there were clear obligations on the parties linked to other aspects of the agreement.

The agreement has two essential characteristics, one of which deals with the constitutional and institutional arrangements for Northern Ireland. Within those arrangements, political compromises have been made between Unionism and nationalism. The other feature is the confidence-building measures, which were designed to run alongside the implementation of the institutional and constitutional arrangements. They were intended to give people confidence that we were making the transition from 30 years of violence to a new era of peace based on democracy and political stability.

The difficulty for Unionists, which the Secretary of State recognised, at least verbally, in his recent speech in Liverpool, is that the confidence-building measures specifically designed to build confidence in the community, particularly among Unionists, that those who had engaged in violence in the past had moved to democracy, have not been fulfilled to the extent that Unionist confidence has been built. The Secretary of State spoke about the "cold house effect", and it is true that, in respect of many of the proposals flowing from the agreement, Unionists have felt the breeze of change, which they considered unbalanced. In particular, their sense of British identity has been eroded in a way that has made them feel extremely uncomfortable.

Nevertheless, Unionists want the Assembly to provide good, stable government for Northern Ireland. Among Unionists right across the board, there is support for the Assembly. There is also support for the principle that parties should work together to achieve the objective of good government, but when we entered the negotiations it was clearly understood that parties that participated in the new institutions should commit themselves exclusively to peaceful and democratic means. It is clear that in respect of the republican movement, such a commitment has not yet been fulfilled to the extent that I, as a Unionist, feel comfortable with the idea that republicans are in the Government of the part of the United Kingdom in which I reside and which I represent.

I share the views expressed by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) about the difficulty for many in Northern Ireland of having Martin McGuinness as the Minister of Education, when that individual is still linked to an illegal terrorist organisation, as a member of that organisation and part of its leadership. That presents enormous difficulties for ordinary, decent people who want a better future and stability and peace for their children. I hope, therefore, that the Secretary of State not only recognises but genuinely understands the discomfort that Unionists feel.

That brings us to the nub of the issue. The Secretary of State will have heard the comments of the Conservative spokesman and the leader of the Ulster Unionist party. We do not oppose in principle an amnesty for those who decommission their illegal weapons or extension of that amnesty, but we are against creating circumstances in which there is no deadline and no target date for the completion of the process of decommissioning, and in which the amnesty period is potentially extended until 2007. That sends completely the wrong signals to the Provisional IRA and the loyalist paramilitaries, as it suggests that they have bought themselves more time through their procrastination and delay, and also to the Unionist community, to which it says that the decommissioning process is becoming open ended, will never be completed and will continue to be a shadow that is cast over the political process. That does not engender stability and confidence.

We have recently seen some positive steps. The agreement of the Policing Board on a new police badge was significant. My preference would have been to retain the existing badge. I have argued in this House that it represented fairly both traditions in Northern Ireland with the harp, the crown and the shamrock. However, I believe that the new badge is a sincere attempt by representatives of both traditions to reach agreement on something that was controversial and shows what happens when democratic political representatives from different traditions come together to try to resolve a problem.

There was, however, a missing dimension in that decision: Sinn Fein-IRA. It is worth recalling that Sinn Fein-IRA has so far refused to support the new Police Service of Northern Ireland and to participate in the Policing Board. Thus, Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive are participating in the government of that part of the United Kingdom but refusing to support its police service. Surely, that is an absurdity in any democratic scenario. It demonstrates that Sinn Fein has not yet made the transition from a past in which it was engaged in violence—and, indeed, a present in which it is continuing to engage in unacceptable levels of violence—to a commitment to exclusively peaceful means.

Decommissioning is not only an end in itself, although the removal of the gun from our politics is important, but a means of building confidence in the political process in Northern Ireland. It was a confidence-building measure in the agreement, but the problem with such a measure is that if it is not delivered, it has the opposite effect and undermines confidence. That is precisely what has happened within Unionism. I hope, therefore, that the Secretary of State will understand that there is a wide degree of scepticism among Unionists, whether they support the agreement or are sceptical about it, about the speed with which the decommissioning process is being implemented. That is why, on this side of the House tonight, there are some hon. Members representing constituencies in Northern Ireland who strongly support the agreement and some who strongly oppose it, but all of them will be supporting the Conservatives' reasoned amendment. We are dissatisfied with the Government's extension of the amnesty, potentially to 2007, when they have not clearly established a deadline or a target date for completing decommissioning.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) referred to the Government's responsibility for decommissioning. In the past, we have had to bear

responsibility for applying pressure to the republican movement to decommission. We will not shirk that responsibility in future. If necessary, we will take action to bring pressure to bear on the republican movement and loyalist paramilitaries to decommission.

I do not agree with the Secretary of State that pressure does not work: it does and it has. I do not agree that deadlines do not work: they have worked in the past and they can work in future. If necessary, we will apply pressure through the political process and democratic methods on the republican movement and on loyalists to decommission.

We want loyalists to decommission. As Unionists from a Unionist tradition, we have always unequivocally opposed the violence of so-called loyalist paramilitaries. We want them to end the violence and decommission their weapons. The Secretary of State can apply pressure to those groups through the prisoner release scheme, under which individual prisoners are released on licence. If they breach it, they forfeit the right to freedom and have to return to prison.

The Secretary of State and his predecessor have so far twice returned people to jail. In view of continuing loyalist violence, surely there is a case for the Secretary of State to review the matter and make it clear that if the violence continues and organisations fail to decommission, he will return the released prisoners to prison. That will put pressure on the groups to end violence and enter meaningfully into the decommissioning process.

If we turn a blind eye to the violence, we breach the agreement and the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998, which clearly linked the ceasefires to the release of prisoners, albeit imperfectly.

**Lembit Öpik:** The hon. Gentleman rightly says that deadlines sometimes work. What mechanism would make the deadline that we are considering work? The Bill is an enabling measure, which does not create pressure. If it is passed, we can provide meaningful deadlines and staging posts for decommissioning.

**Mr. Donaldson:** Several mechanisms might be used to bring pressure to bear. I have mentioned the prisoner release scheme; another possible mechanism is excluding from office those who have failed to fulfil specific decommissioning obligations. The Government could apply some pressure points if they have the will.

If the Secretary of State is trying to build confidence in the Unionist community and deal with the cold house effect, he is going the wrong way about it. Every time we make suggestions or proposals, they are rebuffed. Every time we make suggestions about how the Government should handle decommissioning, they are not backed. The Secretary of State expects the right hon. Member for Upper Bann to show leadership, make concessions and stick his neck out, yet he is not prepared to give us the means to apply the pressure on the republican movement and on loyalists to honour their commitments under the agreement. If he is not prepared to do it, we must do it, but that should not be the way. The Government are responsible for ensuring that decommissioning works.

My difficulty with the Bill is that it sends out the wrong signal to the paramilitary organisations. It says to the UDA and the UVF, "You've got until 2007 to do something." It says to the IRA, "Don't worry, boys—2007." That is the signal. It may not be the Government's intention, but that is how it will be read by the paramilitaries on the streets, and that is how it is being read by the communities in Northern Ireland, which see decommissioning becoming an open-ended process. That is not a recipe for creating political stability in Northern Ireland.

If the Secretary of State wants to address the confidence issue with regard to Unionists, he should understand that they want him to be more resolute in dealing with decommissioning. They want him to send out stronger signals to paramilitaries that their violence and their procrastination on decommissioning will not be tolerated, and that if they fail to deliver an end to the violence, and the decommissioning of their illegal weapons, there will be political consequences.

Some right hon. and hon. Members have referred to the process of concession—others have called it appeasement. Whatever it is, the reality is that on the ground among Unionists, it has sapped any confidence that they had, and the Government need to address that issue. They are not addressing it to the extent to which Unionists can feel that there is now a balanced approach.

8.51 pm

**Mr. Andrew Rosindell** (Romford): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) and I concur with everything that he said. It is very sad—disappointing is too weak a word—and I am appalled at the fact that nearly four years after the Good Friday agreement, the IRA-Sinn Fein and other paramilitary organisations continue to hold the threat of a return to violence. I sincerely believe that we must stop being weak, and show resolution. We must show that we intend to treat people who act, or threaten to act, with violence as the criminals and gangsters that they are. We need a much stronger approach from the Government, but we are clearly not getting it.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) spoke about the momentum of decommissioning, as if the amount of weaponry decommissioned in October represented a momentum. I do not believe for a moment that we would be in this position today had it not been for the atrocities of 11 September. The IRA-Sinn Fein clearly knew that, for political reasons, they had to do something. They had to present an image of wanting to decommission so that we would believe them to be sincere. I do not believe that they are.

We need to show that we mean what we say, and that weakness is not the way to defeat terrorism, or to encourage those who hold weapons to decommission them. I speak in this debate with a heavy heart for the future of Northern Ireland, because I fear that the Bill will set a precedent that will send a dangerous signal to those who bear arms there. The British Government appear to be too weak to stand up to those people, and too afraid to call their bluff. There has been a great deal of talk in recent years about historic moments. The Prime Minister spoke of "the hand of history" on his shoulder at the signing of the Good Friday agreement, yet the true markers of historic significance do not come with such agreements, but with the effect and success of their implementation.

There is no doubt that the peace process has moved forward since the mid-1990s. There is now an open dialogue among parties that would not even have

*[Mr. Andrew Rosindell]*

acknowledged one another as having a vaguely relevant case 10 years ago. Indeed, since the Belfast agreement was signed, most sides have kept to their part of the bargain and significant changes have occurred. I can think of three: Northern Ireland has certainly gained devolved government, terrorists have certainly been released early from prison and, shamefully, the Royal Ulster Constabulary has been abolished.

What is not certain is the status of decommissioning, which remains dubious at best, as limited decommissioning has occurred only under duress and following extreme political pressure. Furthermore, it is important to note that even when such decommissioning takes place—that in October, for example—it is further rewarded through the dismantling of British military structures such as the observation tower at Sturgan mountain in south Armagh, an observation tower at Camlough mountain and many others.

I appreciate that good will needs to be shown, but the decommissioning episodes by Sinn Fein-IRA in October, supposedly part of a reciprocal deal, were delivered late, given the sacrifices made by the Unionist community and the Governments of Britain and the Republic of Ireland. There is a limit to how far good will and trust between groups with no fundamental reason to trust each other can go. We must not forget that ceasefires have been broken before and that hopes have been shattered.

I shall never forget the disappointment and anger that I felt in 1996 when the IRA broke its ceasefire and planted a bomb in docklands, killing two people and injuring many more. Indeed, that very day, I was at South Quay station an hour before the bomb went off. I shall remember it for the rest of my life. There was so much hope for peace in Northern Ireland, and, most significantly, the British and Irish Governments and the Northern Ireland parties were starting to believe that real progress was being made—a bit like now, as the position today is similar.

There is hope for the future, but so long as full decommissioning is continually delayed and the message goes back to those who hold weapons that the Government will keep moving the deadlines, we cannot know what might happen as a result and we shall betray those who acted in good faith, believing that decommissioning would happen.

**Lembit Öpik:** I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Does he think that the Conservative Government were correct to introduce the original amnesty in 1997?

**Mr. Rosindell:** I shall not comment on what Conservative Governments did; I have never been part of a Conservative Government. I shall speak about what this Government are doing today. Over many years, there has been not so much a peace process, but a process that seems to appease those who act violently. The situation must not be left open ended. The time has come to deal with it and show paramilitaries on both sides that the Government will not be forced into continual compromise, and that they will stand firm.

I knew two Members of the House who were killed by the IRA—a former Member for Eastbourne and a former Member for Enfield, Southgate, who was killed in the Grand hotel in 1984. I was there that evening. Such events leave a scar, and we cannot go on compromising with these people. At some point, we must make it clear that the vast majority of law-abiding people in Northern Ireland are the people whom we shall defend. Compromising with the men of violence will not result in true peace in Northern Ireland.

Groups on all sides of the debate in Northern Ireland are determined and passionate about what they believe in, and violence has been used for decades as a way of articulating those beliefs. The consequence of that has been the deaths of thousands—3,321 according to the latest statistics published by the Northern Ireland Police Service. The violence and intimidation continues. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Bureau estimates that, following terrorist threats, more than 1,000 people have been forced to move to the mainland since the Good Friday agreement was signed, with a further 2,519 families having to be rehoused since 1998.

It has also been reported that the ceasefire years have seen some of the most intense and sustained vigilante campaigns of the entire troubles. That does not necessarily mean that there will be a return to the widespread terror and violence of the past, nor is it likely that the better known groupings will recommence their campaigns of violence. However, the threat from the dissident groups remains high. It would be extremely naive to ignore those threats, and to allow the weapons used as central to them to remain in use or ready to be used.

It is particularly bizarre that, when there is so much action against terrorism and so many precautions being set, the Government should introduce a Bill that potentially gives those capable of more terrorist atrocities a further five years, when they have already had nearly five years to hand over their weapons. I do not believe that any Member of the House would have argued in favour of giving international terrorist groups such a long time to remove from bank accounts moneys raised for terror campaigns. It was right that extra moves were made to freeze such assets immediately. Little international credence would have been given to the suggestion of giving the Taliban seven years to hand over Osama bin Laden before military action was to commence. Immediate action was taken to deal with that serious threat.

I appreciate that decommissioning of arms in Northern Ireland is a matter of delicate political negotiation. I understand that some give and take is necessary to build up some semblance of trust. However, I urge Members to recognise that there is a clear threat. So long as those weapons exist, there is no guarantee that they will not be used. So long as others, such as the Unionist community, make sacrifices and receive nothing in return, whatever trust has been established will soon fade.

Indeed, the Northern Ireland Assembly has already been suspended three times due to lack of progress on decommissioning. That signals that faith in the agreement has already sunk. If we permit the Bill to extend the lack of progress, how many more times will the Assembly have to be suspended? How many more times will Northern Ireland Ministers have to resign simply to force a tiny show of decommissioning? How long will we have to extend the deadlines beyond 2007, if full decommissioning has still not occurred.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) argued that the Government have tied their hands behind their back by permitting the early release of terrorists without any reciprocation. The Bill destroys any remaining sense of urgency.

The Bill is soft on terrorism at a time when, in every other respect, the civilised world is being hard on terrorism. I urge right hon. and hon. Members to oppose the Bill, and send a message to the holders of arms in Northern Ireland that we will not tolerate this threat any longer, and that we will not keep on extending deadlines year in, year out until the whole agreement has been utterly undermined. The agreement can work only when all parties stick to their side of the bargain. If we do not send out that message, we shall be permitting the scenario to continue indefinitely, and setting a precedent that the British Government will always back down.

9.5 pm

**Mr. Stephen Pound** (Ealing, North): Before I begin what will be a fairly brief speech, in view of the time, let me apologise for having had to pop out for about 20 minutes. Although I was here for the beginning of the debate, I had to stand in for Father Christmas earlier. If there are any small bits of white fluff clinging to my head, they are what remain of my hair rather than the beard—but I must not extend this suspension of disbelief too far.

Let me say this to the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) and the hon. and gallant Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). I doubt sincerely whether the cause of Northern Ireland is best served by speeches such as theirs—the Manichean descriptions that we have been hearing. I observed some Northern Ireland Members almost wincing when the lines were trotted out yet again.

It is very easy in this life, and in this place, to play the plastic Palmerston and hurl the bombast on the Floor of the Chamber. It is very easy to come up with marvellous expressions of undiluted negativism. I have slightly more respect for the hon. and gallant Member for Blaby, who has worn the Queen's uniform and knows a bit about the realities of life on the streets of Northern Ireland; but too many of us seem over-keen to establish what we think it should be, rather than what it can be.

History, as we know, is written by the winners. History is not a matter of black and white. It is not a matter of people beyond redemption. It is not a matter of someone remaining as they are for ever. I understand the pain and distress that are felt when those who in the past have either espoused the cause of violence directly or been associated with it become part of a democratic process—I can imagine what has been described tonight as revulsion—but we have been here before.

Politics is a business for grown-ups. We all know that Nelson Mandela was imprisoned as a terrorist. Menachem Begin—a close associate of a former Conservative Prime Minister, Lady Thatcher—was a member of the Stern gang back in the 1940s, and a member of Irgun, the organisation that slaughtered British army sergeants in Jerusalem and was responsible for the massacre at the King David hotel; but when that group made peace, did anyone in this place say "We will never treat with Menachem Begin, because he has been a member of the group that directly murdered our soldiers in what was then the Palestine mandate"? No, we did not say that.

I am not trying to make comparisons between Palestine and Northern Ireland. The late Golda Meir was asked precisely that question: whether an analogy could be drawn between the two states. She said, "The problem is that in Israel and Palestine there are two sides who are both in the right, whereas in Northern Ireland there are two sides who are both in the wrong." I do not happen to agree with that analysis. I think that there is a future in the north of Ireland, which lies before the eyes of those of us who visit the Province regularly.

Let me say something about the speech of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). Almost against my expectations, I have come to feel considerable respect for Northern Ireland politicians over the years. I have not had a great deal to do with loyalism and Unionism in the past—that is no secret—but I have worked with those politicians. I have sat in Committee Rooms with, and talked to, Members such as the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), whose home was blown up around his ears less than 30 years ago.

We are talking about something very serious—far too serious for bitter, nonsensical talk of appeasement from the safety of London seats. When the hon. Member for Belfast, East, who I suspect was not educated by Jesuits, talks of his meeting with General de Chastelain and applies Occam's razor to "If we said it was this, would you say it was that?", I begin to doubt whether he is not too close to the situation to be truly objective.

It is presumptuous of me, from the safety of my London constituency, to claim objectivity in this matter, and I would not even begin to do so, but I can see why decommissioning is not the be-all and end-all of the process. It is the process that matters. If every single piece of ordnance in the entire Province were destroyed tomorrow, would peace suddenly arrive on the wings of a dove with the dawn? Would there be no rearming? Would nobody bring in arms from Libya? I do not think so.

What makes the verifiable act of decommissioning so incredibly significant—to use General de Chastelain's word—is simply the fact that it happened. For years, I have begged republicans and nationalists to give up that one bullet or that one ounce of Semtex, and they told me that I could not even begin to understand what would happen in the republican community if they did so. They talked about the pikes in the thatch, about 1690 and about the fact that the IRA was called "I Ran Away" after 1968. They said that if they started to hand in their weapons, the cohesion among the republicans who are signed up to the peace process would be destroyed and we would see a hundred so-called Real IRAs and a hundred groups of murderous, inward and backward-looking people. Yet somehow republicans have gone beyond that stage and committed themselves to a verifiable act of decommissioning. I do not think that we in this House should underestimate for a moment the immense significance of that act. We have to pay tribute to it.

Hon. Members have said that this is all part of a charade, and the hon. Member for Belfast, East talked about the decommissioning of the two sites as a stunt. If this is a charade or a stunt, what is it for? The Irish Republican Army had an virtually limitless supply of finance and so-called volunteers. It has been described tonight as the most successful organisation of its type in western Europe. We are told that 11 September changed all that, and people are no longer able to occupy themselves in that way.

If that is the case, why has not ETA started decommissioning? Why is there not a peace process in the Basque country? Decommissioning is not about

*[Mr. Stephen Pound]*

11 September; it is not about the nonsense in Turkey or the farce in Colombia. It is part of a much longer process. Anyone who spends time studying the evolution of republican political thought in Ireland will see that decommissioning is part of a movement away from violence and towards engagement in a political process. That is the result not of a suspension of disbelief but of very careful analysis.

Why on earth would the IRA want to take part in the decommissioning process if it was not serious? Anyone in the Chamber who has had anything to do with the process knows that a member of Sinn Fein who stands up at a meeting anywhere in the United Kingdom now will be attacked by someone in the hall saying that Sinn Fein are the appeasers who have sold out, who have betrayed the glorious history and who are turning their backs on the terrible beauty of 1916 and all that sad, bitter, old music that we have known for so many years. Decommissioning has not been easy for republicans; it has been desperately, desperately hard.

I am not, for a moment, trying to make a case for the IRA. If there is one thing that has made me deeply respect those Northern Irish Members to whom I have spoken, it is the fact that they have never failed utterly to condemn ruthless gangster murders, even when they are committed by people in their community against people in that community. I take second place to no Member of the House in recording my respect and admiration for those Northern Irish Members who have had the courage to utter that condemnation.

I will not seek to defend the IRA or Sinn Fein, but to those Members who have tried to convince us that the process should be derailed, because Armalites have not been fed into angle grinders or smelters, I say that the de Chastelain commission, in which the House has expressed its confidence, has witnessed those acts and that has to be good enough. If we want to make a judgment on that, we should look at the impact within the republican communities. It is a sad fact that I have addressed myself to the speeches made by Northern Ireland Members in particular, but we are debating a Conservative amendment to the Bill. The fact that the Conservatives have come to the House tonight with no alternative, no plan B and no great vision for the future of the political process—nothing but bitter negativism—is a terrifying indictment of their political immaturity on the issue.

Politicians in Northern Ireland have the right to say what they think; they have earned it. We know that they represent their communities and that they must speak according to their own beliefs. The Conservative party appears to be playing the old trick of party politics on an issue that should be above it. The amendment says nothing; I am sorry, it says one thing. It says no. That is it. I feel sad. I also feel a certain amount of contempt for Her Majesty's official Opposition, who chose to try to derail a process that is not perfect but is the only game in town and the only possible avenue in which any hope exists or in which any chance is identifiable. Yet tonight they say simply no.

Other hon. Members wish to speak and I will conclude by saying that I hope that we will pass the Bill tonight and reject the amendment. If I have caused any offence to any Northern Ireland Members, I bitterly regret that. As someone who comes from an entirely different community, I have come to hold you in considerable respect. As long as there are people like yourselves—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord):** Order. The hon. Gentleman must remember to use the proper parliamentary language.

**Mr. Pound:** I am extremely sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise unreservedly to the House. As long as there are politicians of the calibre that we have elected to the House, I see hope for the future of Northern Ireland.

9.17 pm

**Mr. Nigel Dodds** (Belfast, North): I listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound), and I admire his sincerity and conviction. He referred to having left the Chamber momentarily to act as Father Christmas. That must mean that there are two Members tonight who have acted as Father Christmas; the hon. Gentleman outside the Chamber and the Secretary of State, in terms of what he has offered to IRA-Sinn Fein, inside it. Let us make no mistake about it: that is exactly how the Bill is seen in Northern Ireland and how it will be taken by the republican constituency. They are delighted at the fact that once again the deadline for decommissioning will be extended, if the House so votes tonight. Once again, it is going to be fudged and put back, as many hon. Members have predicted. My hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) said to the Secretary of State at Question Time that it would not cause a ripple of surprise in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, that is not to diminish the outrage that is felt among ordinary grass-roots Unionists in Northern Ireland at the way in which concession after concession has been given to the republican movement; and on the issue of the decommissioning of illegal terrorist arms, they have been pandered to and appeased.

Reference has been made to the 1997 Act and to the fact that this Bill is an extension of that Act. When the Act was introduced, it was not introduced in a vacuum, as some have said. It was introduced in the wake of the Mitchell report. The Mitchell commission was set up to look at how progress could be made through talks, and at the barrier that was said to exist for republicans because of their refusal to decommission. The Mitchell commission made a proposal for a twin-track approach, with political discussions and, at the same time, the decommissioning of illegal terrorist arms for those who took part in the talks. That is why the 1997 Act was introduced by the then Conservative Government. It was on foot with the Mitchell review.

What actually happened? Despite the clear outline given by Senator Mitchell, and the Government's acceptance of the need for political talks to run in parallel with decommissioning of illegal terrorist weapons by those engaged in the talks, what happened was that, once the talks started and IRA-Sinn Fein was admitted, just six weeks after the atrocious murder of two RUC officers on the streets of Lurgan, that issue was put to one side. It was forgotten, and no decommissioning took place.

Then we had the agreement. Nowhere in the agreement does it say explicitly that there was a deadline for decommissioning of illegal terrorist arms, but we were told by those who signed up to the agreement and by the

proponents of the agreement that the deadline was 22 May 2000. Of course, we saw that deadline moved to June 2001. The then junior Minister at the Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), made it clear that the target date was June 2001. That has passed and now the deadline of February 2002 is also to be extended to a date that means that the Government hope that decommissioning will simply disappear as a political issue. That is the purpose of the Bill and it is why so many people in Northern Ireland are so angry about it in the context of all the other concessions that have been allowed to the republican movement. On the one issue on which something was demanded of it, the deadline will be put back to 2007. As has rightly been pointed out, the original IRA and other terrorist organisations will take whatever time is available to perform whatever responsibilities they have.

The Secretary of State came to the House not long ago and quoted the editorial in the *Belfast News Letter* against hon. Members, and he urged us to take account of what it said. That newspaper is not generally supportive of those of us who have taken a sceptical view of the agreement—far from it—so I hope that the Secretary of State will take account of that paper's editorial on 12 December, which said:

"The Secretary of State is again making the mistake of allowing paramilitary organisations to duck their responsibilities."

That is what the Bill will achieve.

We have had discussion of the wonderful progress that has been made, but many people in Northern Ireland would scratch their heads in amazement at some of the descriptions we have heard from hon. Members, especially Labour Members, about the progress that is supposed to have been made. The *Belfast Telegraph* publishes opinion polls—which it does not generally use to bolster up my side of the argument—and it published one in the aftermath of the gesture carried out by the IRA, which showed that only 51 per cent. of all respondents, Unionist and nationalists, Catholics and Protestants, believed that an act of decommissioning was in fact carried out. It said that 52 per cent. of Protestants who were asked whether they believed General John de Chastelain when he said that a significant act of decommissioning had been carried out by the IRA said no. I am reminded of what the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said on 28 June 1999:

"recognisable, quantifiable decommissioning before any Executive is established remains the only way in which democrats can safely see that the war is indeed over."

I wish that the right hon. Gentleman still took that position, and that he had stuck to it before allowing IRA-Sinn Fein into government.

The gesture that we have seen from the IRA is just that. It is not linked to a timetable or a process. We were told that it had to be part of a timetable leading to the complete and verifiable destruction or decommissioning of illegal terrorist weapons.

There have been gestures before. People have urged us to consider the historic significance of the IRA's acts, but another event, already referred to today, involved the Loyalist Volunteer Force. There was an act of decommissioning. The LVF ceasefire has been declared over since then because that gesture turned out to be meaningless. Why was it meaningless? Because it was not part of a process linked to a timetable for the complete and utter destruction of all weapons. It was a gesture, a stunt.

Ministers have been unable to tell us today that they know even what the IRA's gesture amounted to. The IRA, as General de Chastelain confirmed to us, made it clear that it wants no one apart from the commission—not the Government, not even the Prime Minister—to know what the event was, how many weapons were involved, where it took place or anything else. On that basis, we are supposed to keep Martin McGuinness, the IRA chief of staff, and Gerry Adams and other such people in the Government of Northern Ireland.

Let us consider the so-called historic and significant event in the light of what happened following the LVF gesture. The LVF ceasefire has been declared bogus. Hon. Members on both sides of the House should recognise how strongly people on the Unionist side in Northern Ireland feel. I accept what the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) said about recognising where Members from Northern Ireland come from on these issues, but I wish people would take more time to speak to Unionists in Northern Ireland and realise the depth of anxiety and anger that exists at the process of concessions that is under way.

We have seen the Royal Ulster Constabulary shabbily treated and discarded. The Minister can shake her head, but the RUC has been shabbily treated and discarded. That is the view of the vast majority of the Unionists of Northern Ireland. Indeed, the Minister herself said that the RUC had been laid to rest.

The hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) referred to the fact that people in our Government refuse to support the new Police Service for Northern Ireland. Not only do they not support it; they are on record as saying that they want its recruits to be treated in the same way that recruits to the RUC were treated. We know exactly how they were treated—they were murdered and intimidated, and their families were murdered and intimidated.

There is a cold house for Unionists, as the Secretary of State said in his speech in Liverpool. Instead of offering measures to remedy that, he comes before us with a measure that will put back the deadline for decommissioning. Tomorrow, along with his colleague the Leader of the House, he will come here with a motion to allow IRA-Sinn Fein into the precincts of this House, a special privilege not granted to other Members who refuse to take the oath. The Secretary of State needs to start acting on his words. The vast majority of Unionists, whether or not they supported the agreement, have lost faith both in the agreement and in the Government's capacity even to acknowledge the fears of the Unionist community.

9.29 pm

**Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): The debate has shown that the measure is anything but technical—the suggestion made by one or two Labour Members. It has shown the importance of timetables and process. The measure is central to the process that we all want to achieve.

Following the speech made by the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds), it is appropriate to reflect that his constituents experience anything but normal life under the peace process. They have no experience of political normality—unlike the majority of our constituents. The hon. Gentleman was right to remind us of the twin-track process that Mitchell set up. He was also right to remind

*[Mr. Crispin Blunt]*

us that the Government are allowing paramilitaries to duck their responsibilities. I agree with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the Government's treatment of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

I shall deal with the Secretary of State's speech towards the end of my contribution, but I shall refer first to the speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe), who said that timetables have bedevilled the process. In that case, what was the Prime Minister doing when he insisted on a timetable for the Belfast agreement and said that it had to be finished by Good Friday—hence its name? The Prime Minister gave graphic descriptions of how he put his back to the door and said that no one was to leave until there was an agreement.

What about the first act of IRA decommissioning? The decision of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) to remove Ulster Unionist Ministers from the Northern Ireland Executive led, four days later, to the first act of IRA decommissioning. For the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green to say that another five-year period, as proposed by the measure, is the minimum needed to achieve the objectives flies in the face of experience not only in Ireland but throughout the world.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) pointed out how long it took in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia to complete a decommissioning process in circumstances that were much more challenging and wholly different from those we face in Northern Ireland. In Afghanistan, the decommissioning of al-Qaeda and the Taliban—admittedly an involuntary process—was achieved in only three months.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) complimented my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), who opened the debate for the Opposition, on his cogent arguments. I regret that I shall be unable to respond to the hon. Gentleman entirely in kind. His criticism was that our current position is inconsistent with that of the Conservative legislation in 1997. However, he must understand that in 1997 the Government were setting up a mechanism to test the genuineness of terrorists' intentions to give up violence.

The inevitable concessions to bring together all sides that are linked to the Belfast agreement had not been made. The Conservative Government brought in the 1997 Act to implement the Washington principles, as enunciated by Lord Mayhew, and then to give effect to the Mitchell principles that followed. The situation was wholly different. It began the process that led to the Belfast agreement in 1998. In 1997, the then Government and the then Parliament were opening up that process.

In a typically independent and refreshing contribution, based on years of commitment and experience, the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) pointed out that the measure proposed merely a minor amendment to the 1997 Act. However, it goes much further than that. We are talking about the signals that the measure sends out. It is not merely a minor amendment, although I have no doubt that we shall return to that issue in Committee if our reasoned amendment is not carried this evening.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford on the appalling failure of the Government to deal with prisoner releases and the complete lack of connection between those releases and decommissioning. I know that some of my Republican friends will have enjoyed the links that he made between Presidents Castro and Clinton in their terms of welcome for Gerry Adams—I of course refer to my Republican friends in the United States.

The hon. Gentleman was absolutely right in his unrelenting message that Sinn Fein must be opposed. He was concerned over the constant concessions made to Sinn Fein as the party of violence, of the bullet in conjunction with the ballot box. It has pursued that strategy with success, and now with electoral success in Northern Ireland at the expense of the constitutional politicians of the SDLP. He is right to say that that is significantly to be regretted.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) intrigued the House in reporting that IRA decommissioning had been substantial. I am sure that we all look forward to further substantiation of and evidence for that remark. The Secretary of State is not, it seems, in a position to deliver it.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann was, however, absolutely right—he added his name to the reasoned amendment that we tabled—that it is the Government's responsibility to achieve decommissioning. The Government should not be hiding behind him any more. It is the Government who must deliver and not expect the right hon. Gentleman as First Minister to do the difficult work for them.

The contribution to the debate of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) must be respected. He served in Northern Ireland, but his memory seems to have been overtaken by his latter experience in the Army following his earlier experience alongside colleagues in the Black Watch. I wonder how many of his former Black Watch colleagues, knowing what has happened to morale in the Northern Ireland Police Service, have his confidence that in the end the Real IRA and loyalist paramilitaries who remain at violence will be mopped up by sound policing process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), whose long experience and personal commitment to the issue is peerless in this place, has shown courage in consistently putting forward his views in the face of the threats that he has opposed. That makes it appropriate for him to comment on what he called the retreat and appeasement between 1993 and 1997. I do not share his conclusion, as it was right for the then Government to pave the way for the Belfast agreement in 1998. It was right for the Ulster Unionist party to sign the Belfast agreement and right for the Conservative party to support the agreement in the campaign that followed to achieve a yes vote in the referendum. All the work done by Lord Mayhew and his predecessors as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland led to that process, which remains the best available for achieving a lasting peace.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) brought to the debate his usual uncomfortable clarity. He rightly disinterred the meaning of the word "significance" in his discussions with General de Chastelain, to confirm what most of us expected that de Chastelain was saying—that he considered not the amount but the event as significant. That is true; we must acknowledge that the event of decommissioning itself was of psychological rather than practical importance.

The point from which we cannot escape, however, is the record of the Provisional IRA since the Belfast agreement, to which the hon. Gentleman drew our attention. It is a damning indictment of that organisation.

The Secretary of State says that we cannot tolerate private armies indefinitely. Inescapable logic leads from that remark to the conclusion that at some point we must cease to tolerate them, but the signal that the Bill sends is that we will tolerate private armies indefinitely, because it mirrors precisely the legislation that laid down the timetable five years ago. The message is that in five years' time, we shall be back here again, debating a precisely similar piece of legislation, with nothing substantial having happened in terms of decommissioning.

We had an extraordinary diversion in the form of the Secretary of State's definition of Sinn Fein-IRA and his assertion that they are not the same organisation—that they enjoy the same relationship as the trade unions and the Labour party. Is John Monks the director of the Labour party in some sense, or is the Prime Minister the director of the trade unions? I must have missed something.

**Dr. John Reid:** The hon. Gentleman is incapable of following a logical argument. I did not say that Sinn Fein and the IRA enjoyed the same relationship as the trade unions and the Labour party. I said that it is possible to be interlinked but not the same, and I gave as an example of that phenomenon the Labour party and the trade unions.

**Mr. Blunt:** The right hon. Gentleman is dancing on the head of a pin. Who does he think Gerry Adams was talking to when in October this year he said:

"Martin McGuiness and I have also held discussions with the IRA and we have put to the IRA leadership the view that if it could make a ground-breaking move on the arms issue that this could save the peace process from collapse and transform the situation"?

As we all know, he was talking to *The Mirror*. If the Secretary of State believes that the distinction he makes is credible, we are playing Alice in Wonderland politics—politics through the looking-glass.

The Secretary of State referred to dissident republicans and rejectionist loyalists, saying that they were the true enemies of Northern Ireland, opposed by all the people of Northern Ireland, but his remarks did not persuade me that the Bill is aimed at them. Five years ago, when the timetable was discussed in Standing Committee, Ulster Unionist party Members tabled an amendment in support of their argument that five years was too long. The position of the then Government was that a shorter timetable would be far more appropriate for the Provisional IRA, because there was supposed to be a prospect that that organisation, through Sinn Fein—the other side of the coin—would become involved in the process. In resisting that amendment, Sir John Wheeler, then Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, made it clear that

"The maximum duration of five years depends on an annual renewal within that period. It rests on the premise that—as members of the Committee know—there are small groups whose much smaller stocks of weapons and explosives need to be taken out of circulation. That may take time."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 17 December 1996; c. 23.]

However, the Government have not suggested that the five-year timetable set down in the current Bill is designed to address those smaller groups. Instead, it is aimed at the Provisional IRA—the main holder of weapons in Northern Ireland. That is why we should resist the Bill as it stands being given a Second Reading.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) challenged the Secretary of State to say that, if no decommissioning takes place within a year, he will not propose another extension in February 2003. The Secretary of State simply replied that he could not predict the future. The problem is that we are dealing in signals. General de Chastelain said that the decommissioning that took place was significant as a signal of IRA decommissioning, and it was accepted and welcomed by the Opposition as a signal. The signal that the Bill sends is the wrong one. It ignores the law-abiding majority in Northern Ireland. It is a signal of pressure being taken off the Provisional IRA.

The Bill is another concession in an endless series to Sinn Fein-IRA. The Government's concessions have not been to constitutional politicians. Instead, they have always been to those who are illegally holding arms. To introduce another five-year Bill in precisely the same terms as previous legislation, which was introduced in an entirely different situation before the ceasefire and before the Belfast agreement, is a message that the process will be endless. There will never be closure.

It is time for the Government to seek to achieve a return to normality. It is time for them to show some commitment to achieving normality and not to hide behind the right hon. Member for Upper Bann. That is what our reasoned amendment seeks to achieve, and that is what I hope the House will support.

9.45 pm

**The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy):** I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. It mellowed into an interesting discourse on the moral dilemmas facing us, as a Parliament and as a Government, as we grapple with progress in moving from armed conflict and terrorism to a fully democratic and peaceful Northern Ireland.

The Bill simply provides a legal framework to allow decommissioning to happen; no more and no less. It mirrors closely the Bill that was introduced by the Conservative Government in 1997, which was supported by the then Opposition. It extends legal immunity from prosecution for one year only. Any further extension requires the approval of the House.

Contrary to what may have been understood if someone had wandered into the debate, the framework that the Bill provides will assist in the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms, both loyalist and republican. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) said that there is little between us, I think. He criticised the Bill's timing and the period in respect of which it is designed to provide legal immunity. Timing could always be better, especially with hindsight, and, as I said, the legal framework will last for one year only. I am sure that we will debate that issue further when we come to consider the Bill in Committee after we return from the Christmas recess.

I hope that we are all agreed that we want to achieve decommissioning. The original Bill was introduced in 1997, five years ago. The political context has been transformed since then. No one could have predicted then where we would be today, five years later. Would we have

*[Jane Kennedy]*

a process in place that still warranted the provision of a legal indemnity for the decommissioning of weapons? The five-year life span of the original Bill reflects that uncertainty.

If I may pay tribute to him, in a powerful and incisive speech, the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) touched upon the courage and vision of the then Conservative Prime Minister, John Major. The hopes and aspirations of the Conservative Government in bringing forward a Bill five years ago have been vindicated by the progress that has been made subsequently.

The point made by the hon. Gentleman is the more powerful because when the Conservatives took their measure forward, the Provisional IRA was not even on ceasefire. Its ceasefire had ended in February 1996 and was not restored until the summer of 1997. The hope and aspirations fully justified the extension of the principle that the Conservative Government introduced and that we supported. We have made huge strides over the past five years. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State outlined many of those at the beginning of his powerful speech, when he laid out the strong reasons why we are bringing the Bill forward now.

I say to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford that Conservative Members do not have a monopoly on distaste. I understand and share the view that is held by many people in Northern Ireland and elsewhere that the early release of those convicted of terrorist offences was profoundly distasteful. However, without prisoner releases we would have had no agreement; we considered that that was a prize worth taking risks for.

I am grateful to many of my hon. Friends who participated in our debate. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), and welcomed his contribution, which was based on his extensive knowledge of the situation in Northern Ireland and, as was acknowledged, the constructive role that he played there.

I shall deal with points made by other Members in our debate. I heard a lot about concessions to the IRA. We are not in the business of making concessions. Our concern at all times has been to create a society in Northern Ireland in which both sections of the community can feel a sense of belonging and in which all political aspirations are recognised. That is why we now have devolution, which gives real power to Northern Ireland politicians; the principle of consent, which establishes Northern Ireland's position as an integral part of the United Kingdom; and the removal of the Republic of Ireland's territorial claim to Northern Ireland.

**David Burnside:** Since no concessions have been made and none are planned, does the Minister expect the Government of the Irish Republic and Fianna Fail to be consistent with the British Government in keeping Sinn Fein out of a coalition Government if, after their election in May next year, Sinn Fein does not give up the private army within the state, which is unconstitutional under the Irish Republic's constitution?

**Jane Kennedy:** That is a matter for the Government in the Republic. I shall just finish the list of positive things that have happened that cannot possibly be described as concessions to Sinn Fein or the IRA. We have a new police service with cross-community support—*[Interruption.]* Absolutely not; that is not a concession to Sinn Fein or the Provisional IRA—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. It does the hon. Gentlemen no good to shout at the Minister. I will stop them doing that.

**Jane Kennedy:** Equality for all and individual human rights are being promoted. How those fundamental aspects of the Belfast agreement can be conveniently overlooked or presented as somehow pro-republican is beyond me. They are good things in their own right that clearly demonstrate our commitment to promoting peace, stability and democracy for all.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** The hon. Lady said that the Government are not in the business of making concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA. Does she think that prematurely releasing terrorist prisoners, murderers, convicted murderers and multiple murderers is not a concession, or does she think that that is a perfectly normal and sensible thing to do on its own merit? Does she think that the motion that the Government are introducing tomorrow is a concession or is it something perfectly normal that should be accepted on its own merits?

**Jane Kennedy:** I have already said that the early release of prisoners was distasteful.

**Mr. Davies:** It was a concession.

**Jane Kennedy:** No, it was not, because it applied equally to republican and loyalist prisoners, so the point made by the Opposition cannot possibly hold.

**Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): Will the Minister give way?

**Jane Kennedy:** No, I shall just finish my point about concessions.

The Bill is said to count as one of the so-called concessions to Sinn Fein. That is a misunderstanding of its significance, because it will provide a legal framework for decommissioning by all paramilitaries, both loyalist and republican. This is not about Sinn Fein but about continuing to fulfil our duty to support the Belfast agreement and, in particular, the decommissioning process. If the Bill is not enacted we will, in effect, let the paramilitary organisations off the hook. Surely, it is right to keep working towards our ultimate goal by giving those groups every opportunity to decommission and allowing them no excuse for failing to do so. I shall try to come to the points made by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford, but shall give way for the last time to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan).

**Mr. Robathan:** Those groups have had nearly four years since the Belfast agreement—or will have had by February—in which to decommission. How much longer does she intend to give them? Could she specify whether it will be one year, five years or 10 years?

**Jane Kennedy:** The framework that we are establishing today will allow one year before we have to consider the matter again in the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) outlined the range of pressures that are brought to bear on paramilitary organisations. I agree with him that the most effective pressure that can be brought to bear is international opinion. We can be instrumental in bringing that about by ensuring that there is no impediment to decommissioning and no excuse for further prevarication.

**Mr. Barnes** *rose—*

**Jane Kennedy:** If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I said that I would not give way again, and there are several points to which I should respond before the end of the debate.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) suggested that if the Government set target dates and deadlines, there would be fewer crises than if his party had to do so. I do not find that line of argument persuasive. The difficulty is that deadlines and public threats are unlikely to achieve the objective that we all share: securing full decommissioning. Yes, we need pressure, public and private, but as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we shall not sustain the peace process merely through deadlines and public ultimatums. Perhaps life would be easier if we could do so, but the process is not like that.

On the significance of the act of decommissioning, many hon. Members dismissed what happened a couple of months ago. We should not dismiss that act of decommissioning so lightly. The IRA constitution expressly prohibits the destruction or surrender of any weapons, so the general is right to describe any decommissioning as significant. In recognition of the need to further the peace process, the IRA has set aside one of the cornerstones of its existence. No one should be in any doubt about the significance of that.

The commission told us in its report that it witnessed the event. Members of the commission are relying not on the words of others, but on their own eyes. The commission regards the act as significant—a judgment that I am confident that it would not reach lightly—and the judgment is shared by the Chief Constable.

The commission confirms that the material in question includes arms, ammunition and explosives. It says that those have been put completely beyond use and dealt with in accordance with the decommissioning scheme under the legislation previously approved by Parliament. That scheme is satisfied only if arms are destroyed or made permanently inaccessible or permanently unusable. Whatever the method, the arms can never be used again by anybody.

As we draw to the conclusion of the debate, it is worth pondering the fact that in the Belfast *News Letter* the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford stated that the debate would mark a turning point in his approach to supporting the Government. I had looked forward to hearing him outline his alternative vision for the future of Northern Ireland, but all we have heard from the Opposition tonight is negativism, shameful opportunism and posturing. It seems that one can always rely on the Conservatives to fall to the occasion, but even now I am surprised how low they can go.

I know that some things seem unpalatable, but we are not at the pick 'n' mix counter at Woolworths, where we choose only our favourites when it comes to making the peace process work in Northern Ireland. No objective observer expects decommissioning to be finished by February next year. The Opposition conceded as much tonight. After tonight's debate, it is clear that something has been verifiably and completely put beyond use: the critical faculties of those on the Opposition Front Bench.

How does the hon. Gentleman expect decommissioning to continue after February without the legal provisions that would allow it to take place? Does he think that those holding illegal arms would be more or less likely to decommission if they lay themselves open to prosecution in doing so? When the Conservatives went to the pick 'n' mix to get their policy, I fear that they passed over the Quality Street and went straight for the Curly Wurly. We propose to extend for an extra 12 months the period during which guns can be put beyond use within a legal framework—that is all. I commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 151, Noes 342.

**Division No. 115]** **[9.59 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa

Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and**
**Mr. Julian Brazier.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moie, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oliner, Bill

O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Jim Fitzpatrick and**
**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on second or third Reading), and agreed to.*

*Bill read a Second time.*

## NORTHERN IRELAND ARMS DECOMMISSIONING (AMENDMENT) BILL (PROGRAMME)

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],*

That the following provisions shall apply to the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning (Amendment) Bill:—

### *Committal*

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

### *Programming of proceedings*

2. Proceedings in Committee of the whole House and all remaining proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or any further messages from the Lords) shall be programmed.

### *Proceedings in Committee, on consideration and on Third Reading*

3.—(1) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be completed at one day's sitting.

(2) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House and any proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on that day or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock on that day.

(3) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on that day or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.— *[Mr. Heppell.]*

*The House divided:* Ayes 341, Noes 148.

**Division No. 116]** **[10.15 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and Jim Fitzpatrick.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey

Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. David Wilshire and**
**Mr. Laurence Robertson.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

## Employment Rights

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

10.31 pm

**Dr. Howard Stoate** (Dartford): Since 1997, the Government have adopted an approach to employment rights which recognises that individuals work best when they are properly rewarded for their work and able to achieve an effective balance between work, family and leisure. The introduction of the minimum wage, the right to a minimum of four weeks' paid holiday, improvements in maternity pay and leave, new regulations on part-time work and the implementation of the EU working time directive have, without doubt, significantly improved the quality of life of workers in this country. Millions have benefited from those policies. More than 1.5 million workers, around 7 per cent. of the work force, are better off because of the minimum wage, while more than 3 million people have benefited from the right to four weeks' paid holiday.

There is, however, strong evidence from trade unions and citizens advice bureaux that a large number of workers, many of them low paid, are still not receiving all the employment rights to which legislation brought in by successive Governments entitles them. Every year, citizens advice bureaux throughout the country deal with more than 650,000 cases of employment-related problems. Many of the cases that CABs handle concern contractual disputes between employer and employee or issues connected with redundancy or dismissal.

A great many cases, however, concern employers' failure to grant their employees' full employment rights. Many of those workers are in low-paid, low-skilled service sector jobs, are non-unionised and have been denied a full written contract by their employers. They are therefore in an extremely weak position to challenge their employer about their rights as employees. Routine abuses include the denial of the right to four weeks' paid holiday, the denial of statutory sick pay and the denial of full maternity or paternity rights, such as the right to maternity leave and pay and the right to time off for antenatal care.

Some employees have been pressured by their employer into opting out of the 48-hour limit on the working week, while others have been pressured into giving up their right to Government tax credits, such as the working families tax credit, because of the supposed extra administration involved for companies. Some employees have even had their hours cut below 16 a week to ensure that they do not qualify for tax credits or other benefits.

It is clear that many companies that fail to meet their statutory obligations to their staff are doing so deliberately, claiming, for example, that part-timers do not qualify for rest breaks, holiday pay or statutory maternity pay, or that the working time directive does not apply to every company. It is equally clear, however, that not every company that is falling short is doing so deliberately. Many companies are simply not aware of their full responsibilities as employers.

Some 95 per cent. of UK companies, a far higher percentage than in most European countries, are small operators that employ fewer than 10 people. As their budgets are tight, many companies of that size do not

*[Dr. Howard Stoate]*

employ a personnel specialist. Consequently, most of them have no employee with an in-depth knowledge of employment law or human resources management. Although they want to do the best for their employees, they simply lack the requisite funds and knowledge to ensure, first, that they are up to date with legislation and, secondly, that they are able to implement it.

The problem that we face is that the mechanisms of enforcement that currently exist, such as the employment tribunals, are expensive to access and rely on the employee bringing a complaint against his or her company. As many employees are either unaware of their entitlements or unwilling to jeopardise their position in the company by making a complaint, only a small number of cases of employers evading their responsibilities are ever heard by tribunals.

The insignificance of most awards made to successful plaintiffs by tribunals—the median award in 2000-01 was only £2,700—acts as a further disincentive to employees with a grievance. A few thousand pounds and the satisfaction of proving the culpability of one's employer is a poor substitute for a broken career and long-term loss of earnings. The tragedy is that most of the people who are missing out on their proper entitlements are working long hours in low-paid positions and are precisely the sort of employee whose quality of life would be improved enormously by even a small increase in their hourly wage or a few days extra spent with their family.

Clearly, we need a more transparent, accessible and proactive system that is less reliant on individual employees bringing their case forward for consideration. Furthermore, we need a system capable of improving the lot of every employee in the company, rather than a system that is able to give redress only to the individual employee who chooses to bring his or her case before a tribunal. There are precedents. The minimum wage enforcement agency, recently set up by the Inland Revenue, is precisely the kind of practical enforcement agency that we need.

My suggestion—it has also been proposed by the Institute for Public Policy Research and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux—is that we create a body that I suggest we call the national employment rights office, or NERO. This would ensure that employers were aware of their responsibilities to their staff and, hopefully, we would find far fewer problems. NERO is a particularly apt name because those employers who routinely fiddle the system, abuse the law and exploit their staff will end up getting their fingers burned.

As a first step, NERO should devote itself to ensuring that employees are given written statements of their terms and conditions and itemised pay slips, and that they are paid holiday and statutory sick pay and receive maternity and paternity rights. NERO should also commit itself to tackling inequality between full-time and part-time workers, to ensuring that the working time directive is observed and to ensure that employees receive the tax credits to which they are entitled.

The main role of the office would not be to penalise employers for non-compliance—although it would need to be equipped with the appropriate powers of enforcement—but to advise and guide employers and employees as to their responsibilities and rights. For the thousands of small companies who want to ensure that they are meeting all their obligations to their staff, a service such as this, funded by the state, would provide the means for them to do so.

Under the system, employers would be able to approach the service for cost-free information about employment law without the risk of incurring a penalty for past non-compliance. They would also be able to receive practical assistance, again cost-free, from trained support officers about how to comply with the law and advice on current best practice. When an employer was failing to meet its statutory duties, or where a firm did not have the necessary policies or procedures in place to allow it to meet its obligations, the agency would step in and provide the firm with advice on how to meet its requirements and a clear structured programme to follow.

There could be considerable productivity benefits for small and medium-sized employers. Properly funded, the service could instigate the replacement of many entrenched and inefficient management attitudes and workplace practices that are holding back growth in small and medium-sized businesses. After all, it is not in the interests of anyone—least of all the employer—to have tired, overworked, badly paid and demotivated workers, incapable and unwilling to do anything for their company beyond that stipulated by their contracts.

Employers would also benefit from the creation of a more level playing field. Responsible employers would no longer be undercut by less-scrupulous employers who can offer a cheaper product by neglecting their responsibilities towards their staff. NERO could also raise public awareness of the basic statutory employment provisions and encourage companies to take advantage of its services by issuing certificates of compliance, or even star ratings for the best employers. Potential employees would then be able to get some idea of the employment track record of a company before making the decision to join them. If employers are able to seek references from a potential employee, why should not a potential employee have access to an independent assessment of a company's suitability as an employer?

If we can get an idea of the relative quality of a school or college—or, indeed, a hospital—by looking at a league table, or if we can judge a restaurant or a hotel by how many stars it has, why should not the same be true for employers? It seems strange that while a hotel guest has a reasonable idea of the calibre of the hotel from the number of stars it has before deciding to stay there, a chef looking for a job at the same hotel has no idea what sort of employer the hotel is before deciding to work there.

There are some awards in place which recognise excellence in an employer, such as the investor in people standard, which acknowledges a company's commitment to supporting the professional development of its staff. But there is no single, universally recognised standard of excellence as an employer which encompasses everything from compliance with legislation on maternity rights to the calibre of training and professional development on offer. In a competitive labour market, an independently administered ratings scheme would provide a powerful incentive for employers to ensure that they complied with the latest employment legislation. Not only would a high rating prove beneficial to a company in terms of recruitment, but potential clients would be able to see that a company was meeting its obligations as an employer.

The creation of a national employment rights office would help to ensure that each and every employee was decently paid, had control over the number of hours that he or she worked and was not discriminated against or exploited in the workplace. After all, improving the quality of work experience of the working population of this country is a goal every bit as important as the goal of full employment. If we were to ask people of working age in the UK what it is that they most want from a job, the chances are that a friendly and decent working environment would be high on their list.

It stands to reason that employees who are well rewarded and respected by their employers are likely to be happier, healthier and more capable of making a full contribution to their communities and the companies that they work for than those employees who are treated with scant respect and decency by their employers. As Karl Marx, whose analysis of the sociology of work is still highly relevant today, said:

"What then constitutes the alienation of labour? First, the fact that labour is external to the worker, i.e. it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy; does not develop his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind."

Establishing an effective mechanism for enforcing employment rights would provide a means for tackling what Marx described as the alienation of the worker from the work they do.

With effective enforcement we would create a healthier working environment and enable employees both to engage with their work and to strike a better and more productive relationship with their employers. It is therefore high time that quality of work issues were placed at the heart of the political debate in this country. As Fidel Castro said recently, in a speech to the Cuban Young Pioneers at Jose Antonio Echeverria social club in Havana:

"En un país justo, no existe el egoísmo . . . o . . . explótacion."

which translates as "In a just country, there is no selfishness or exploitation."

**Mr. Bob Laxton** (Derby, North): Follow that!

10.43 pm

**The Minister for Employment and the Regions (Alan Johnson):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) on securing this debate and I am grateful to him for raising this important issue. I am not sure whether I can follow that and quote so eloquently from Marx and Castro, although if time allows I might have a go at the theory of surplus value. Perhaps it would be better if I addressed the major points of my hon. Friend's speech.

This Government took office in 1997 with a determination to improve employment rights for working people. Indeed, we had a determination to introduce basic, civilised minimum standards in this country in the workplace practically for the first time. In the past four years, we have introduced many important measures that have created a substantially better working environment for many employees. The measures in the current Employment Bill—which I urge my hon. Friend to read, because it addresses some of the issues that he raised—will continue to take that good work forward. However, while we must recognise that most employers happily comply with those measures because they recognise the link between good employment relations and success in the marketplace, we also have to accept that that is not always the case and that some workers are not receiving all the employment rights to which they are entitled.

The key question is how best to address that problem. It seems to me that my hon. Friend has identified two principal difficulties with the present system. The first is that some employees are not aware of their rights, and that some employers deliberately or through ignorance do not apply those basic minimum standards. Our approach to that is to try to help to build constructive employment relationships, and thus ensure that workers and employers alike are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Advice on employment rights is provided by a range of bodies, including ACAS, which has seen a step change under Rita Donaghy's chairmanship and a new chief executive. It is now committed to increasing the number of seminars that it conducts with businesses to help them to understand the complexities of employment rights.

Apart from ACAS, the Department of Trade and Industry, equality commissions, the Trades Union Congress, voluntary sector bodies such as the low pay units, and advice agencies such as citizens advice bureaux raise awareness as far as possible through publicity campaigns to improve understanding of specific employment rights. An ever-increasing amount of information is also available on the internet, including the Tiger website, which the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has helped us to develop. That will continue to expand to cover a broader spectrum of employment issues.

Much guidance material is available from both the DTI and ACAS, which also runs conferences, seminars and employer workshops to raise awareness of statutory duties and rights. The Small Business Service provides employers, especially in small firms, with a single entry point for guidance on regulations on employment legislation from across Government. The Government and the bodies that I have mentioned are always reviewing the available guidance and advice to see how it can be improved and better publicised. It is clear that a wealth of guidance material is already available to employees and employers.

My hon. Friend argued that employment tribunals are expensive to access and that few employees think that the risks involved in taking an employer to a tribunal are worth the perceived benefits of winning a case. It is precisely such problems that the dispute resolution measures in the Employment Bill are designed to tackle. We are ensuring that all workplaces must have grievance procedures. The proposed steps are simple and easy to use. They will ensure that a dispute is tackled where it arises, in the workplace. Employers will have to take the process seriously, or they could find that any award made against them is increased by up to 50 per cent.

We are ensuring that all employees are issued with a written statement of terms and conditions of employment that lays down those procedural steps. At present, there is a requirement to do that, but companies employing fewer than 20 employees have no obligation to include disciplinary and grievance procedures. In any case, there

*[Alan Johnson]*

is a problem with compliance. Mitigation awards of between 10 and 50 per cent. will apply in that respect. Everyone in the workplace will know where they stand and how best to approach a dispute. The use of such procedures should mean that far fewer disputes have to be taken to tribunal for resolution.

My hon. Friend mentioned the awards made by tribunals. Just under 50 per cent. of awards are for unfair dismissal, which is not relevant to this debate. It is true that the median award is not high, but we are not trying to create a compensation culture in employment tribunals, and awards are designed to compensate for actual losses. Tribunal chairmen assess the level of an award as they deem fair, taking into account the circumstances of the person against whom the award is made.

In addition to the measures in the Employment Bill, we have set up a partnership fund to promote understanding between employers and employees in the workplace. That is an important non-legislative measure aimed at improving work relations. The Government and business have invested £10.3 million in it.

My hon. Friend suggests that the answer to the difficulties that he raised would lie in creating a new body, to be known as the national employment rights office. That would act as an independent assessor of whether employers were meeting their legal obligations to their staff. I am aware that others, including the Institute for Public Policy Research and NACAB, have made the same suggestion.

I remain to be convinced that the formation of a single, over-arching body would be the best way forward. In many respects, it would duplicate work that is already being done. It is not clear to me that the creation of NERO would necessarily improve the volume and quality of information available about employment rights. It is entirely possible for us to improve that within the present system, and we are always looking to do so. Nor would NERO improve the way that employment tribunals work. Employment disputes often lead to complicated and intricate cases and would not naturally lend themselves to resolution through an investigative agency. Tribunals are structured as they are because the expertise of lay members combined with the legal knowledge of the chairman is required to reach a solution.

It is also not entirely clear how the new body would fulfil its role. How could NERO be seen by employers and employees as an independent adviser and conciliator on the one hand while also acting as the body responsible for enforcing employment rights? ACAS, for example, does vital work in both its advisory and conciliatory roles while maintaining its independence and integrity. It is difficult to imagine how NERO could continue as an independent body if it were to take on the dual role suggested by my hon. Friend.

The creation of a single body does not of itself resolve any of the difficulties in the present system. Indeed, it is even possible that, if not carefully handled, the body could create additional difficulties: effort and resources could be drawn into the creation of a new bureaucracy, rather than being used for the operation and improvement of the existing system.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, we made an exception in relation to the minimum wage: because of a service agreement between the DTI and the Inland Revenue, Inland Revenue officers are dedicated to enforcing the minimum wage and to taking cases through employment tribunals. That is fundamental because the matter relates to people's pay and because we introduced a minimum wage for the first time in 1999, whereas such arrangements are well established in other countries.

The Inland Revenue does an excellent job on our behalf, but other employment rights—such as weighing up part-time and full-time work in relation to the directive on part-time workers—are more subjective. To create a body to enforce all employment rights across the board would demand substantial resources, and I am not convinced that it would deliver a better result.

That is not to say that the Government are irrevocably opposed to the idea of NERO. Incidentally, there seems to be awareness of our minimum standards. Last week, it was reported that Madonna said that every worker on her new house knows that they are entitled to four weeks' paid holiday, to the minimum wage and so on. I do not know whether she intended that as an accolade for the Government, but we shall accept it as such.

We are not irrevocably opposed to my hon. Friend's idea. Although I am not convinced that it offers significant advantages at present, I should be happy to reconsider it at a later date. My hon. Friend has raised an important point. We do not intend to set up basic minimum civilised standards only to have them ignored by a minority—thankfully—of unscrupulous employers. We shall look at the proposal again, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for initiating this important debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Tuesday 18 December 2001*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREENHAM AND CROOKHAM COMMONS BILL

*Order for Third Reading read.*

*Read the Third time, and passed.*

# Oral Answers to Questions

## TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### Cable Companies (Road Disruption)

1. **Ms Julia Drown** (South Swindon): What steps he is taking to minimise the disruption to road users by cable companies. [21556]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble):** We are taking various measures to reduce unnecessary disruption from works carried out by utilities, including cable companies. Since April this year local authorities can charge utilities when their works overrun an agreed deadline. We are also launching pilot schemes early in the new year in Camden and Middlesbrough under which utilities will have to pay lane rental, which is a daily charge each time they dig up the roads.

**Ms Drown:** I thank the Minister for that reply and I appreciate that the fine and charging system will give an incentive to companies to stop dilly-dallying while they are on the roads. However, it will not stop the farcical situation that we have seen in Swindon and elsewhere in which one cable company digs up the roads, causing major disruption, and finishes, only for another company to start again 10 days later. Will the Minister agree to meet me and local government representatives to discuss how to insist on co-operation between companies, so that road disruption is minimised for our constituents?

**Ms Keeble:** I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend and her local authority representatives to take up the problems that she has had with cable companies and their works in Swindon, which she has highlighted repeatedly. Local authorities already have a duty under the New Road and Street Works Act 1991 to co-ordinate their street works, and the Government recognise the real problems caused by repeated digging up of the roads. Our proposals are intended exactly to address that problem.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): The hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) is right to raise that important point about street works. In fact, I had just commented to my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench that Constitution hill seems to be being dug up for the third time this year. While we would welcome the institution of charges on cable companies or anybody else who decides to dig up the roads, does the Minister agree that under current rules nothing would prevent the companies from forwarding those charges on to their customers? Therefore, it would be no penalty and it would be the poor customers who would suffer. Will she consider changing the rules so that the penalties are real penalties for the companies, not for those using the companies' services?

**Ms Keeble:** At present, the main mechanism that local authorities use is charging for overrunning the deadline—109 local authorities opt for that method. The pilot schemes have not started yet and we will have to see how they work. Even if the lane rental scheme were introduced nationally immediately, the estimated cost across the country would be £109 million or more, and the regulator would wish to consider that. We also must consider the £2.5 billion—a much bigger sum—that congestion problems caused by street works cost the country.

**John Cryer** (Hornchurch): Such activities by utility and cable companies cause chaos in my constituency, in the borough that I represent and across London. One has only to drive into London to see that happening, day in and day out. I welcome the system of charging that the Government have introduced, but—as my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) said—the problem is that one company digging up the street is followed by another and then another. We need new powers so that local authorities can say to those companies, "No, you cannot dig up that section of street." Is there any possibility that the Government could introduce such powers?

**Ms Keeble:** Under the 1991 Act, local authorities already have a duty to co-ordinate street works and we have issued best practice guidelines to encourage that to happen. It is a real issue, and the charging scheme to be introduced in Camden and Middlesbrough will help to ensure that utilities are more economic in the way in which they dig up the roads.

### Cambrian Coast Line

2. **Hywel Williams** (Caernarfon): If he will make a statement on future investment on the Cambrian coast line. [21557]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson):** The Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan will set out its plans for investment across the network to deliver the key rail targets in the 10-year plan. The strategic plan will be published on 14 January.

**Hywel Williams:** I thank the Minister for that reply. I suspected that he might refer to the SRA. Can he assure

me that spending on the Cambrian line is not being held back by priority being given to spending on other parts of the rail network?

**Mr. Jamieson:** I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's frustration and many of my hon. Friends have made representations to me on that important matter. The project was put on hold by Railtrack, before it went into administration. I know that the case for the importance of the line to the local economy and the university at Aberystwyth has been made very strongly. He will be aware that one of the reasons for the delay was the shortage of skilled signalling designers. To tackle that problem, the SRA is considering establishing a national rail academy to cover a wide range of training needs. I assure him that the scheme that he has in mind will be given due priority in the plans that we have afoot.

**Mr. John Smith** (Vale of Glamorgan): My hon. Friend is responsible for regional airport development, so what plans does he have to ensure that the Welsh rail network, including the Cambrian line, is linked directly to Cardiff international airport by a spur from the Vale of Glamorgan coastal line? That line will open to passengers next year.

**Mr. Jamieson:** My hon. Friend raises an important matter in connection with integrated transport, and I assure him that that is the type of issue that the SRA will consider in due course.

### Integrated Transport Network

3. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): If he will make a statement on progress in implementing his integrated transport network. [21558]

**The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar):** We are making good progress in implementing our integrated transport strategy, through our 10-year plan for transport. We are already delivering: for example, £8.4 billion is pledged over five years to fund local transport plans, nine light rail lines are under development, and we have our targeted programme of road improvements to the trunk road network. There will be much more to follow.

**Mr. Swayne:** The 10-year plan calls for £34 billion for the rail network alone from private sources. How will the Minister guarantee that, given that the plug was pulled on Railtrack despite its ambitious investment record and plans?

**Mr. Spellar:** Unfortunately, Railtrack's investment record is that it bid £2.3 billion for the west coast main line and its cost overruns now amount to some £7 billion. Such a record might not give the necessary level of confidence. The hon. Gentleman will also know of the channel tunnel rail link, which is an enormously successful programme that is running to time and to budget. I initiated work on the second phase only a couple of months ago. To take that work forward, the Department is therefore looking at special purpose vehicles. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I were recently out in east London to see the work being done on the east London line. The real progress being made with transport suggests real confidence in the future.

**David Wright** (Telford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that high-performing rail companies are central to a good integrated service? Is he aware that Central Trains, Wales and West Passenger Trains and the company serving the borders are failing to collect fares even on peak-time services, even though they complain about under-investment? Is not it time that they got their house in order?

**Mr. Spellar:** The new chairman of the SRA is looking fairly closely at the management of train operating companies across the network. We look forward to his strategic plan, which will be launched on 14 January.

**Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): The Government's 10-year plan for transport will depend heavily on the successful completion of the rail franchising process. Why is the process so delayed, and when is it likely to be completed?

**Mr. Spellar:** The announcement on the franchising process will be made very soon. The hon. Gentleman will not have to wait long, and I am sure that he will welcome the announcement when it is made.

**Mr. David Clelland** (Tyne Bridge): Will the plans include proposals to help relieve congestion on the Gateshead western bypass? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Government office of the north-east recently announced proposals that revived the prospect of a bypass to the bypass—a proposal rejected under the previous Government, after a huge protest from local people, MPs and the council? Millions of pounds of public money were wasted when properties that had been bought had to be sold back to the sellers, or sold on. Will my right hon. Friend look at the matter urgently, and make it clear that the proposal will not receive the Government's support?

**Mr. Spellar:** I certainly undertake to look at the matter, and to take into account my hon. Friend's remarks, as well as the views of the local authorities involved, and of the local passenger transport executive.

**Mr. Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar): To return to the railways part of the 10-year plan, does the right hon. Gentleman believe that there are two principal lessons to be learned from Railtrack's interim profits, announced today? First, it is inconceivable that the chairman of Railtrack could have told him and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the company was insolvent. Secondly, as my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) has rightly pointed out, the level of investment in the railways has been £3 billion a year under Railtrack, while under British Rail it was just £750 million. Can the Minister give a better explanation than he gave my hon. Friend about where the bulk of the future investment will come from, given that it came from the private sector before? Will it involve a cut in railway

investment or will there be a guarantee from the Treasury? Or, as is more likely, is the Government's indecisiveness still final?

**Mr. Spellar:** It was a guarantee from the Treasury—or, rather, the Government—that Railtrack was seeking. The hon. Gentleman must explain why Railtrack was, as it has admitted, asking for relief from the Rail Regulator or, at another stage, saying that it might have wanted to go to the regulator, in both cases because it claimed that it needed extra funding. Although he is right to draw attention to the paper profit made by Railtrack and announced today, it is surprising that he did not also draw attention to the £2 billion extra in debt carried by the company during the past year. He must also explain why, if Railtrack believed that its position was so sound, it did not, even though it was present in court, contest the petition that we put and which the judge decided required a declaration of insolvency and for the company to be put into administration.

## Railtrack

4. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): What representations he has received from passengers and passenger organisations regarding his decision to put Railtrack into receivership. [21559]

**The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers):** I have met passenger representatives several times since the High Court granted the order placing Railtrack plc into administration. They have reacted positively to the Government's decision not to provide additional funding to Railtrack plc. They agree that Railtrack plc's role as network operator should be transferred as soon as possible to a robust successor company capable of delivering the quality of service that rail passengers need and have wanted for years.

**Mr. Cunningham:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the taxpayer is aware that from time to time Railtrack has come to the Government with a begging bowl? Does he also agree that rail passengers will be astounded to learn that in the first six months of this year, Railtrack made a larger profit than it did last year?

**Mr. Byers:** The information that has been disclosed today by Railtrack shows the difficulty that Railtrack plc had. Effectively, it was trying to serve two masters: it had the desire to meet the needs of shareholders as well as a responsibility to the travelling public. In the end, whenever there was a conflict between the demands of shareholders and the travelling public, Railtrack, as a publicly quoted company, always came down on the side of its shareholders. There is no surprise in that—that was its legal obligation, and the directors had no alternative. However, that highlights the difficulties and contradiction at the heart of Railtrack plc.

There should be no surprise at the profits announced today. That does not affect the view that we took, endorsed by the High Court on 7 October, that Railtrack plc—the body in administration, not the separate company, Railtrack Group, which has declared profits today—should go into administration.

**Mr. John Redwood** (Wokingham): Will the Secretary of State tell us his estimated budget in advisory fees and capital injection to get a company limited by guarantee, a not-for-profit company, off the ground? It is about time the House was told what the budget is; I think that a very large sum will be needed for such a proposal.

**Mr. Byers:** We have made the position clear in terms of the financial commitment that we will give to ensure that the needs of the rail passengers are put first. I welcome the fact that the SRA is acting as sponsor for the bid team which is headed by Ian McAllister. That is good news, because it will ensure that a robust proposition is put to the administrator. The Conservative party would of course have done nothing.

I was interested to note that, as a result of the current debate about the future of railways, an informative and thoughtful article was published in the *Financial Times* on 12 December. It made a clear statement:

"An early return to the private sector is the best option for the traveller as well as for the taxpayer."

That was written by the real shadow transport Secretary, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). Does the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) support that approach?

**Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North): I was interested in my right hon. Friend's last answer. May I go on from that to suggest that we look at continental railway systems, which are much more successful than ours—indeed, light years ahead? Those systems are generally state owned, coherent and integrated with other forms of transport.

**Mr. Byers:** As a result of the decisive action that we took on Railtrack, a number of opportunities and options that were not previously available are now accessible. The approach adopted in some continental railway systems—where there is a far greater degree of integration than we see in the United Kingdom—is something on which we shall need to reflect. Ultimately, it will be for the administrator to make a recommendation for my approval in relation to the transfer of the company. I hope that the Tories will come off the fence at some stage, and will say—the hon. Member for Maidenhead now has an opportunity to do so—whether they will privatise Railtrack and put it back into the private sector, as recommended by her right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham. Will she tell the House today?

**Mrs. Theresa May** (Maidenhead): Before the Secretary of State decided to put Railtrack into administration, did he ask the company for its expected interim results?

**Mr. Byers:** As the hon. Lady will know, we petitioned the High Court based on the information available to us. The most important point was that the company came to the Government asking for more money. That was the situation.

**Mrs. May:** It is quite obvious from that reply that the answer to my question is no. The Secretary of State was

preparing to go to court to put Railtrack into administration and he could not even be bothered to find out whether it was making a profit. Does he still think that a company with increased profits is one facing "financial meltdown"? It is now clear that the £1.7 billion deficit that he claims that the company faced was in fact an increase in private sector lending. Did not he realise that, far from being a deficit, that was money for investment in projects such as the west coast main line? Will he tell the House how much of that investment now has to be paid by the taxpayer? Will he answer the question: how much capital will the Government be injecting to set up the not- for-profit company that he wants to see taking over from Railtrack? With train delays up 45 per cent. since administration, with shareholders threatening to sue the Government, with Railtrack threatening to sue the Government—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The hon. Lady has asked the questions. Now, she must have an answer.

**Mr. Byers:** Let us get some facts out into the open. Railtrack had a £1 billion credit facility on which the banks would not let it draw down. Why? Because they knew Railtrack's financial situation. A company that came to the Government with a begging bowl paid out £88 million in dividends to shareholders at the beginning of October. Our evidence to the High Court—of the £700 million deficit in December and a £1.7 billion deficit in March next year—was not challenged or contradicted by Railtrack. Railtrack's representatives were in court. Railtrack had counsel in court, but they sat like Trappist monks and did not say a word. Even more important, the company waived its right to have two days' notice of the petition. It could have delayed the proceedings until Wednesday of that week, but failed to do so. The company knew the situation; it knew its financial situation. Let us be clear on this point: the Tory party and Railtrack directors say that because I refused to bail them out in October—because I am refusing to give £1 billion of taxpayers' money—I am abusing my position. I have used my power as Secretary of State to put taxpayers and rail passengers first and will continue to do so.

## Cyclists

5. **Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): If he will make a statement on the level of accidents involving cyclists without lights on their bikes over the past five years. [21561]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson):** We do not record the number of accidents involving cyclists without lights. However, it is an offence to use a pedal cycle on the road without lights between sunset and sunrise, or in conditions of reduced visibility.

**Andrew Mackinlay:** I hope that, from now on, we will keep statistics on the injuries and deaths that occur where the lack of lights was a contributory factor to the accident. Does the Minister understand that, although riding without lights is an offence, it is not enforced by the police or other agencies? Will he consider taking an early legislative opportunity to create a civil offence, whereby a bike can be impounded and only returned to the owner on payment of a fixed-penalty fine to abate what must be the very considerable number of deaths caused by a lack of lights, as well as the trauma and anxiety caused to the diligent motorists who cannot see the offending cyclists? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Does the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) have a complaint?

**Mrs. May:** No.

**Mr. Jamieson:** I share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), which he raises with his usual vigour. People who ride bicycles in the dark without lights put themselves and others, particularly pedestrians, at risk. He may be interested to know that, last year, there were 21,000 accidents involving cycles, although the trend is generally downwards. A fifth of those accidents occurred in the dark and 34 involved fatalities. I am sure that my hon. Friend's suggestion will be born in mind if a legislative opportunity arises. Information is not currently collected on whether cyclists involved in accidents have lights, but a review team is currently considering this issue, and I shall ensure that the important matter that he raises is drawn to the team's attention.

**Miss Julie Kirkbride** (Bromsgrove): May I tell the Minister of a very sad case in my constituency, where a young man died this summer while delivering papers, when he was knocked over while cycling? Clearly, we send our condolences to his parents this Christmas, as they will feel the effects deeply. Will the Minister pay tribute to one of our local bobbies, PC Twentyman, who, since then, has tried to ensure that all young people have access to crash helmets while riding their bikes on their paper rounds? In the context of the review that the Minister has just announced, are the Government considering whether people should be required to wear helmets while riding bicycles on the public highway?

**Mr. Jamieson:** First, I ask the hon. Lady to convey my condolences to her constituents—I know how terrible such events are. She will be aware that schools run many programmes to give such advice to children, and I hope that such events will spur the local schools to refresh that advice. I hope also that the newsagents and others who employ children—particularly, those who work in the early mornings and in the evenings in the dark—will also be mindful as to whether those children wear helmets, carry reflective bags or have the appropriate lights on their bicycles. We have certainly considered making helmets compulsory—the issue has been mentioned to us a number of times—but people, particularly parents, need to be mindful of the dangers to children and of the fact that helmets can assist considerably in lessening that risk. I am sure that the hon. Lady's suggestion will be borne in mind if a legislative opportunity arises.

## Local Government Reform

6. **Mr. Clive Soley** (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): If he will make a statement on the reform of local government. [21562]

**The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers):** Last Tuesday, the Government published their White Paper on local government, setting out a radical programme of reform and modernisation based on new freedoms and greater accountability. In addition, I can inform the House that, in the light of representations received from some hon. Members and some shire districts as part of the on-going consultation on the 2002–03 financial settlement, I shall introduce an alternative baseline for 2001–02, which, in effect, adjusts only for the transfers of service for which shire districts are responsible. In order to guarantee a minimum 2.3 per cent. increase for shire districts, I will give each district whichever increase is greater—2.3 per cent. on the original baseline, or 2.3 per cent. on the alternative. I believe that that will meet their concerns.

**Mr. Soley:** I very much welcome that reply, but I urge my right hon. Friend to keep going with the reform of local government. Many people in all parties want local authorities to be returned the power and responsibility that was whittled away in the 1980s and 1990s. We must return that power and responsibility to locally elected people. As we do that, will my right hon. Friend consider giving more financial power to local authorities which must, at the same time, be held responsible by the electorate? I know of no better way of ensuring greater interest in local democracy than by linking financial responsibility with accountability to the electorate for how the money is spent.

**Mr. Byers:** I strongly endorse the principles that underpin my hon. Friend's comments. That is why we have always stressed that the White Paper that we published last week is about modernisation and reform. It is also, however, about greater freedoms based on accountability, which must be at the heart of effective local government.

When we published the White Paper, I tried to make it clear that it represented a change in direction in terms of central and local government relations. The interface between local authorities and central Government is never easy, but we must accept that we in this place and the Government do not have to control everything and that we have to believe in the strengths of local democracy. That is why we want to give new freedoms and flexibilities to local authorities. The White Paper outlines how we can do precisely that.

**Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): In the Secretary of State's attempt to decentralise power from the centre to local government, will he guarantee that the future of county councils is safe in his hands?

**Mr. Byers:** Yes. The Government have no intention of proposing the imposition of the abolition of county councils. I can give that assurance.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his proposals for the reform of local government finance have been welcomed in my constituency? They are certainly more welcome than the actions of the Conservative Government in the 1990s which led to an unfair and inequitable system of distribution. However, will he ensure that when he implements the proposals, the transitional arrangements do not adversely affect those councils—particularly my county council—that are at the bottom of the heap for funding? I am sure that he will agree that we do not want to wait another 10 years to have an equitable distribution of the funding.

**Mr. Byers:** I am aware that Cambridgeshire county council has, for a long period, argued for a change in the regime by which we allocate funding to local authorities. It will welcome the fact that we will abolish the standard spending assessment that bears no relation whatever to the levels of services provided or to the needs of a local authority. It was, of course, introduced by the Conservatives when they were in government and it affects Conservative-controlled county councils and many other local authorities.

We shall see the end of the standard spending assessment regime and, instead, we shall have a system of distribution based on needs and the levels of services provided. There will be dramatic changes as a result of that, and it is only right and proper that we have a system of transitional arrangements to make sure that we do not adversely affect the provision of services and to ensure that those areas, such as Cambridgeshire, that may benefit will receive the benefit of the changes as soon as we can possibly introduce them.

**Mr. Malcolm Moss** (North-East Cambridgeshire): Last year, three quarters of local authorities spent above their SSA for social services, with a total overspend of £183 million. Based on this year's financial settlement, local government bodies are already saying that the overspend could be nearly £1 billion. No amount of tinkering with local government reform will substitute for the proper funding of local authorities to provide the necessary level of social services to the old, vulnerable and weakest in their societies. Does not the Secretary of State have any shame that his Government are presiding over the near collapse of social services, over bed blocking on a massively debilitating scale and over a cruel and insulting level of services for elderly people?

**Mr. Byers:** Well, this is the party that introduced the poll tax into local government and that decimated council services year after year by cutting spending. This is the party that, when electors voted for Labour councils, abolished those councils because it could not tolerate real local democracy.

The reality is that this settlement gives 6.4 per cent. to personal social services, which is way above the rate of inflation. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is providing an extra £200 million specifically to deal with bed blocking in the national health service, from which many local authorities will benefit. That is what the Government are doing, and we will continue to deliver good services, whether it be for the elderly or children at risk who know that for too long they have been denied the level of service that should be theirs. This Government are delivering. The people out there know that we believe in local democracy and local government, which is why we are providing the resources to ensure that services are delivered at last to those in greatest need.

## Local Government Allocation (Deprivation)

7. **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): What assessment his Department has made of the need for a deprivation factor in the formula used to distribute central Government finance to local authorities. [21563]

**The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford):** Deprivation indicators are included in a number of the standard spending assessment formulae used to distribute grant to local authorities. For example, the education formula includes indicators of lone parents and income support. However, we do not believe that the SSA system adequately reflects needs. That is why we introduced the neighbourhood renewal fund, from which Birmingham has received £11 million in the current financial year. It is also why we are currently reviewing the grant distribution formulae, with a view to creating a fairer system in which, among other considerations, deprivation is properly reflected. The work is still in its early stages, and we have not yet reached any conclusions.

**Richard Burden:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. An accurate reflection of deprivation is obviously important to ensure that local authorities receive a fair allocation. However, does he agree that all too often the problem is that deprivation is assessed across broad areas, which averages those areas out? Pockets of deprivation may exist alongside areas of relative affluence and often do not get the attention that they deserve. Does he also agree that there are two solutions? The first is for the formula to reflect local circumstances much more exactly. The second is to ensure that local authorities, especially larger bodies, devolve their management so that local circumstances are adequately reflected. Further, does he welcome the moves that Birmingham recently made to achieve such devolution?

**Mr. Raynsford:** There are three points to make. The first is that our review of the grant distribution formulae for local government should help to ensure that we pay proper regard to deprivation as part of the general process of allocating funds to local government. Secondly, our neighbourhood renewal programme has been geared towards ensuring that additional funding helps the most deprived areas. My hon. Friend knows that Birmingham qualifies as one of the 88 authorities that are in that programme. The third point is that it is important to consider initiatives that help to establish more effective responses to particular communities. In proposing a framework to devolve more say to local areas, Birmingham city council is developing an interesting initiative that will be considered by many other authorities. I suspect that a great deal will be learned from that valuable experiment.

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): As part of the review, will the Minister consider pockets of rural deprivation, in particular in those parts of North Yorkshire that have suffered from a dreadful downturn in the agricultural economy? Does he accept that there is social exclusion in areas that do not have an advanced network of public transport, and that factors of rurality and sparsity of population should be taken into consideration?

**Mr. Raynsford:** The answer is yes: there are pockets of deprivation in rural as well as urban areas, and factors that lead to deprivation and social exclusion apply in rural areas, although they are different from those in urban areas. Our review will attempt to take a fair view across the country and take account of the factors that apply to rural areas as well as those that are specific to urban areas.

**Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the taskforce report on the disturbances in Burnley in June this year identified that deprivation and housing were the two biggest factors? Does he recognise that the report also states that although Burnley has inner-city problems, it is a shire district council and does not have the finance to tackle the problems that it faces, and that it needs Government help urgently?

**Mr. Raynsford:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point about the particular needs of his community in Burnley. He will know that, having visited the area a year or so ago, I am familiar with the problems that he mentioned, including the housing problems. He may be interested to know that I have just come from a round table discussion at the Local Government Association which looked specifically at the lessons to be learned from the reports on the disturbances in Burnley and other cities. We take those reports very seriously indeed, and we want to ensure that we learn from the conclusions, to help authorities such as Burnley respond more effectively to the serious challenges that they face.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): On the subject of housing, which featured in the Minister's reply, does he accept that some Government policies are making it very difficult for those on low incomes to rent property, particularly in affluent areas that traditionally have high rents? Even in affluent areas, there are people on low incomes. Does he agree that there is a problem, and will he turn his considerable energies to doing something about it?

**Mr. Raynsford:** The hon. Gentleman must appreciate that I am now responsible for local government, and my noble Friend Lord Falconer is responsible for housing, along with the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble). Having said that, let me assure the hon. Gentleman that we take very seriously issues of need, and the Government have been putting substantial additional investment into the provision of affordable housing in many areas, including his own. We are committed to expanding opportunities for people who currently have difficulty in securing housing, after years and years in which the housing budget was remorselessly cut by the party that he represents in the House.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): Does the Minister accept that the experience of deprivation in a number of areas is not properly reflected in their financing? For example, Slough is in the top 10 areas in the country for deaths from heart attacks and in the top 20 local authorities for ethnic minority populations, but that is not reflected in the resources that we get. Can he please consider those authorities where there seems to be a mismatch between need and resource, to see whether the sums are being done correctly?

**Mr. Raynsford:** I have to tell my hon. Friend that the perception of almost every Member of the House is that

the current funding system does not adequately meet the needs of their local authority. We therefore face an obvious difficulty in conducting reform because it will not be possible to satisfy everyone. We want to review the arrangements to ensure that the formulae reflect, as accurately and comprehensibly as possible, the needs that most people would want them to reflect.

There is a tension, however, between fairness and simplicity, and if one tries to take into account too many factors in order to create a fairer system, there is a risk that one will end up with a system that is opaque and incomprehensible, and no one will know how it works. That is the situation that we got into with the system that we inherited from the Conservative party. We know that we can do better, and our review will seek to improve on that system.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): Despite what the Secretary of State said a moment ago, does not last week's announcement on the change in the local government finance formula amount to a huge centralisation by Government over local authorities? Or is it a new departmental policy of endorsing failure—a reward for the failure to run a proper railways policy, a reward for the failure to sort out the muddle in the tube and, above all, a reward for failing Labour councils? Or is it just the Secretary of State himself who is failing?

**Mr. Raynsford:** I have to say that the test of the electorate shows that the Conservative party has failed—twice running. Last week, we announced that we are giving local government a generous settlement, with real-terms increases, guaranteeing increases between two and three times the rate of inflation for all education and social services authorities, and with a minimum 2.3 per cent. increase for all authorities.

That should be contrasted with the experience of the years in which the Conservative party was in government, when local government faced real-terms cuts in its allocations year after year. There has been a sea change under this Government—we are offering freedom, more money, greater responsibility and greater opportunity to local government, and local government knows which party has its interests at heart.

## Speed Cameras

8. **Mr. David Crausby** (Bolton, North-East): If he will make a statement on his policy on traffic speed cameras. [21564]

**The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar):** Correctly deployed speed enforcement cameras reduce road deaths and serious injuries. A successful trial of a new funding system for cameras is now available nationally. To improve effectiveness and fairness, I announced on 3 December new conspicuity, visibility and signing rules for cameras placed in areas that are participating in the netting-off scheme.

**Mr. Crausby:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Will he say something about the public perception that the siting of those cameras is far too often motivated by revenue collection rather than road safety?

**Mr. Spellar:** That is precisely why we announced that we want much greater visibility of those cameras and why we suggested that in most cases yellow is the preferred colour for them. We require them not to be sited behind trees or signs because the purpose is not to collect revenue but to change behaviour to deal with accident-prone stretches of road. In areas with cameras we are already seeing success; we now want to roll the programme out across the country and collect fewer fines because people are reducing their speed, thus reducing the number of accidents.

**Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): Does the Minister agree that there is a particular problem with drivers in 20 mph-zones? Why are police forces throughout the country extremely reluctant to use speed cameras in those zones?

**Mr. Spellar:** That is something that the hon. Gentleman needs to take up with the Home Office, which is responsible for police forces. We are creating a system whereby they can put in cameras, then apply for money to pay for them so that they can become operational. With that money come the visibility conditions that I have described. He needs to take the matter up with his local police authority and chief constable. At the same time, it would be useful if the Norfolk constabulary repainted its cameras in a more visible colour; I think that he is already dealing with that.

**Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does my right hon. Friend accept that traffic regulations are meant to be complied with—especially speed limits, which save lives? Will he try to make sure that firm guidelines and opportunities are offered to local authorities and police so that cameras are used to ensure compliance with traffic regulations like bus lanes, bus gates and public transport priorities, which the police are often reluctant to enforce at all?

**Mr. Spellar:** I thank my hon. Friend. The schemes that I have described are based on local authorities and police working in partnership. We are also piloting schemes in the London area, looking at the enforcement of bus lanes. They must be applied with discretion because, obviously, a vehicle parked in them at the height of the rush hour is far more of a problem than one whose driver has temporarily stopped to pop to the shops mid-morning. Discretion is therefore needed so that traffic can flow but motorists are not persecuted.

My hon. Friend is right; we need to look across the board. Although we have the safest roads in Europe, along with Sweden, we can still do better; we are already making progress and intend to make more.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray): The Minister will be aware that officials have argued that speed cameras cannot effectively differentiate between Scottish European number plates. Will he confirm that that and all other arguments against Scottish European number plates are bogus, and that the Government are about to reverse their decision on them? Will he take the opportunity to

apologise to Scottish motorists for threatening fines for displaying our national flag on our national number plates?

**Mr. Spellar:** The matter has been raised with me by Members of Parliament from all parts of the United Kingdom. We have been reviewing it and I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

**Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): Will my right hon. Friend discuss with the Home Office local campaigns such as those in Mawdesley and other areas in the Chorley constituency, where residents want speed cameras to be introduced to reduce speed, and use his good offices to ensure that those voices are listened to?

**Mr. Spellar:** Such representations should be addressed to the local partnership between the local authority—which, in my hon. Friend's case, I assume is Lancashire county council—and the Lancashire police. I hope that his representations will be taken seriously in the interests of his constituents, whom he always represents so assiduously.

## Rail Safety

9. **John Barrett** (Edinburgh, West): If he will make a statement on progress towards the implementation of recommendations made on rail safety by recent reports from the Health and Safety Commission. [21565]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead):** The Government have asked the Health and Safety Commission, the regulator for rail safety, to ensure that action is taken on all the recommendations from the four recent public inquiry reports. The commission's progress reports on recommendations from the Southall and the train protection inquiries are in the House Library. Progress reports on the two Cullen reports are due in the spring.

**John Barrett:** Following the Southall train crash and Professor Uff's subsequent recommendations, can the Minister confirm that by February this year, 81 of the recommendations should have been implemented, yet only 15 had been? By February next year, all 93 recommendations should have been implemented. Does he expect that they will be, and if not, why not?

**Dr. Whitehead:** Through the offices of the Health and Safety Executive, the Government are ensuring that the reports that have been produced on rail safety are implemented progressively. It is anticipated that those reports will be fully implemented in the not-too-distant future.

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): Does the Minister recall that following the Paddington rail crash and Lord Cullen's first report, the Secretary of State specifically required the Health and Safety Executive to produce a report on implementation of those recommendations within six months—that is, by tomorrow? Can the Minister explain why that report has been delayed until spring next year? As 41 of the 89 recommendations were due to be implemented by tomorrow, including those on improved signal arrangements in the Paddington area and improved signal siting, can the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether they have been implemented, and if not, why not?

**Dr. Whitehead:** I will look at the details of the hon. Gentleman's question and write to him. He should be aware that the progress reports on recommendations from all the inquiries are either in the Library now or will be made available in the early spring next year. Those reports will demonstrate, I understand, that good progress has been made in implementing all the recommendations of those inquiries.

**Hugh Bayley** (City of York): Is my hon. Friend aware that in the four years prior to the privatisation of Railtrack, the number of passenger deaths on the railways decreased from 30 in 1991-92 to eight the year before privatisation, and that in the four years after privatisation, the number rose from eight to 43 in the latest year for which we have figures? Despite the claim from the shadow Transport Secretary, the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), that Railtrack made the railways safer, does my hon. Friend agree that the figures show a worrying trend? Will he tell the House what the new regime for managing the track and signalling will do to improve rail safety and reduce fatalities?

**Dr. Whitehead:** My hon. Friend makes an important point concerning some of the perceived consequences of Railtrack privatisation, but he should be aware that rail remains one of the safest forms of transport—seven times safer than travelling by car. The Government are working hard with Railtrack plc and the administrator to ensure that safety on the railways is maintained. A formal direction was issued to Railtrack plc on 8 October for it to bring forward a new railway safety case after administration. That has recently been accepted by HSE. HSE has doubled the number of railway inspectors actively inspecting railway safety since 1999, and intends to double the number of inspectors again by next year.

**Mr. John Taylor** (Solihull): Is the Minister still actively in favour of road to rail in the overall context of safety? If so, will he comment on the proposal to construct a rail link between Land Rover in my constituency and the west coast main line?

**Dr. Whitehead:** The proposal is actively being considered, but obviously the question of ensuring that transport can move around the country in the most efficient way in terms of industrial productivity and safety is a very important part of any overall transport plan.

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): My hon. Friend will be aware that the HSE does a fantastic job on rail safety, but is he satisfied that it has a sufficient number of trained engineers and inspectors? Is he even more satisfied that it has a sufficiently large budget to perform its necessary functions?

**Dr. Whitehead:** My hon. Friend is aware that a review was undertaken by the HSE—it was supported strongly by the Government—to look at the number of rail safety inspectors that it employed. She will be aware that, since 1999, the HSE has doubled the number of railway inspectors—there are currently just over 100—and that

the proposal is to increase that number to 200 by next year. She will also be aware that the HSE is undertaking to do that within the budget limits set under the spending review for the last period. If it considers that it should receive an increase for this particular work, it is up to it to make a case for that. It is undertaking this increased safety regulation within the resources that it currently has, and, in my view, it is doing so very effectively.

### Rail Regulation

10. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): If he will make a statement on the roles of the Strategic Rail Authority and the Rail Regulator. [21566]

**The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar):** The purposes and functions of the Strategic Rail Authority are set out in the Railways Act 1993, as amended by the Transport Act 2000. The Rail Regulator's functions and duties are set out in a number of Acts, including the Railways Act 1993, the Transport Act 2000, the Competition Act 1998 and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996.

**Mr. Turner:** I thank the Minister for that illuminating reply, but is he aware that passengers are more concerned about whether their trains are going to arrive on time and whether they can travel in reasonable comfort? Is either of the bodies continuing to collect information about time keeping, in which there has been a serious decline since October this year? Will the Minister publish regular reports on time keeping in the rail network?

**Mr. Spellar:** The hon. Gentleman recognises a problem that is part of the great difficulties of the system that we inherited from the Government whom he supported. The Opposition should recognise that it is that fundamentally flawed model that has created the difficulties. Notwithstanding that, there is, obviously, still a need to run the system. He will be extremely pleased with the progress that the new chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, Richard Bowker, has already made in starting to set new leadership in the industry. He will shortly be announcing the franchising proposals and will announce next month his strategic plan for the industry. That is the way in which leadership should be taken forward, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

**Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): In a recent parliamentary answer, the Minister confirmed to me that he was still in discussions with Railtrack about matters concerning the completion of phase 1 of the west coast main line modernisation; no mention was made of phase 2. What information has he provided to the Strategic Rail Authority about the matters that are outstanding, how will that outstanding work be financed and when will the project be completed?

**Mr. Spellar:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for highlighting the problems with the west coast main line, which demonstrate exactly the reason why we had to take action with regard to Railtrack. It priced the project at £2.3 billion, but it was then going to cost £7 billion and rising. I was absolutely astonished that the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) tried to brush that to one side as an insignificant item in its accounts. The matter requires discussion between the Department, the Strategic Rail Authority, Railtrack and Virgin Rail, precisely so that they can work their way out of the horrendous difficulties that the abject failure of Railtrack has placed with the authority, the Government and the train operating company. As he would expect, we are involved in very active discussions on the matter, because of the complexities and difficulties that we were left with.

### Area Cost Adjustment

12. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If he will make a statement on the working of the area cost adjustment. [21568]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead):** The area cost adjustment consists of two elements: a labour cost adjustment and a rates cost adjustment. The labour cost adjustment is by far the most important. It is based on comparisons of average wages in London, the south-east and the rest of the country. Average wages are derived from the new earnings survey for a range of occupations considered to be relevant to local authority employment.

The rates cost adjustment is based on rateable values per square metre for commercial office space. There is a slightly different approach for schools buildings.

**Mr. Robertson:** I am grateful for that reply. Does the Minister know that the area cost adjustment costs Gloucestershire £4.648 million a year? I understand that the Government are to review the area cost adjustment. Does he agree that it is wrong for Gloucestershire to lose out by such an amount? Does he further agree that the basis for the formula—that it costs more to run services in, for example, neighbouring Oxfordshire—is wrong, and will he therefore guarantee that Gloucestershire will not lose out unfairly after the review?

**Dr. Whitehead:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the current ACA methodology was developed under the Conservatives in the early 1990s. If there are serious problems, perhaps he should consult the history books to ascertain how they arose. At the time, Conservative Ministers did not believe that there was strong evidence to show that average wages varied much between authorities outside the south-east. That may have changed by now, and the Government are therefore reviewing the matter.

Various options, including an ACA that is more specifically associated with individual authorities, are being discussed with the Local Government Association. If the hon. Gentleman wants to know how openly the review is being conducted, he can look at the LGA website, where the different options are displayed.

## Points of Order

3.31 pm

**Mr. David Wilshire** (Spelthorne): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, of which I have given you notice. I want to clarify a point about this afternoon's debate on the motion on the facilities of the House.

Some years ago, I referred to Mr. Gerry Adams as the dishonourable Member for Belfast, West. The then Deputy Speaker ruled that such unparliamentary language was permissible because our rules protect only Members who have taken the Oath or affirmed. Will you confirm that the ruling continues to apply? Although I accept the need for moderate language in an emotional debate such as this afternoon's, is it still in order to describe someone who has not affirmed or taken the Oath as a supporter of terrorism or to refer to any other unpleasant facts that the evidence suggests?

**Mr. Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point of order, which gives me the opportunity to remind the House of the wise words of "Erskine May":

"Good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language."

I recognise that strong feelings exist on the issue, but let us conduct our debate in a civilised manner. The Chair will not tolerate unparliamentary language or behaviour.

## BILL PRESENTED

JUSTICE (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Jim Fitzpatrick presented a Bill to make provision about the judiciary in Northern Ireland and to amend section 6 of the Appellate Jurisdiction Act 1876; to make provision about the law officers and other legal officers and the courts in Northern Ireland; to establish a Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, a Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland and a Northern Ireland Law Commission; to amend the law of youth justice in Northern Ireland; to make provision for making available to victims of crime information about the release of offenders in Northern Ireland; to make provision about community safety in Northern Ireland; to amend the law of legal aid in Northern Ireland; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 75].

## Elections (Entitlement to Vote At Age 16)

3.33 pm

**Matthew Green** (Ludlow): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Representation of the People Act 1983 to provide that a person aged 16 years or over is entitled to vote in a parliamentary or local government election.

The Bill is an attempt to use common sense to tackle civil rights and the health of our democracy head on. I am sure that no hon. Members consider marriage, a full-time job or having children to be lesser responsibilities than voting, yet that is what successive Governments have effectively told us by failing to tackle the voting rights of 16 to 18-year-olds. We expect young people who work to contribute taxes, so why cannot they have a say in who spends their hard-earned money at local and national level? We treat them like adults one minute and children the next.

Let us be consistent. If we expect young people to be accountable and responsible, we must afford them responsibilities and respect. Young people under 18 can die fighting for their country, so is it not madness that they cannot elect the very people who send them to war? Respect and equality are at the heart of the Bill: giving 16-year-olds the vote is a fundamental right.

Why bother, some may ask? After all, we have all heard in the news about the increasing apathy of young people towards politics. I am sure that some will say, "What is the point of giving young people the vote if they are not going to use it?" Giving young people the chance to vote can only benefit society. It will empower young people and give them a greater sense of responsibility in society. We will make politics more relevant to the young and encourage personal responsibility by giving them a stake in the future.

We cannot deny someone their rights simply because they choose not to use them. If we played that game, we would have to forfeit the rights of almost half the population in the UK, given the results of the last general election—some democracy we would have if we did that.

Unlike some adults, young people are interested. A research poll carried out following the general election for Charter 88 and the YMCA came up with some surprising results. It seems that young people are still interested and have faith in the political system. Some 62 per cent. believe that voting is an important way to defend the public interest, and 61 per cent. believe it makes the Government responsible for their actions. More than half believe that voting is instrumental in getting the right people elected who will represent their views.

We cannot take young people for granted. As the research also shows, if we fail to nurture young people's interest in politics, we lose it. As many as 47 per cent. of 16 to 17-year-olds said that voting could have a lot of influence; that dropped to only 35 per cent. once they reached their early twenties—a 12 per cent. drop in just five years. How can we tell young people that we are interested in their views, yet at the same time not let them have the vote? Young people are judged old enough to

start a family and contribute taxes. We should now allow them to elect the Government who will spend their taxes and provide the hospitals in which their children are born.

The change has the support of the Electoral Reform Society, the British Youth Council, the YMCA, the National Youth Agency, the UK Youth Parliament, the Children's Rights Alliance, the National Black Youth Forum and the Care Leavers Alliance.

The last time that the voting age was lowered was under the Representation of the People Act 1969, which came into force for the 1970 general election and allowed 18 to 20-year-olds to vote for the first time. I understand that a total of 81 Members of this House had the opportunity to vote that year, which they would not have had otherwise. Without giving anyone's exact age away, I shall mention a few of them, including my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes). I understand that he insisted on using his vote, with his father driving him from Hereford, where they had moved to, to north Wales to make sure that his vote counted at the age of 19.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris) and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), were also able to vote for the first time in 1970 thanks to the lowering of the voting age. They could not have done so if the voting age had not been lowered the previous year.

We all know how quickly youthful passion and idealism can fall victim to cynicism and apathy. How many more Ministers, Chancellors or perhaps even Prime Ministers will be encouraged if we foster young people's interest in politics early on?

The citizenship curriculum that is being made compulsory in September 2002 will teach all young people about the political process: 16 and 17-year-olds will be better informed about politics than ever before, and probably better informed than most adults. Young people are the future. We want to encourage their interest in the community in which we live as well as the world around them. We must motivate young people before they lose interest, and there is only one way to do that—give them the vote.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Matthew Green, Mr. Andrew Stunell, Jane Griffiths, Angus Robertson, Lembit Öpik, Dr. John Pugh, Mr. Mike Hancock, Mr. Paul Marsden, Mr. Alan Reid, Adam Price and Mr. Roger Williams.

ELECTIONS (ENTITLEMENT TO VOTE AT AGE 16)

Matthew Green accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Representation of the People Act 1983 to provide that a person aged 16 years or over is entitled to vote in a parliamentary or local government election: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 76].

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

TAXES

That the Variation of Stamp Duties Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3746), dated 27th November 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

*Question agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No.89) (HC415) on Children's Services (Quality Protects) Special Grants for 2000–01 and 2001–02, which was laid before this House on 30th November, be approved.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

3.42 pm

**Mr. Speaker:** Before we come to the main motion, I have a short statement to make about the debate on facilities of the House. A list of amendments that have been selected has been circulated. I propose to allow a broad general debate on the motion, at the end of which there will be an opportunity for amendments to be proposed formally and divided on before the Question is put on the main motion.

## ROYAL ASSENT

**Mr. Speaker:** I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Act:

Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Act 2001

## Facilities of the House

3.43 pm

**The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook):** I beg to move,

That, with effect from 8th January 2002, those Members who have chosen not to take their seats and thus do not qualify to participate in the proceedings in Parliament may use the facilities within the precincts of the House and the services of departments of the House, and may claim support for their costs as set out in the Resolution of 5th July 2001, relating to Members' Allowances, Insurance &c., and the allowances relating to travel within the United Kingdom for Members, their families and staff.

The motion relates to the facilities of the House, but I fully recognise that most Members come to the debate with views mainly shaped by events in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), who I understand will respond to my opening remarks, informed us this morning, courtesy of *The Daily Telegraph*, of the views that he brings to the debate. He said that the Conservative party is withdrawing bipartisan support in Northern Ireland over this issue. *[Interruption.]* I observe that he has the support of the Conservative party.

It is of course the right of the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to end the principle of a bipartisan approach in Northern Ireland. We gave them bipartisan support on Northern Ireland when they were in government.

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Grantham and Stamford): Is the right hon. Gentleman telling the House that, in opposition, the Labour party voted for the Prevention of Terrorism Act?

**Mr. Cook:** No, I am not saying that. As the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, that Act raised a number of concerns about the treatment of people on the mainland who were not necessarily connected with the IRA. I am sure that he will also acknowledge, as he is a fair-minded gentleman, that we gave the Government full support for every effort that they made to get a peace process going in Northern Ireland.

I am not surprised that, in opposition, the hon. Gentleman does not feel bound to give us the support that we gave his party when it was in government. What does surprise me is that he has ended bipartisanship over access to the House of Commons. Never once in their 18 years of government did the Conservatives withdraw the right of access from Sinn Fein. Throughout the decade in which Gerry Adams was an elected Member of Parliament, a Conservative Government left him the right to enter the precincts and the right of access to any services provided. Indeed, in every month of his membership Gerry Adams was mailed his allocation of tickets to the Public Gallery, and occasionally used them. Not once in those years did the hon. Gentleman try to stop him.

I assume from the bewildered look on the hon. Gentleman's face that he was totally unaware of his Government's policy throughout that decade in which Gerry Adams was entitled to come into this place.

At that time, the right of access to Westminster for Members who had not taken the Oath was of long standing. For more than 100 years, there was nothing to bar from the precincts a Member who had refused to take the Oath. Indeed, in the 19th century, Members who had not taken the Oath on religious grounds attended Westminster regularly, and even listened to debates from beyond the Bar of the House.

It will be interesting to discover, when the hon. Gentleman makes his speech, whether he can clarify whether he was aware that that was the position throughout the time for which his Government were in office. He supported that Government, but he is not prepared to support us when we restore the position that existed when they were in power.

Not until a ruling by Madam Speaker Boothroyd after the 1997 general election was access to the precincts and the services of any of the Departments of the House withdrawn from Members who did not take the Oath. At that time, the IRA had repudiated its ceasefire and the peace process had foundered. In those circumstances, the ruling was understandable. Since then, however, we have witnessed historic developments in Northern Ireland. Three years ago, the Good Friday agreement committed the parties to it to pursue their different perspectives through politics and not through violence. Two years ago, power was devolved to an Assembly elected by the people of Northern Ireland.

It was against the background of those developments that in January 2000 the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), wrote to the leaders of all political parties in Northern Ireland proposing that Sinn Fein MPs be granted access to Westminster and the ability to claim constituency allowances. At the same time, the Prime Minister consulted the leaders of the Opposition parties. In the event, the Government decided that the time was not right, as further progress was required on the peace process.

We have now had that further progress. After a difficult few months, the existence of the Northern Ireland Assembly has been stabilised. General de Chastelain has confirmed that he has witnessed the first ever act of decommissioning by the republican movement in its history. He described it as significant, and he has confirmed that the material included arms, ammunition and explosives.

**David Burnside** (South Antrim): Does the right hon. Gentleman regard what was done in my constituency yesterday, on behalf of Sinn Fein, as evidence of progress in the peace process in support of the police? Posters were put up reading "Don't Join RUC/PSNI"—"PSNI" stands for "Police Service of Northern Ireland"—and listing "plastic bullets", "shoot to kill", "abuse of human rights", "sectarian intimidation", "collusion", "obstruction of enquiries" and "torturers". Does that constitute progress in support for the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the peace process?

**Mr. Cook:** What I said to the House, and what I stand by, was that there had been progress in the peace process. As I pointed out, part of that progress is represented by the fact that we have an elected Northern Ireland Assembly in which 18 members of Sinn Fein sit, and in which the hon. Gentleman's party participates. His party has sat in 2,000 committee meetings with members of Sinn Fein in Belfast. I think that he should explain why he is willing

to take part in 2,000 committee meetings in Belfast, but will not even allow Sinn Fein Members access to the Travel Office or the Vote Office here.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Cook:** I give way to the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer).

**Mr. John Gummer** (Suffolk, Coastal): Surely the right hon. Gentleman understands that those who are engaged in the committee meetings in Belfast have agreed the same terms under which committee meetings take place, whereas he is suggesting that there shall be a special kind of Member of Parliament who shall take what he wants and not what he does not want. Those of us who do not take the Unionist Whip are for the first time driven into a position of saying that this House must insist that Members of Parliament either take the whole thing or nothing at all.

**Mr. Cook:** The right hon. Gentleman suggests that the Good Friday agreement applies only to parties in Northern Ireland. It does not. The British Government are also a party to that agreement. He must explain why it is permissible for members of Sinn Fein to take a full part in the democratic process of Northern Ireland, to attend the Assembly and to sit in the Executive Committee, but not to have access even to the precincts of Westminster. That seems a double standard, which would not be welcome in Northern Ireland.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Cook:** If hon. Members will allow me, I will return to my speech.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Cook:** I will.

**Kate Hoey:** Can the Leader of the House point out exactly which page and paragraph of the Belfast agreement talk about giving Sinn Fein Members who had not taken the Oath entry to the House of Commons?

**Mr. Cook:** The Good Friday agreement commits us to a parity of esteem for both traditions in Northern Ireland. It sets us out on a process. If my hon. Friend wants that process to succeed, she must recognise that it will involve different steps along the way, whether or not they are specifically written down in the document of three years ago.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Cook:** I will continue with my speech.

All four of the Sinn Fein Members elected to the House are full Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. They regularly attend that body without any problems of security in the Assembly. There is no logic in saying to them that as a result of the peace process, to which we are party, they can attend, speak and vote in Belfast, but in Westminster they cannot get past the door.

One of their number, Martin McGuinness, is the Minister of Education in Northern Ireland. He has a pledge of office, which committed him to using only democratic, non-violent means. He sits in the Executive Committee with representatives of other parties, including the Unionists. He not uncommonly meets my colleagues in the United Kingdom Government. The House has initiated a peace process that involves him and his colleagues in the peaceful administration of public services in Northern Ireland. The question now is whether the House is willing to play its part in engaging Sinn Fein in political activity.

**Mr. David Wilshire** (Spelthorne): In view of what the right hon. Gentleman said about Martin McGuinness committing himself to purely democratic means, presumably the right hon. Gentleman will accept the amendments tabled today to require such an undertaking from those four people before they are allowed in here.

**Mr. Cook:** The position that I am putting before the House, which is clear within the motion, is that those Members who have not taken the Oath should be entitled to access to the precincts, in the same way as they were before 1997 and before progress had not been made on the peace process.

**Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): Can the right hon. Gentleman try to explain to my constituents in Eastbourne, who saw one of their previous MPs murdered by the IRA, why we are now proposing to give the benefits, privileges and facilities of this place to some of the people responsible for his murder?

**Mr. Cook:** Ian Gow was tragically and appallingly murdered during the year in which Gerry Adams was a Member of this House and had precisely the access to the precincts for which the motion provides. The whole point of the peace process is to prevent future murders of that kind and to ensure that we proceed by political activity, not by violent confrontation. I do not understand how the hon. Gentleman imagines that we can draw Sinn Fein into political activity if he will not even allow it anywhere near Westminster.

**Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Leader of the House referred to the pledge of office that people have to take to sit in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and there are similar new pledges in the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. Will he help the House by saying whether, as part of his welcome modernisation programme, it is in his mind that we should amend the law on the Oath, which not only is of interest to people elected from Northern Ireland, but would be widely welcomed in many parts of the House and would facilitate many people living with their consciences as well as serving their constituents?

**Mr. Cook:** If the hon. Gentleman and any other substantial body of opinion in the House wish to raise the question of the Oath that Members take, that is a matter that we can explore at another time.

**Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): A majority does.

**Mr. Cook:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for having his finger on the pulse and his assurance on that point,

*[Mr. Cook]*

but at present I do not anticipate that giving a commitment to changing the Oath would assist me in the present debate. As I was saying, the peace process is a process, not a single event. A process requires parallel progress on both sides.

**Mr. Andrew MacKay** (Bracknell): Will the Leader of the House give way?

**Mr. Cook:** No, I will not.

Amendment (q) in the name of the Leader of the Opposition would prevent any part of this motion from being implemented until all of the decommissioning has been completed. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) confirms that point.

**Mr. MacKay:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on the specific point of decommissioning?

**Mr. Cook:** If the right hon. Gentleman lets me get a word in edgeways, I will talk about decommissioning. Both sides of the Chamber want to secure more decommissioning and want it to continue until it is completed. There is no difference between us about the need for further decommissioning by the IRA, but we are more likely to secure further decommissioning if we demonstrate that we are willing to maintain momentum on our side. I would ask all of those in the House who want more decommissioning, including the right hon. Gentleman, whether they really believe that they would make it more likely by voting down this motion tonight. I will happily hear the right hon. Gentleman's answer now.

**Mr. MacKay:** The answer to the question is simply that the very limited decommissioning that we have had so far resulted entirely from our taking a strong stance, and not from appeasing in the way that the Leader of the House is today. He attempts to pray in aid the limited amount of decommissioning as the reason for this dreadful motion. Will he remind the House just what the terms of the Belfast agreement were on decommissioning, and will he tell us when all decommissioning was supposed to have been completed?

**Mr. Cook:** The Belfast agreement committed all parties to use their best endeavours and the right hon. Gentleman is right that the original timeframe provided was two years. He is also right that it is only very recently that we have received what General de Chastelain—whose judgment I trust possibly more than that of the right hon. Gentleman—described as a significant event. I find it strange that he should say that that happened when we played tough and stood our ground, because I do not remember him saying before the October act of decommissioning that the Government deserved praise for standing firm and refusing concessions. We secured decommissioning because we have a peace process in being, and we will secure further progress only if we keep that process alive.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Cook:** I wish to make some progress.

The step that the House is being asked to take is a limited one. It will restore access to the precincts and Commons services that existed before the election in May 1997. It will not confer any right to take part in proceedings or to vote. It will not provide a salary or pension for Sinn Fein Members. It will not provide any Short money for Sinn Fein as a party. *[Interruption.]* Yes, it will extend the entitlement to constituency allowances to Sinn Fein Members on the same basis as any other elected Member. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. As I said last week, this is a sensitive matter, but it does not help when hon. Gentlemen shout across the Chamber.

**Mr. Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton) *rose—*

**Mr. Cook:** I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Duncan:** The only person who could possibly have claimed allowances in the past was Gerry Adams, because the others who did not take their seats were disqualified. He did not claim. Since then, the allowances have dramatically increased from near zero to about £100,000. In addition, there is a legislative Assembly in a devolved Ulster, whose Members also get about £50,000. Given that dramatic change, how can the Leader of the House argue that his motion today is a return to the status quo ante?

**Mr. Cook:** In respect of the access to the precincts and services, it is precisely that. *[Interruption.]* If I may say so, and if the hon. Gentleman is listening, that is precisely what I said and have just conceded. In respect of the allowances, the motion introduces a new situation.

**Mr. Duncan:** New?

**Mr. Cook:** Yes, it is new. I have never sought to disguise that. It will provide constituency allowances to the four Sinn Fein Members, and any other hon. Member who does not take the Oath, on the same basis as to any other elected Member.

**Mr. Douglas Hogg** (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Cook:** If the right hon. and learned Gentleman will allow me to continue, I give him an undertaking that I shall give way to him next.

I concede that the motion would reduce the extent to which there is a distinction between Sinn Fein Members and other hon. Members. It is not my motion, but amendment (m), tabled by the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), that would perpetuate two classes of MPs—those of us who are entitled to support in our work for constituents, and those who are denied it.

Some amendments have been tabled that would introduce a new version of the two classes of MPs. They would divide us into those who would get constituency allowances under the same rules as everyone else, and those who would get them under special rules invented specifically for the four Sinn Fein MPs. If the motion is approved and constituency allowances are to be extended

to Sinn Fein Members, they should receive it on the same basis, for the same purposes and with the same regulations as any other hon. Member.

**Mr. Hogg:** Will the Leader of the House say how we are to police the allowances? One of the House's sanctions is that it can prevent hon. Members from sitting in the House if they have acted improperly. The Sinn Fein Members will not be sitting in the House, as they decline to do so. In those circumstances, how will the expenditure and allocation of the allowances be properly policed when no sanctions can be exercised against Sinn Fein Members?

**Mr. Cook:** I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman that suspension from the House also involves being barred from the precincts of the premises. Any motion carried in the House to suspend any of the four Sinn Fein MPs would reverse the position set out in the motion today, and those MPs would lose access to the House and its facilities.

The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) asked how the allowances would be policed, as he put it. The Sinn Fein MPs could claim the allowances only on the same basis as any other hon. Member can—namely, that they are spent "wholly, exclusively and necessarily" on constituency duties. The four Sinn Fein MPs would have to observe the same rules as everyone else. If Conservative Members do not believe that the rules are properly policed, they should, by all means, come forward with proposals to tighten the rules for every hon. Member.

If any of the Sinn Fein MPs' staff apply for a pass to the House's precincts, they will be required to satisfy the same security test as the staff of any other hon. Member. Those rules are common to all hon. Members. If they are unsatisfactory, they should be amended for all hon. Members, not just for four hon. Members.

**Mr. Frank Field** (Birkenhead): The members of staff employed by hon. Members in furtherance of their parliamentary duties have to satisfy the office of the Serjeant-at-Arms that they are not a security risk. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to lay in the Library of the House the advice that he has been given by the Serjeant-at-Arms' office in connection with the changes that he proposes?

**Mr. Cook:** I have discussed the matter with the Serjeant-at-Arms. The advice that I have given to the Serjeant-at-Arms is that we cannot change the rules, the process of vetting or the tests for Sinn Fein Members' staff. They must be subject to the same test as the staff of any other hon. Member. I assure my right hon. Friend that no separate advice to the contrary has been tendered to me. I hope that that gives him the reassurance that he was seeking: the security tests will be the same for Sinn Fein Members' staff as for the staff of any other hon. Member.

**Mr. Field:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way again. My question was not about the advice that my right hon. Friend had given to the Serjeant-at-Arms, but about the advice that the Serjeant-at-Arms gave to him. Could that advice be made available to hon. Members in the Library?

**Mr. Cook:** I have received no such advice, but I assure the House that, if I do, I shall make it public.

**Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The Register of Members' Interests was published recently. If the facilities of the House are being extended to these four elected Members, should not those hon. Members be expected to register their interests?

**Mr. Cook:** The motion will enable the four Sinn Fein Members to make an entry in the register. They are not required to do so under the rules, which provide that Members shall be obliged to make an entry only within three months of taking their seat. If that disappoints Opposition Members, I can give them the assurance that the motion will bring the four Sinn Fein Members within the scope of the remit of Mrs. Filkin, who will be able to apply the code of conduct. *[Laughter.]*

This place is an expression of the electoral process. Whatever our individual views of the politics of Sinn Fein, each of us must accept that the Sinn Fein MPs were elected to this House and were elected by their constituents.

Our constituents approach us with a wide range of issues, from their tax liability to their pension entitlement. It is because of that demand from our constituents that the House has approved allowances for all Members to provide a professional service to their constituents. We should not deny the same service to 250,000 United Kingdom citizens in Northern Ireland by refusing their MPs the same constituency allowances.

**Mr. Hugo Swire** (East Devon): Does the right hon. Gentleman not understand that Conservative Members see a very real difference between constituency MPs who are prepared to take the Oath and represent their constituents in this Chamber and those who are prepared to take the money but not take the Oath and cannot properly represent their constituents in this Chamber?

**Mr. Cook:** The Sinn Fein MPs will continue not to get any salary until such time as they take the Oath. The hon. Gentleman must ask himself whether he really regards his constituency allowances as money for himself. Does he not rather regard them as money to enable him to provide a service for his constituents? Most of those who voted in those four constituencies did not vote for the Sinn Fein candidate. Why should they be denied the same constituency services that we demand for ourselves and our constituents?

I began my speech by referring to the momentous developments that we have seen in Northern Ireland: I shall also end with them. The peace process has made it possible to contemplate the changes proposed in the motion, but it also makes it necessary to adopt these changes. The aim of many years of dialogue with republicans has been to persuade them to give up violence and engage instead in the political process.

**Mr. Paul Goodman** (Wycombe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Cook:** No. I will not give way again.

*[Mr. Cook]*

In Belfast, republicans have engaged in the political process on everything from child welfare to care of the elderly. We cannot demand that process of engagement in Northern Ireland if we at Westminster keep the door firmly barred in case Sinn Fein MPs even put their foot across it.

**Mr. Jonathan Sayeed** (Mid-Bedfordshire) *rose—*

**Mr. Cook:** I know that for some Members this is a difficult step. I respect the sincerity of those who feel that they cannot take it. However, I ask them to respect the sincerity of those of us who believe that the time has come to take this step to help the peace process.

We all—both sides of the House, I presume—welcome the ceasefire, which, for four years, has stopped IRA bombs and attacks on the security services. Most of us welcome the development of an elected Assembly in place of direct rule. If we want the ceasefire to become permanent and if we want the new democratic institutions of Northern Ireland to grow in strength, the House should also be prepared to contribute to the process of political engagement. The motion before us is one small contribution that the House can make, and I invite the House to support it.

4.9 pm

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Grantham and Stamford): I beg to move amendment (q), in line 1, leave out "8th January 2002" and insert—

"the completion of decommissioning, as verified by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning".

This is a worrying day for the House. It could turn out to be a very sad day—a memorable day in an unfortunate sense—for the House. Let me first say that I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) for intervening on the Leader of the House. The right hon. Gentleman should be particularly grateful to my hon. Friend for giving him the opportunity to salvage something of his reputation this afternoon. It was only after taking my hon. Friend's intervention that the right hon. Gentleman disclosed to the House a point that is blatantly clear from the Government's proposal: there is indeed a very real distinction between the regime that the Government are proposing for the Sinn Fein-IRA MPs and the status quo ante before the ruling in 1997 of your predecessor, Mr. Speaker.

During the earlier part of the speech of the Leader of the House, I was being given the clear impression—and I was not alone—that he was arguing that all that was happening was that the Government were restoring the status quo ante. The most charitable construction that one could have put upon that was that the right hon. Gentleman had not taken the trouble to read his own motion, which states:

"and may claim support for their costs as set out in the Resolution of 5th July 2001, relating to Members' Allowances, Insurance &c., and the allowances relating to travel within the United Kingdom for Members, their families and staff".

Those allowances were never available to Members who did not take their seat. That was explicitly set out in the statement made on 14 May 1997 by your illustrious predecessor, Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption.]* Far from forgetting it, I have had a copy of it before me since the beginning of the debate. Madam Speaker said:

"In 1924, one of my predecessors ruled that any such Member"—

that is, Members who did not take their seats—

"could not receive a salary, and this regulation also applies to allowances."—*[Official Report*, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 35.]

At that time, Madam Speaker made an authoritative statement of the position before she tightened the rules.

**Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): The Leader of the House pointed out that we were reinstating the situation pre-1997. Notwithstanding the fact that none of those Members availed themselves of the facilities, immediately before 1997 they could have done so. Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether he objects to the principle, or merely to the fact that the increased value of the office costs allowance is available to them? That is not a matter of principle, but it casts aspersions on the ability of the Fees Office properly to police the spending of that money.

**Mr. Davies:** The hon. Lady invites me to give her a preview of my speech. I should be happy to summarise it in one minute so that she can leave the Chamber if she wants to do so. Although I shall demonstrate—I hope, persuasively—the validity of two points, the focus of my remarks will be limited to those points.

The first point is that the Conservatives object very much to the whole concept of the creation of two-tier membership of the House, with the distortions that would flow from that. The second point is that we object fundamentally to the idea of making more unreciprocated concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA—especially treating the rules of the House of Commons as the currency for such concessions.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North) *rose—*

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid)** *rose—*

**Mr. Davies:** I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Gentleman in turn—that is fair.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank the Opposition spokesman for giving way. Will he consider the democratic argument? Four constituencies elected Members of Parliament on the clear understanding that those Members would not partake in parliamentary proceedings—as they had made clear during the election campaign. What business is it of the hon. Gentleman or of the House to deny the constituents of those MPs facilities at Westminster that would enable the MPs better to represent individuals of all parties in their constituencies? Is that not a fundamental democratic argument that seems to have entirely escaped the Conservative party?

**Mr. Davies:** Is the hon. Gentleman advancing the extraordinary argument that anybody who stands for election in this country—on however absurd a programme as regards the parliamentary rules that he or she will or will not accept if elected—should, once elected, compel

the rest of the House to change its rules to accommodate whatever bizarre demands they set out in their manifesto? That position is utterly unreasonable.

**Dr. Reid** *rose—*

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Davies:** I shall give way to the Secretary of State, but then I want to make some progress.

**Dr. Reid:** I would be obliged if the hon. Gentleman answered the extremely important question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey); it is important that we know on what basis the Conservative party has decided to end its bipartisan approach of 30 years. Does he object to the principle relating to the facilities involved or does he object to the money? If he objects to the principle, will he explain why the Conservative Government found no objection to the principle of providing the facilities for nine years while the IRA were bombing and not on ceasefire? Can we have a very straight answer to that fundamental question, because a political position that has lasted 30 years seems to have been broken? I repeat: does the hon. Gentleman's objection relate to the principle, or to the money? If it relates to the principle, why have Conservative Members changed their minds since past decades of Conservative Government?

**Mr. Davies:** The right hon. Gentleman also asks me for a preview of much of my speech, but I do not need to give him another preview because he, by parliamentary convention, is rather compelled—unlike the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey)—to remain in the Chamber to hear my speech, so he will hear exactly what I have to say on this subject. I assume that the Government want to hear my speech, or indeed that of any Opposition Member on this subject, but perhaps they are too ashamed of themselves and do not want to hear anything that we may have to say.

**Mr. Gummer:** I wonder whether my hon. Friend will consider the fact that we are elected as Members of Parliament not just to deal with people's tax problems and the like; we are primarily elected to take decisions in this House about the future of this nation in the world in which we live, and we are given the allowances for that purpose as a whole. Does he agree, therefore, that at the very least there ought to be a different understanding for those who are not prepared to shoulder the main job of being a Member of Parliament?

**Mr. Davies:** I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. The allowances are, of course, given to those hon. Members who wish to do a full job here and to enable them to do so.

**Mr. Martin Salter** (Reading, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Davies:** No, I will not take any more interventions for the moment; otherwise we shall not make progress— *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Let the hon. Gentleman speak.

**Mr. Davies:** I am conscious of the fact that a great many right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part in this debate, and rightly so because it touches the integrity of House of Commons, so I do not want to take up too much time.

I must, however, deal with two extraordinary distortions—I can only politely call them that because I am conscious of your strictures, Mr. Speaker, that I must keep to parliamentary language—that emerged from the speech made by the Leader of the House, the first of which was the comparison of the anomaly that would be produced by agreeing to the motion with the situation in Stormont. There is in fact no comparison at all between the position in Stormont and that in the House, because Sinn Fein-IRA have agreed to take their seats in the Assembly at Stormont and in the Executive there; they are playing a full part in those two new devolved institutions. For my part, I am delighted that they are playing a full part in those institutions, and we would welcome it if they decided to take a full part in the proceedings of the House of Commons and took their seats here.

We have no illusions about Sinn Fein-IRA, unlike the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who, in last night's debate on Northern Ireland, compared the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA to that between the Labour party and the trade union movement. We have no such illusions about them or their record, but we respect the rules of democracy. Those four persons have been democratically duly elected to their seats in this House and the doors here are open; they are welcome to take their seats. If they take their seats, they are, of course, welcome to all the facilities and allowances that go with that.

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones** (Cardiff, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Hogg:** *rose—*

**Mr. Davies:** I shall give way briefly to the hon. Gentleman, then to my right hon. and learned Friend, and then I shall proceed with my speech.

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** Although there are many differences between Members in the House and Sinn Fein—and we disapprove of Sinn Fein—does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that there is one honourable difference? Many Members on both sides are republicans but not a single one of them was elected as a republican. Because of the Oath that the House sets, a Member who is a republican and who was elected as such needs to deny the platform that he was elected on before he can take his seat in the House. How does the hon. Gentleman defend that?

**Mr. Davies:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman intended to make a helpful intervention, but he is simply misinformed about the facts. Sinn Fein-IRA have made statements recently—one appeared in the *Irish Times* on 14 December and, although I did not hear it myself, colleagues heard Pat Doherty make a similar one on the radio this morning—and they have made it clear that, even if the Oath were abolished, they would not take their seats in what Mr. Doherty apparently described as a foreign Parliament.

**Mr. Hogg:** To build on my hon. Friend's point, once it is accepted that it is right to allow former terrorists or

*[Mr. Hogg]*

supporters of terrorists to become Members of the House—that is my view—should we not resolutely confront the problem of the Oath? I am a constitutional monarchist, but I do not see why my duties as a Member of the House should be defined with reference to the Crown. Should we not, in fact, re-examine the Oath, so that we have either no oath or an oath that does not strain the consciences of loyal republicans? I refer not to the IRA but to others who are loyal and committed republicans.

**Mr. Davies:** My right hon. and learned Friend is a very distinguished lawyer and he takes a considerable theoretical interest in all these matters. He raises enormously important subjects that are not at all germane to today's debate. If anyone in the House seriously wants to abolish the concept of the Loyal Oath, I suggest that he or she take the opportunity to table a separate motion so that the House can pronounce on the subject. I have a very clear view as to how the House would pronounce in such an eventuality. However, that is not the issue that has been raised today.

The issue before us is not a suggestion that we should change our rules for everyone—that would mean that everyone would still be subject to the same rules on the same terms—but the suggestion that we should distort our rules to produce two sets of rules: one for one type of Member of Parliament and one for another type of Member. Conservative Members will certainly decide—and I hope that the whole House will—that that is a thoroughly unacceptable course to take.

**Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): The hon. Gentleman has just said that the Oath of Allegiance is not germane to the debate. However, amendment (t)—which is in his name and which you have selected, Mr. Speaker—makes specific reference to the "oath of allegiance". If therefore the hon. Gentleman is speaking for the Conservative party, he has the duty to answer the question of the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg).

**Mr. Davies:** The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The present rules, which the Government are trying to change, deal with elected Members taking or not taking their seats. The suggestion is that there should be one regime for Members taking their seats and another for Members who do not. The extent to which taking their seat is conditional or should no longer be conditional on taking an oath is a separate matter. I shall not be drawn any further down that road.

I have dealt with two entirely gratuitous distortions that the Government have made this afternoon. The first is the suggestion that there is an analogy with Stormont. There is no such analogy. In Stormont, Sinn Fein-IRA accept the same rules as everyone else and they are welcome here on the basis that they accept the same rules as everyone else.

The second distortion is the suggestion that we are trying to bar Sinn Fein-IRA Members from taking the seats here to which they have been elected. I have explained that that is not at all the case. They themselves have precluded themselves—most recently in a statement on the radio only this morning—from taking their seats in Parliament, whatever we do about the Loyal Oath or about anything else.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): I heard Pat Doherty on the "Today" programme this morning as, I am sure, did other hon. Members. He described this place as a foreign Parliament. The problem is not the Oath of Allegiance, but his complete contempt for this place. Why should we allow someone who holds this place in such contempt, and who does not play a part in it and has no wish to, any access to public money in this country?

**Mr. Davies:** I share my hon. Friend's immediate response. There are two issues to consider. The first is whether we should create a distorted regime with a two-tier categorisation of Members of Parliament. The second is that if we create a specially privileged category of Members of Parliament who can access facilities, money and so forth without taking their seats, we must consider whether it is bizarre—

**Mr. Salter:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Davies:** No, not for the time being.

We have to consider whether it is perverse and bizarre to allow the beneficiaries of such a special regime to be people to whom we owe so little by way of favours—I am trying to make my point as mildly as I can—as we do to Sinn Fein-IRA.

Why have the Government made this proposal? We all know—they have not attempted to deny this—that they would not have attempted to create a special regime for special types of MPs in any other context. If any one of us had formed up to the right hon. Gentleman in his role as Leader of the House and said, "Look, it would rather suit us after the next election, if we get elected, not actually to take up our seats, but to have the offices, money and travel allowances. Would that be all right? Would the Government like to use their vast majority—their pay-roll vote—to help us get that through?", we would have got a dusty answer. We all know that the Government are providing a specific and direct privilege that is to be handed over to one category of Members of Parliament who have been elected on a Sinn Fein-IRA ticket.

The great question that the Leader of the House has to answer is: why are we doing this? What are we getting in return? We know that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland discussed the matter with Sinn Fein-IRA, because he told us so last night. As that has been the subject of negotiation, what is the other side offering? The Government have promised to change—indeed, I repeat, to distort—our rules in the House of Commons, but what are they receiving in return?

I shall be delighted to give way to the Leader of the House if he wants to answer my question, but he shakes his head and does not intend to respond. That goes to the heart of the trouble that we have with supporting the Government on Northern Ireland. They introduce such one-sided measures without consulting the Opposition or giving a public response in the House of Commons to our questions.

and then expect us to support them. What an extraordinary state of affairs it is that a Government in those circumstances seriously think that they deserve support.

**Mr. Salter** *rose—*

**David Winnick** (Walsall, North) *rose—*

**Mr. Davies:** I give way to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) because he has a long-standing interest in Irish matters and has played a distinguished role in those in the House. After that, I do not intend to give way for a while because I must make progress.

**David Winnick:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those words. Does he remember that, at the height of IRA terror, his Government constantly denied that there was any contact between them and the IRA, yet on 29 November 1993 the Secretary of State admitted to the House that there had been a means of contact between the IRA and the British Government over many years? The Opposition could have made great play of that. We could have said that the Government were hypocritical and the rest, but we did not. That was not out of sympathy for the IRA—we loathed its crimes and atrocities—but because we believed that if the Conservative Government were having contact with the IRA, they were doing so for the national interest.

**Mr. Davies:** If that is an invitation to launch into a seminar on Irish history, now is not the time or the place, much as I would find it fascinating to do so. If, on the other hand, it is an attempt to throw me off my stride or to help the Leader of the House by protecting him from some of my strictures, I have to tell him that it simply will not work, because I do not intend to be thrown off my stride.

**Rev. Ian Paisley** (North Antrim): Will the hon. Gentleman give way? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber. Does the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) want to give way?

**Mr. Davies:** Yes, I will give way to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley).

**Rev. Ian Paisley:** I told the House what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and the House threw me out because I told the truth.

**Mr. Davies:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman told the truth in his own inimitable way. I am sorry that I was not here at that time to hear what he said or to witness the reaction; it sounds as though it was rather traumatic.

We have established that this measure, which was brought forward as a change to the rules of the House of Commons, has nothing to do with the interests of the House. In no sense at all is the Leader of the House making this proposal as part of his responsibility to improve and modernise our procedures. It is simply part of the Government's policy of endless concessions to, and appeasement of, Sinn Fein-IRA. Hardly a week goes by—this week, hardly a day goes by—without the announcement of a further concession.

I spoke about this last night. It is a deplorable situation for two reasons. First, these endless concessions are unreciprocated. They are being given away in exchange for precisely nothing. Let no one say that they are being made in exchange for decommissioning. Decommissioning was part of the Belfast agreement and should have been completed two years after the agreement was made. Against that, various things had to be done by the other parties concerned, including the British and Irish Governments. The British Government made a major concession to paramilitaries by releasing all terrorist prisoners. They released those prisoners unaccountably and extraordinarily, even though it was not necessary to do so within the terms of the agreement, and without any progress having been made on the other side or any decommissioning having taken place. That was a catastrophic mistake. It meant that decommissioning did not happen within two years; nor did it happen within three years.

The Government then completely panicked and decided that they had better make more concessions, which were not even in the Belfast agreement. In other words, they proposed to increase the price but were still receiving nothing at all. They went to Weston Park and made a whole new raft of concessions, but what happened? They did not get decommissioning. A week or so later, Sinn Fein-IRA withdrew from the agreement on the methodology of decommissioning which they had negotiated with General de Chastelain at the time of the Weston Park meeting. As I said last night, that was a real blow to the Government and indeed to the peace process.

The tragic events of 11 September and the public exposure of the IRA's involvement with FARC in Colombia meant that we had a new international situation, which could not possibly have been predicted by the Government or anyone else. It was not until then that new pressures could be exerted on Sinn Fein-IRA and we had the first act of decommissioning in October, and very welcome it was. However, it was simply the first act in what ought to be a process, and one in which the Government should be doing everything possible to make rapid progress. It is vital for the stability of Northern Ireland and for everyone's confidence in its new institutions that decommissioning be completed at the earliest possible opportunity.

Against that background, I am sorry to say that the Government have fallen back, with a vengeance, into their bad habit of throwing out concession after concession without receiving anything in return. We have had dramatic evidence of that today. We all know that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is not slow to intervene in the House. He loves to jump up when he thinks that he can gain a point. The Government have brought this measure forward as a concession to Sinn Fein-IRA. That has been established beyond any doubt in the debate this afternoon. I asked the Secretary of State a simple question: what was received in return? I said that I would give way to him and am prepared to do so now if he will answer that simple question. No answer. Shall I

*[Mr. Davies]*

wait? Shall I observe a five-second silence while the right hon. Gentleman gathers his thoughts? It is clear that nothing—

**Dr. John Reid:** Although the hon. Gentleman with his much vaunted history of Ireland is too blind to see it, one of the gains that we get is a compromise from republicans on engaging in dialogue in the House, as I shall point out later. Now that I have told him the gain, will he tell me the answer to a fundamental question that he promised 20 minutes ago, and explain the foundation of Conservative Members' opposition? Do they object in principle to what is being done on facilities or is it the money? If they object in principle to extending the facilities now that the IRA have decommissioned, why did his Government not object in principle when they were blowing up ordinary civilians throughout the country?

**Mr. Davies:** I will not allow the right hon. Gentleman to get away without taking up the absurdity of his remarks at the beginning of his intervention. I distinctly heard him say that it was necessary to pass the motion to give us opportunities for dialogue with Sinn Fein-IRA. He has an opportunity, as do I or any one of us, to engage in dialogue with Sinn Fein-IRA in Belfast or anywhere else, including London, if they came here. They can come to the House of Commons—

**Dr. Reid** *rose—*

**Mr. Davies:** I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman if he will sit down for a moment and let me finish my sentence. We have every opportunity for dialogue with Sinn Fein-IRA, to use the right hon. Gentleman's phrase; they can come to his office in the House of Commons any time they choose. The idea that we have to pay them money, travel expenses and an office cost allowance to have a dialogue is absurd. Does he think that whenever he wants to have a dialogue with someone he has to pay them money in advance?

**Dr. Reid:** The hon. Gentleman is proving himself not only blind but deaf. I did not say that that was necessary to have a dialogue. I said that one of the gains that we all got from the move was to bring Sinn Fein into dialogue in the House. Now that I have clarified that again, will the hon. Gentleman answer the question. Is he objecting in principle or to the money?

**Mr. Davies:** I shall answer the right hon. Gentleman's question frankly. The proposal is objectionable and problematic in principle, but life consists of making difficult choices. If the right hon. Gentleman did not know that, let me tell him it now.

**Dr. Reid** *rose—*

**Mr. Davies:** No, no, no. The right hon. Gentleman cannot ask me a question and not even allow me to finish one sentence before he tries to get in again. I am sorry—he will have to sit there until I have finished answering his question.

Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman again that life consists of difficult choices. Politics and much of human life consist of defending what is essential and being prepared if necessary to give away the less essential and the non-essential. I shall explain frankly to him the views of my colleagues and me on the matter. We would not lightly change the rules of the House; above all, we would be extremely reluctant to produce a regime for Members of Parliament that is not universal, does not apply equally to all Members and does not give them the same obligations and rights. Even more essential to the national interest is fulfilling the Belfast process and achieving complete decommissioning, which the right hon. Gentleman has so far failed to do. We are therefore prepared to contemplate such an arrangement, anomalous and objectionable as it is, if it is the price of full and complete decommissioning. Under no circumstances—

**Dr. Reid** *rose—*

**Mr. Davies:** Let me finish; this is important. Under no circumstances are we prepared to contemplate it simply as a kind of goodwill gesture or unilateral concession. Above all, the arrangement is not necessary or—if the right hon. Gentleman would like me to correct my earlier quotation of his remarks—desirable to help to promote dialogue. That is utterly absurd and he knows it full well.

**Dr. Reid:** Now we have it. There is an objection in principle to the facilities of the House being extended to Sinn Fein after the IRA have gone on ceasefire, after Sinn Fein has Ministers and Members of the Assembly, and the IRA have decommissioned. *[Interruption.]* Can the hon. Gentleman explain why there was no objection in principle from the Tory Government to the facilities being made available when the IRA were not on ceasefire, Sinn Fein was not participating in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the IRA were bombing and blasting their way through this country?

**Mr. Davies:** I have already explained exhaustively to the right hon. Gentleman that there is no analogy between the position in Stormont and the position at Westminster. Surely I need not repeat myself a third time on that subject. I have also explained exhaustively that, contrary to what his right hon. Friend the Leader of the House implied at the beginning of his speech, it is certainly not true that the motion would restore the status quo ante. That impression would have been extremely deceptive, had the right hon. Gentleman continued to sustain it. I am glad that he corrected himself and the point has been made clear.

Before I conclude my remarks, I must set out, first, what we find particularly objectionable about the Government's approach to Northern Ireland, and secondly, how the Opposition could do a great deal more to protect this country's interests and facilitate decommissioning.

We object to the Government's policy of endless unilateral concession. We object to the lack of reciprocity, discipline and any sense of how to conduct a businesslike negotiation. We have seen that again and again. The Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, in which there are further unilateral concessions, had its First Reading today. We saw another example last night, when the regime for

decommissioning was extended by five years, whereas we had all hoped that the extension would be for just a few months or a year at most. What an appalling signal to send to Sinn Fein-IRA.

Far from maximising the leverage that they have on Sinn Fein-IRA, the Government are continually relaxing the pressure. They are continually making concessions and demanding nothing in return.

**Hugh Bayley** (City of York) *rose—*

**Mr. Davies:** I am not giving way at this stage. The hon. Gentleman will have to catch Mr. Speaker's eye later.

The Government's approach is disastrous. Sinn Fein-IRA do not take it seriously. They know that they have merely to whine, and the Government will keep them happy with some new concession. That has been the story all along.

Our second great objection to Government policy is the extraordinary mind set with which they approach the problem. They seem to think that of all those with whom they might be negotiating in a hard world, Sinn Fein-IRA alone are soft people who will respond generously and sentimentally to concessions. The lack of realism is amazing. It was most graphically represented the other day when the House debated the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill.

As originally drafted, the Bill contained an extraordinary clause whereby the powers taken against terrorism in the Bill—understandably taken, in the present circumstances—would not apply to terrorism directed against a part of this country. Of course, we objected to that, and the Government accepted the error of their ways and withdrew that pernicious distinction. However, the Government seemed prepared to introduce an anti-terrorism Bill which perversely discriminated against this country—in other words, a Bill that provided a less severe regime for terrorist threats directed against our own citizens than for terrorist threats directed elsewhere. It is difficult to speculate on the mind set that could produce such a distortion.

**Hugh Bayley:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Davies:** I said that I would not give way to the hon. Gentleman. Did he not hear me the first time? [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I am sorry that I cannot give way, but the hon. Gentleman will understand that many hon. Members want to take part in the debate. I accept that it is necessary for Front Benchers to take as many interventions as possible and I appreciate that that is what Parliament is about, but there comes a point when one must move on. I am within a few minutes of letting everybody else take part in the debate, if I am allowed do so.

Against the background of completely uncontrolled concessions, the Government's seemingly complete failure to appreciate the need to maintain some balance in their dealings with Sinn Fein-IRA, and an extraordinary tendency to believe that terrorist threats in this country are not as real as those in the rest of the world, it is not surprising that we in the Conservative party have had to review very seriously our policy towards supporting the Government. We would love to get back to a greater degree of bipartisanship and I hope and trust that we may do so. We remain utterly committed to the Belfast agreement, the peace process and the success of devolved democracy in Northern Ireland. We simply do not believe that the Government are going about things in a sensible way if they wish to reinforce those institutions.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney** (North-West Cambridgeshire): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Davies:** Of course I shall have to make an exception in favour of my right hon. Friend.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. He rightly reminded the House that, when the Conservatives were in government, the Labour Opposition from time to time did not support measures that we introduced. The bipartisan approach never implied total agreement or accord, but it was the pillar on which the Belfast process was built and moved forward, and it was also of great succour to our fighting men and women who were putting their lives on the line for this nation. Can I say to him that, while he is right to criticise individual aspects of Government policy, especially tonight, many of us are still wedded to the concept of the importance, both historically and in the future, of a bipartisan approach?

**Mr. Davies:** I am one of those people. I am very much committed to the idea of bipartisanship in this field, as I have said. I agree entirely that we have jointly supported the Belfast agreement. Indeed, I continue to hope—perhaps against hope—that we can get back to a bipartisan approach, but we will not do so on the basis of the tactics adopted by the Government. Neither will we do so, I must tell the Leader of the House, on the basis of the Government's attitude to the House of Commons as he represents it. He cannot get away with neither answering questions to the House nor consulting us in private and still expecting us to support his policies. That does not make any sense.

**Hugh Bayley** *rose—*

**Mr. Davies:** I am very sorry; I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand that I had to make an exception in favour of my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), who has great experience of Northern Ireland.

The Opposition's view, which I have reiterated several times—I can see that I shall have to return to it on future occasions, as I do not think that the Government have taken it on board—is that it is very important, if we are going to maximise pressure on Sinn Fein-IRA to decommission and get decommissioning from other paramilitaries, that a slightly more robust stance be taken. I have proposed that the Government should at least attempt to negotiate a full package—I have called it a programmed process—leading to full decommissioning, so that all parties concerned, including the British Government, know what needs to be done by whom, when and in what order, and so that we have a clear, linked and co-ordinated agreement leading to the completion of decommissioning. Until and unless such a package is negotiated, there should be no further unilateral concessions, least of all if they involve throwing away the integrity of this House. That is what we are deeply concerned about.

*[Mr. Davies]*

As Leader of the House, the right hon. Gentleman must recognise that he has an absolute responsibility before the House and before history to ensure that we do not lightly treat our rules and procedures, lightly create different rules for different people, or play ducks and drakes with the constitution of the House of Commons. Above all, he must recognise that we do not sell our rules and procedures, least of all if we receive nothing in return.

4.50 pm

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): I hope that all hon. Members recognise that I have a record of strenuous opposition to Sinn Fein and that I would never wish us to be soft on it. However, I support the motion so that we can engage with Sinn Fein and express views that its members would find uncomfortable but would have to try to tackle.

My assistant chairs a group called New Dialogue, which has often disputed Sinn Fein's ideas. I have supplied access to the House to people such as Sean O'Callaghan, who was the southern organiser of the Provisional IRA, but changed his position and became an informer on that organisation. There would therefore be some difficulties for me, and people who work for me, or are associated with me, if Sinn Fein had access to the House. Nevertheless, the motion could lead to substantial gains, and it should be supported.

**Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley): Does the hon. Gentleman know that Mr. O'Callaghan's successor as southern commander of the Provisional IRA is now Member of Parliament for West Tyrone? The motion would give him full access to the House's facilities.

**Mr. Barnes:** That already happens in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and there are no problems there. Indeed, the Opposition have said that they would not worry if Sinn Fein Members took their seats as long as they took the Oath and thus became full Members. However, there is a difficulty about rubbing shoulders, which must also exist in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I believe that we should bear it and try to deal with it. We should be aware of it but respond to it strongly.

**Mr. Goodman:** Does the hon. Gentleman know that as recently as 20 November, *Republican News*, the Sinn Fein newspaper, republished an article entitled "IRA Strike Hard"? It referred to a hard-hitting IRA operation, which succeeded in "executing" someone whom it described as the "loyalist extremist Robert Bradford", a former Member of Parliament. Given the contempt of Sinn Fein and the IRA for democracy as represented by the House and its Members, is it the right time to admit the four people whom we are considering to the facilities of this place?

**Mr. Barnes:** It is the right time. I do not doubt what the hon. Gentleman says about the positions that Sinn Fein adopts in *Republican News*. I have been attacked on its front pages for lines that I have taken. However, changes are happening. A sea change is beginning that allows us to start to draw Sinn Fein into the political process and to put alternative viewpoints, which, I hope, will drive it from having any standing or position in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.

We cannot get rid of Sinn Fein's political viewpoint by trying to distance ourselves from it. At one time, we tried to deny Sinn Fein the oxygen of publicity. Sinn Fein Members were seen on television, but their voices were not heard, because their words were spoken by actors. We were told that if that system were changed, the news media might engage in proper discussions with Sinn Fein. Unfortunately, when the change occurred, that full and fearless discussion did not take place. Sinn Fein gets away with murder on television, and perhaps elsewhere, in terms of their position. We should be capable of taking on Sinn Fein and we should have sufficient strength in our position to be prepared fearlessly to argue those points.

The fact that Sinn Fein Members would be around and about within the Palace of Westminster has advantages for the rest of us in taking on board their position. I would sooner that means were found—perhaps getting rid of the Oath—to allow them to sit on these Benches. It would then be easier to take on their arguments, because they are not unanswerable.

**Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): If there were to be an opportunity to debate the abhorrent policies of Sinn Fein-IRA as a result of those Members taking their seats, the hon. Gentleman's argument would stand up. However, we know that the Sinn Fein Members said in their election addresses—and repeated it on the "Today" programme this morning—that they were not prepared to take part in any democratic debates in this Chamber. It is not a matter of the Oath, important though that is. They abhor democracy and have referred to this place as a foreign Parliament. How can we allow these terrorists into this democratic debate? They are not democrats.

**Mr. Barnes:** Abhorring democracy and seeing this place as foreign are not tied together. The loyalty of those Members may be seen to be more towards the Republic of Ireland than the UK, but the Republic has a democratic system. Those Members have some problems in dealing with the argument within the institutions of the Republic. I would like to see the day when they are taken fully on board within the Republic of Ireland.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** May I take my hon. Friend back to the Oath? The general understanding of the Sinn Fein position is that its Members do not wish to take their seats in the British Parliament because they want a united Ireland and a Parliament there in which they could take part. The argument on this motion is fundamentally a democratic one about the rights of those Members to represent their constituents in the best way that they can. By denying them access to this building, we deny their constituents access to democratic representation.

**Mr. Barnes:** They should be here, but not just because of the rights that that would give them and those on whose behalf they speak. It is about the rights that we are given to deal with their position—a position that we should be capable of responding to.

**David Winnick:** Did not the Provisional IRA come into existence not to achieve democratic reforms in Northern Ireland, but for one reason and one reason only:

to bring about a united Ireland, against the wishes of the majority of people in Northern Ireland? Where is this united Ireland? Is it not as remote as it was 30 years ago? Why on earth do some people give the impression that the IRA has won a remarkable victory?

**Mr. Barnes:** Yes. The Belfast agreement essentially guarantees Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom, unless the people agree in a referendum to change it, and that is light years away. Unionism should recognise that it has gained a tremendous advantage from the situation. The Opposition continually argue that concession after concession has been made to Sinn Fein, but that is not the case. An overall position advantageous to Unionism has emerged from the agreement, and that must be recognised.

On occasion, attempts are made to push back Sinn Fein. For example, in my speech last night, I discussed the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, a Bill that is directed fundamentally against Sinn Fein, which manipulates and manoeuvres the electorate to get seats. It has not been ruled against by electoral courts, so its members still hold legitimate positions, but, in the end, if the issue is dealt with fully and properly in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein will win fewer seats.

If we take on the politics that I have described, I believe that we will overrun Sinn Fein so that constitutional nationalism, through the Social Democratic and Labour party, for instance, would be in a prominent position. The Labour party should be willing to organise in Northern Ireland to take those issues on and we should take the debate on measures that the House considers into the Province to argue the case.

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): I agree totally with my hon. Friend on that count—for many years, I have advocated restoring the Northern Ireland Labour party—but may I ask about another matter? I assume that he regards himself as my equal. Like me, he was elected by adult franchise and by a majority in his constituency according to an electoral system that he and I recognise. If he arrived in the House of Commons and found that, unfortunately, he was subject to one set of basic rules while another Member operated under a second and totally different set that offered some privileges without the work having to be done, what would be his response?

**Mr. Barnes:** Any elected Member is subject to the provisions that are being agreed to tonight and that are established generally. In some future situation, someone else, apart from Sinn Fein Members, might decide that he wants to operate in that peculiar way, but it is not a matter of fundamental constitutional or parliamentary principle that what is proposed should not occur.

I return to the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn). Traditionally, Sinn Fein would not take seats in the Republic of Ireland or in Stormont, but the situation has changed. The distorted principles that it held in the past have been influenced and altered, and it is willing to act to try to maximise its political advantage or to minimise disadvantages. Owing to that, it agreed to the position on putting some arms beyond use. It was under tremendous pressure and liable to lose very much financially and politically, so it has altered its views and attitudes. It is on the slippery slope over its past position and we should encourage that.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and his shadow had an argument about whether the motion is a matter of principle or of money. The shadow Secretary of State said that, in the end, it is a matter of principle, although it sounded to me as though it is about the money.

If it is about the money, I do not know what Sinn Fein is after. It is the richest political party in western Europe, and it has obtained its money by all sorts of devious and other means. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) that Sinn Fein Members should be obliged to make an entry in the Register of Members' Interests.

A number of Members have registered the fact that 25 per cent. or more of their election expenses came from certain organisations, such as trade unions in the case of various Labour Members. Where did 25 per cent. of Sinn Fein's money come from when its members stood for election? If Sinn Fein Members had to register such details, they should be subject to investigation, especially if—for all Members—we made investigation of such matters more rigorous. If we began to take account of some of the manoeuvres and manipulations in which the organisation has been involved, that would be a healthy development.

**Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): Did I mishear, or did the Leader of the House indeed say that no registration would be required because the Members had not taken their seats, and that although they were engaging in constituency advocacy and representation, they would not be subject to the same rules as other Members?

**Mr. Barnes:** Perhaps that could be clarified. I understood that those who had taken the Oath and had been Members for more than three months must then be included in the register. If that excludes Sinn Fein, the provision should be altered.

**Mr. Robin Cook:** Let me clear up this point. The provision does not exclude Sinn Fein, although my hon. Friend is right about the requirement for registration within three months of a Member's taking his seat. If registration were required of Sinn Fein Members, or indeed any other Members who did not take the Oath, it would have to take place three months after their election.

In response to an earlier intervention, let me add that those who do not take the Oath are bound by the same code of conduct as those who do, and are therefore required to accept investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. Not all the consequences of the motion might be equally welcome to the four Sinn Fein MPs.

**Mr. Barnes:** Some Members laughed during that intervention, but I think that such points about standards and arrangements are very important. Even if there is no general willingness to obey the rules, they will take on a new significance: they will begin to alter the shape of the activities in which the Members have been involved. That has already begun to happen in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive. If we can encourage it to happen here, we should take the chance.

**Mr. Michael Mates** (East Hampshire): Not for the first time, I fully agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman

*[Mr. Michael Mates]*

is saying. He makes an important point which, with respect, the Leader of the House has not properly answered. Nothing in the motion will change the current position whereby a Member who has not taken his seat is not required to make an entry in the Register of Members' Interests. I confirmed that today—Members may not know that the new register was published today. Under "Adams, Gerry" we see only:

"Mr. Adams has not taken his seat."

If the hon. Gentleman is trying to press the Leader of the House to change that as well—if the House passes the motion giving Sinn Fein Members these allowances—I am right behind him, and I think that most of the House will be as well.

**Mr. Barnes:** That matter should be taken on board. If it is not covered by the current arrangements, it should be. We are not doing it on this occasion because it might not be procedurally possible. If some of us had known of this debate a little earlier, we could have tabled the appropriate amendments. Nevertheless, it should be done as soon as possible. The measure on registration should apply to Sinn Fein Members as much as it applies to anyone else.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): I admire the hon. Gentleman's hope and optimism. He may be aware that the Electoral Commission has already published the expenses of the parties at the last general election, including the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats, but the figure for Sinn Fein accepted by the Electoral Commission is £8,000 or £9,000. How will the commission discover what was spent by Sinn Fein and bring that out into the open? Is it not time that we stopped pussyfooting around in the whole business?

**Mr. Barnes:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am in favour of the finances of Sinn Fein, the IRA, other paramilitary bodies and the parties linked to them being thoroughly investigated and seeing the light of day, and of taking action that flows from that against those organisations, but that is not the only tactic that we should be engaged in. We should not always engage in the tactic of pressure to get concessions, as it were. We should also be for pulling them into the political process.

The analogy between how the Labour party came out of the trade unions and how Sinn Fein as a political body came out of the IRA has some relevance. The Labour party started to change over time. It distanced itself from the trade unions—too much, some of us think. We want Sinn Fein, because it has been pulled into the political process, to begin to detach itself from what remains of the IRA. I suspect that the IRA will still be strong and involved in racketeering and mafia-type activity. Action will have to be taken at that time. We could reach a situation in which the organisations begin to be distinct and not inextricably interlinked, as they happen to be at the moment.

**Mr. Peter Kilfoyle** (Liverpool, Walton): I am a Liverpool, Irish, cradle Catholic. I happen to be inclined towards republicanism. I also aspire to a united Ireland, but I knew when I came in here that I would have to take an Oath of Allegiance. I also knew that the honour of being an MP was about representing not just Westminster in the constituency but the constituency in Westminster. Does it not denigrate hon. Members to suggest that there is an honourable role for people to act just as glorified social workers in their constituency, without their being held to account in this Chamber, with all the rules that go with it?

**Mr. Barnes:** Sinn Fein should be here and should be held to account. On a past occasion, I acted on behalf of a constituent in Belfast, West. I finished up getting what seemed to be a letter of safe conduct from Gerry Adams in connection with that, saying that it was okay to go ahead. I argued about that because he should be here doing his work, and checking and responding to the Executive, but it is a matter of how we achieve that situation. It will not occur dramatically.

It is all right for people such as me. I have reservations about the Oath and about the religious prayers that take place here each day, but I involve myself in them. I am not one of those people who sits down during prayers to show that I have a principled position. I will be a hypocrite, pray and turn around with everyone else even though I might not share those views. The Oath to the Crown is perhaps like that, but there are far more important and significant things to do. I wish that Northern Ireland politics was not so hung up on ideas, views and strict principles that can never be invaded, even though those views are sometimes despicable.

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** Will my hon. Friend acknowledge the point that I made to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies)? Is there not a difference between holding republican or atheistic views, such as those that my hon. Friend expressed, and standing for election and being elected on them, and then being asked to deny them to take a seat in this House?

**Mr. Barnes:** My hon. Friend's point was well put, and that is a particular problem. If principles, whatever they are, are writ large, people have difficulty moving beyond them. I believe in many different principles that all rub up against each other. On some occasions, I have to make difficult choices between them. I wish that that were the case for Sinn Fein and many other politicians in Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Hogg:** Building on the point made by the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), is not the way forward not to create two separate classes of Member, but to remove the Oath, either entirely or in the form in which it stands in the way of loyal, committed republicans honestly taking it? If we remove the Oath in its present form, Sinn Fein has no possible excuse for not sitting here, and its members can take up all their rights and obligations or none of them. What they cannot do is say that we are standing in their way.

**Mr. Barnes:** I have much sympathy for that point of view, because if not having the Oath made it easier for Members to take their seats, everybody would be on an equal footing. The argument of Sinn Fein Members would then be weakened. One could ask why they had taken their seats in the Republic of Ireland Parliament in a divided Ireland and in the Northern Ireland Assembly, but refused to take their seats in the UK Parliament.

They would, in time, take their seats here. If we accept the motion, we will make progress in that direction. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wishes to press for that change, I would support it, but it could build on the motion before us today.

**Mr. Frank Field:** My hon. Friend said that we should make it easy for people to take an Oath and enter the Commons. Surely we should have an Oath that concentrates on the essentials, which concern the way in which political affairs should be conducted in this country. That might be difficult for some people to take, but it would be essential for us to hold to. We need to put aside some aspects of the Oath that are not essential but that may be barriers to people taking it, and concentrate on what is essential. We should not make the test one of whether it is easy for people to take the Oath, but of whether the Oath is meaningful and reflects the democratic way of life that this Chamber represents.

**Mr. Barnes:** Either we need an Oath that relates to democracy and parliamentary activities or, as suggested by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), no Oath at all. Why have an Oath if people have been elected to the House through due procedure? Such people would have been elected by the majority of the electorate in their constituencies, and we should proceed on that basis.

It would have been possible to make a speech even if I had had no notes, because I have taken so many interventions. They have carried me along and made me think on my feet.

In conclusion, I shall describe my general political position, as it affects my attitude to the motion. It is sometimes argued that people who adopt my position are really Orangemen or Unionists. That is not the case. I happen to believe that there are many honourable and decent Unionists. We should be very concerned about the Unionist working class, and we should not parody Unionists as people in bowler hats walking in parades. We should understand the reality of their culture.

However, I am not green either. In the long run, the commercial and economic links between the north and south of Ireland might grow and people might decide to change the constitutional arrangements. That is up to them. I have neither a green agenda, nor an orange one. I feel that all the stuff about the border is trivial, and has been blown up into a great issue. It prevents us from discussing the bread-and-butter political issues that affect people's lives in working-class areas.

In different territories of Belfast, the streets are either red, white and blue or green, orange and white. Yet the people in those areas have much more in common with each other than they have in opposition to each other. Therefore, my colour is red, not green or orange. My position is that of the traditional democrat socialist: I believe in the essential unity of people, and especially of working-class people. I believe that their position in society should be raised, and that working-class Catholics and Protestants should live together.

In 1906, the Labour party—formerly the Labour Representation Committee—held its first conference in Belfast. The problem is that the party does not even organise in the city now. That is something to which we should return.

5.22 pm

**Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire): It is clear that the key question is whether it is acceptable to agree with the Government and provide office space and costs to Sinn Fein Members, or whether the idea is such a bad one that it justifies the Conservative party walking away from the bipartisan arrangement.

I and many other hon. Members accept that this is a vexed issue. Many hon. Members whom I respect—such as the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), and others among my hon. Friends on the Liberal Democrat Benches—have significant concerns about the principle involved in giving Sinn Fein Members these facilities when they are not required to take the Oath, and all that that entails.

The vote at the end of the debate will be free, and I suggest that the balance is in favour of approving the motion. The concerns about principle, valid though they may be, are outweighed by the benefit that would be done to the peace process. Crucially, they are outweighed by the fact that, at every stage in the negotiation of the normalisation of life in Northern Ireland, similar leaps of faith have had to be taken, and by parties of more than one colour.

**Mr. Hawkins:** Should not the hon. Gentleman be a little more realistic? He is the Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesman on Northern Ireland matters, and I am one of the security spokesmen for the Conservative party. We both know that the reality is that, even though tonight's vote may technically be described as free for members of other parties, the Government intend to insure that their payroll vote will force the matter through in a way that is wholly unconscionable. Will not the hon. Gentleman speak about the reality of the position in this House on this important matter?

**Lembit Öpik:** The reality is that it is not for me to pronounce on the internal organisation of the Labour party. I assure the hon. Gentleman that tonight's vote will be genuinely free for Liberal Democrat Members. I hope that my colleagues, when they make their decision, take into account my comments, as well as those of others. However, as an aside, I point out to the hon. Gentleman that it is curious that, although the motion is subject to a free vote among Conservative Members, it nevertheless has sufficient policy implications that the party feels able to walk away from the bipartisan agreement. I fail to understand how those two factors can coincide.

**Mr. Salter:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the official Opposition—the Conservative and Unionist party—might demur from the bipartisan approach to the Northern Ireland peace process as a result of understandable principles on such issues as the release of prisoners or lack of progress on decommissioning? Does he accept how inexplicable people over here and in Northern Ireland will find the fact that 30 years of bipartisan work is being torn up over the principle of a desk, an office space and access to a photocopier?

**Lembit Öpik:** The hon. Gentleman and I take the same position. There is a fundamental contradiction, however, in the Conservative spokespeople on Northern Ireland

*[Lembit Öpik]*

pretending that their party has a free vote and yet pronouncing, hours before the debate is even held and before they have seen how their colleagues vote, that they will walk away from the bipartisan agreement.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** The explanation is simple. Much to our regret, we have found it impossible to support or, often, even to understand Government policy in recent weeks. They have made no attempt to explain it to us either privately or in the House of Commons. The hon. Gentleman has heard me ask questions that go to the heart of this and other proposals for Northern Ireland to which we have not had responses. It is not the case that we have walked away from bipartisanship because of this issue, or, indeed, that we have walked away from bipartisanship at all. The Government have made it impossible for us to be bipartisan. This is just one of a series of endless and apparently uncontrolled concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA.

Conservative Members always have a free vote on House of Commons issues, and this is essentially a House of Commons issue. It is, however, one of the many contexts in which the Government have given us great grounds for anxiety about the course on which they are launched in negotiating the completion of the peace process in Northern Ireland.

**Lembit Öpik:** That serves to confirm that either the hon. Gentleman is not aware of his pronouncements in the press or that he is choosing to redefine what a free vote means. He specifically stated in the press that Conservative Members were walking away from the bipartisan agreement explicitly because of the decision that they anticipated would be made tonight.

The hon. Gentleman is perfectly entitled to say that he speaks for the Conservative party. As I am a Liberal and enjoy an eclectic political approach, perhaps I should join the Conservative party. It seems that a free vote is not a free vote and that Front-Bench Members can say whatever they like because the free vote really belongs to them.

**Mr. Davies:** I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is quoting, but he is not quoting me. If he had listened to what I just said, he would understand what our policy is. If he has some other quotation, let him put it to me. There may be some speculation about my position, but whatever has been said is not a direct quote from me.

**Lembit Öpik:** My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) tells me that he heard the hon. Gentleman on the radio.

I think that I have made my point, and Members can draw their own conclusion.

**Mr. Robin Cook:** Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. On its front page, *The Daily Telegraph*—which is daily reading for me—says:

"the Tories said they were pulling the plug on the principle of cross-party support".

That appears to be in the context of what *The Daily Telegraph* helpfully says is an interview with

"the shadow Northern Ireland secretary".

Either the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) made what I am sure was an error in misleading *The Daily Telegraph* as to what the Conservative party was doing or he has had second thoughts since that interview.

**Lembit Öpik:** I can see that the hon. Gentleman wishes to say something. If he wishes to intervene on me, I am happy to give way again.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to correct what the Leader of the House has said. The right hon. Gentleman did not quote my words, which are quite properly quoted—except for one wrong word—on page 4 of *The Daily Telegraph*. The words in inverted commas are properly attributed to me, except for one, and I stand by them. I am not responsible for any press comment on that interview or anything else.

**Lembit Öpik:** I knew that the anti-terrorism legislation was pernicious, but if it is so powerful that the Government have managed to win over the heart and mind of *The Daily Telegraph*, that is indeed worrying. I have made my point, the hon. Gentleman has tried to respond and the House can draw its own conclusions.

I assume that to walk away from bipartisanship does not mean walking away from the shared goal of peace. I hope to convince hon. Members—on the Liberal Democrat Benches and elsewhere—that, at heart, the judgment that we should make tonight is whether the motion will so help peace and improve the chances for a sustained and normalised political environment that it is worth the risks and the emotional costs involved. The real debate is thus whether such a precedent—it is indeed a precedent—is acceptable in the context of the big picture in Northern Ireland that we must always bear in mind.

I hope that the House will accept the following point in the spirit in which it is intended. The debate has thrown into sharp focus for the entire House a matter that is often debated by a small and experienced number of Members—perhaps 20 or 30—who are often in the Chamber. We are really discussing a snapshot of the point that we have reached in the peace process. The discussion of the need to do things in a new way is not a new principle.

Having criticised the Conservatives for walking away from bipartisanship, I now offer the House three examples of momentous precedents set by the Conservative party in the pursuit of peace. Hon. Members will remember the stress and the history of the Anglo-Irish agreement. Although we all accept the strength of the relationship that now exists between Dublin and Westminster, let us not forget that it was almost non-existent before the advent of that agreement.

The Anglo-Irish agreement was instituted at a time when the Dublin Government claimed a constitutional hold over Northern Ireland—that they had a constitutional mandate to reunify Ireland. Who was the person who pushed through that agreement? It was Margaret Thatcher—not regarded as a republican icon in any quarter. Why did she promote the agreement? Because in her judgment—and to her credit—and in the judgment of her Government, the potential loss of popularity was more than outweighed by the benefits to the peace process.

The second precedent was created by another former Conservative Prime Minister, John Major. He picked up the phone and spoke to the IRA at a time when they were not even on a ceasefire. When he was holding those conversations, which had been—as we have already heard—going on for some time, the IRA were bombing, maiming and killing, and destroying property as part of what they considered a war.

Was John Major an apologist for the IRA? Absolutely not. The reason that he took what turned out to be a courageous and laudable decision was that, in his judgment, it was the right one to secure the ultimate goal of peace. I said during our debate last night—as I have said many times in the Chamber—that John Major's great contribution to the House was the series of decisions that he took, initially in private, which he then made public, to negotiate with individuals who had never been involved in the decision-making process.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman and I am most impressed by his argument. However, can he offer me a single instance—just one—of evidence that the important change that we propose to make tonight will produce the kind of result that he is talking about?

**Lembit Öpik:** I am describing unique and unprecedented incidents and arguing that the proposal falls into the same category: it is a new and unique opportunity to set a further precedent. I fully accept the hon. Lady's implication: a risk is involved—as there was on those previous occasions. However, I want to show the House that whenever we have taken such risks—although they may not have been justifiable at the time—they were worth it in the longer term.

**David Winnick:** When a Conservative Secretary of State for Northern Ireland made a statement regarding contacts with the IRA, I do not recall that any Conservative Member objected to what was being proposed—perhaps hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench would care to listen to my remarks. Is not it true that the only Conservative who resigned from a Government position over the Anglo-Irish agreement was Ian Gow, who was to be foully murdered by the IRA? No other Minister considered it appropriate to resign.

**Lembit Öpik:** The hon. Gentleman's intervention simply serves to show that, to the credit of the Conservative party and others in the House, it was decided that the interests of Northern Ireland exceeded the party political gain to be made from taking an opportunistic shot at the then Government. Furthermore, they were vindicated in taking that decision.

The third example closely relates to what happened last night. In 1997, when John Major was still the Prime Minister and Conservative Members occupied the Government Benches, they passed an amnesty on handing in weapons under which paramilitary organisations and terrorists would not be prosecuted for handing in their guns. Let us remember that that took place in a political vacuum—there was no Good Friday agreement, nor any guarantee that there would be any lasting ceasefire, yet, once again, John Major set a precedent in Northern Ireland's recent history. He did so because he believed that the risk of setting that precedent—letting people off the hook and, by implication, letting people off the principle of being prosecuted for being terrorists—was more than outweighed by the benefit.

**Mr. Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove): I have been following my hon. Friend's argument carefully, and I agree with much of it, but does he not agree that it would be much to the benefit of the House if some of the issues raised so far in the debate were taken forward by the Leader of the House, particularly those relating to the Oath, Members' interests and the possible reimposition of the terms of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 on the financing and management of Northern Ireland parties?

**Lembit Öpik:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, and the Minister would be advised to respond to it in his summation at the end of the debate. Some very important issues have been raised—for example, by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes)—and I shall say a few words about them in a little while.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) said that there has been no reciprocation, but those three examples provide evidence to show that the risks that the Conservative Government took were paid back in clear and definitive results. I am sure that the Anglo-Irish agreement was the forerunner to the decision by the south of Ireland to abandon, eventually by referendum, its constitutional claim to Northern Ireland. That momentous decision would not have been taken if the Conservative Government and Margaret Thatcher had not driven forward that decision at an earlier stage.

On the secret talks on terrorism, I am pretty certain that the Good Friday agreement would not have been reached if the former Conservative Government had not had the courage to make progress, first in secret and then in public. Once again, there is clear evidence—albeit circumstantial—that that was justified.

I am absolutely certain that the limited movement on arms in October 2001, which has led to the first important, albeit symbolic, act of decommissioning by the IRA would not have occurred without the amnesty which was launched in 1997. If the risk is tested against the result in each of those three examples, we can put a tick in the box and say that the risk was vindicated on all three occasions.

The process is not new. It is a little known fact that in 1972 Gerry Adams and other republican prisoners—

**Mr. David Trimble** (Upper Bann): Internees.

**Lembit Öpik:** I am sorry. Internees were flown to London for secret talks with Secretary of State Whitelaw to find out whether progress could be made. I hope that I have clearly shown that such precedents often produce results in Northern Ireland.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) said that a strong stance leads to progress, but on what basis? Each of those three events was an act of good faith, and each produced howls of protest in the Chamber, uncertainty among Northern Ireland's politicians for very good reasons and discomfort within the Government, yet each event led to breakthroughs that have brought us very close to peace.

The issue is not whether this proposal is a precedent but whether this precedent conforms to the criteria that caused previous Governments to take comparable risks.

*[Lembit Öpik]*

I would argue that it does and that the points raised by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford do not stand up to scrutiny when they are compared with the earlier practical precedents. Furthermore, the claim that that view has a basis of principle was clearly undermined by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who pointed out that, in large part, we are returning to circumstances that prevailed for half the entire term of the previous Conservative Administrations—for nine years—without being amended. Therefore, in fairness to those on the Conservative Front Bench, I must assume that they are willing to listen to arguments about practicality.

To return to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), certain issues need to be resolved. There is confusion as to whether Elizabeth Filkin will have a binding power to scrutinise the new Members. Will the Minister respond on that point and, if she does not have that power, will he assure us that the position will be amended in due course? However, as Unionist Members have pointed out, some fear that Mrs. Filkin risks being put verifiably beyond use.

The issue of confidence-building measures on both sides came up in the debate last night. Those who have most justification for being deeply concerned by the proposal are those on the Unionist Benches. They are on the front-line of Northern Ireland politics and they—not us—have had to put up with many concessions, perceived concessions and reconciliation and so forth.

By taking some of the heat ourselves, we are, to some extent, making amends for the enormous pressures that we have put on Northern Ireland's politicians. This proposal is not a new concept for Northern Ireland or for Stormont and, if we feel some discomfort, it is only a fraction of that felt in Northern Ireland as we caused a political settlement to take place that mandatorily required cross-party support and cross-party alliance. It is telling that that cross-party alliance led 100 per cent. of the nationalists and republicans in Stormont to vote to maintain the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)—a Unionist—in the post of First Minister. *[Interruption.]* I can hear the delight and joy as hon. Members behind me recall that wonderful occasion, but the achievement of Stormont is that it has achieved some form of reconciliation. I suggest that we are now taking on a small share of that process.

The amendments to the motion can be categorised in three classes: requirements about the Oath, requirements about renouncing violence and requirements about decommissioning. On the first class, Liberal Democrats feel that there is a strong case to move forward on the Oath, and I have heard other Members also express that view. I seek guidance from the Minister on what plans there might be to tackle that issue. However, I doubt whether simply changing the Oath will overcome the strong principled objection to the republicans sitting in the House. However, let us remember that history shows us that they have been here before.

On the second class of amendments, no one wants individuals who celebrate violence in this place. However, this proposal is hardly a green light for anyone coming here to use it as a base to promote violent activities. I doubt whether anyone in their right mind would seriously suggest that a terrorist organisation would have the audacity or even the stupidity to do that from within the curtilage of the House.

On the point about decommissioning, I believe that this proposal will be a driver to decommissioning. One of the tests of success is whether decommissioning proceeds, and we will be sorely let down by the republican movement if it fails to deliver arms on the basis of such concessions.

**Mr. Gummer:** The hon. Gentleman mentions three classes of amendment, but is there not a fourth class? It tries, perhaps unsuccessfully, to make the important point that being a Member of Parliament is not just about doing the things that we all want to do, and care about doing, on behalf of our constituents as we look after their taxation needs and the like, but about playing a part in the House. The allowances are provided for both those activities. To apply them specifically to one activity makes a statement about the nature of the House that many of us, who are not known to be supporters of the extreme Unionist position, find distasteful.

**Lembit Öpik:** The right hon. Gentleman, whom I greatly respect on many issues, rightly outlines the principal objection. If hon. Members believe that that objection is so great that they cannot go along with the motion, despite the perceived benefits that I suggest will accrue for the peace process, it would be principled for them to vote against it. I am simply saying that that is not where I stand, and I encourage my hon. Friends to take the same view. It is unarguable that the right hon. Gentleman raises an important consideration; if it were not, the debate would not be so charged.

If Sinn Fein Members were totally cynical, they could take the Oath now and receive all the benefits, together with the salary. The fact is that they have not. I believe that we are discussing a halfway house that might one day lead them to take their places here. More than anything, however, it will stitch them closely into the parliamentary procedures of the Chamber, which will cause them to moderate their behaviour and to recognise that any return to violence will be hugely damaging to their public image both on the mainland and among the electorate to whom they are attempting to appeal.

Let us also recognise that an enormous bitterness surrounds Northern Ireland politics. As human beings, we have human feelings about, for example, Airey Neave, the 300-plus police who have been killed in Northern Ireland and the thousands of casualties. The House would be a worse place if we did not have those feelings. However, we are at the juncture at which we should draw a line between the past and the future, and this measure is a watershed in that process. The emotional pressure that many people feel is understandable. The frustration about where we might be heading is genuine and we must make judgments accordingly. However, reconciliation is a "doing" word. It is a mutual act that is hard precisely because it begins with one side negotiating with those whom it hates and who, ultimately, have to reciprocate.

We could demonise Sinn Fein and the leaders of the republican movement, although every time that we have done so we have caused a retrenchment and sometimes a recruitment drive in those organisations. Alternatively, we could subjugate our feelings to our values and ask whether

this is another opportunity to build on the precedents set by the Conservative Government and this Government. I do not suggest that the world will end if we do not do that, nor do I suggest that peace and decommissioning will be secured tomorrow if we do. However, I ask hon. Members to consider whether the principal objection that the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) outlined is so great that it precludes us from taking a further risk. If hon. Members think that, there is not much more that I can say to them, because the alternative is to take that risk in this free vote.

Incidentally, unlike the Conservatives, we will not pull out of the agreement even if the Liberal Democrat vote goes against my recommendation. We will continue to play a positive and proactive part with all sides and all players, whatever the outcome tonight. Ironically, the debate has occurred simply because we have not had an opportunity to discuss the subject before, but it was inevitable that we would have to face it. This degree of cynicism is no longer appropriate.

That is all I want to say. I shall respect what my colleagues do, but I sincerely hope that we prove, in our vote tonight, that reconciliation is not something that we force on the politicians and people of Northern Ireland and then leave at the door of the House when we come here to debate the very same matters.

5.50 pm

**Mr. Clive Soley** (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): As the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) suggested, the debate has two broad strands—the rights of Members who stood for election on the basis of not taking their seat in this place, and the Northern Ireland peace process. Although I regard the first factor as important and deserving of careful debate and scrutiny, the second overrides it by far. On that basis, I shall urge all my hon. Friends to vote for the motion.

There is a long history to the debate into which, obviously, it would not be appropriate to go, but I say to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) that the fundamental flaw at the heart of his argument is one that the Conservative party has made a number of times, and it concerns the political judgment to be made. That judgment is about whether we want the peace process to go forward. The flaw in his argument led him into difficulty when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland asked him about the principle versus the money. The Conservative party has at times taken a view of the whole problem instead of a single part of it. Every now and then, it lurches back into looking at a small part, which is what it is doing today.

I remember my earliest involvement in Northern Ireland issues in the House in the early 1980s, after the horrors of the dirty protest and the hunger strike. Jim Prior, now Lord Prior, was in my judgment probably the best Secretary of State that Northern Ireland had under that Government, or indeed under previous Governments. He made dramatic progress because he recognised, as a number of us had been arguing for many years, that neither the Unionists nor the republicans could overturn what was desired by both the British and Irish Governments acting in union, and that what was required to sort out the complex problems of Northern Ireland was a joint agreement between Ireland and Britain.

It was Lord Prior who achieved that agreement. He sat on the Government Front Bench, and I on the Opposition Front Bench, late into the night, night after night, and he was being driven to the wall by the late Enoch Powell and all the Unionists. I would rally what few troops I had—there were usually only one or two of us about at 3 o'clock in the morning—to support the Conservative Government when it came to a vote. We did that because we knew that the process was going in the right direction, even though we might have had individual disagreements about the way in which it was achieved.

I knew early on that, quite apart from the horrors of the hunger strike and the dirty protest, not only would those events be a publicity disaster for Britain but they would not help Sinn Fein in the long run. The way out of the trap was to achieve the classic British fudge, which I and others had been suggesting for some time, of refusing to give the prisoners political status, which would have been utterly wrong, while making certain concessions, such as allowing them to wear civilian clothes, which we had already given prisoners on this side of the water regardless of why they had committed their offence.

We might describe the proposal tonight as a British fudge—I do not care whether we do or not. The principle that we are concerned with here, of sorting out the nightmarish problems of Northern Ireland, is more important than whether there are slight inconsistencies in the use of the allowances paid to Members of the House.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** Why, then, does not the motion make it clear that we are talking not about the House of Commons but about a concession for the House that has political implications way beyond our shores, and which should be regarded not as something that affects the House but as a matter relating to Irish politics? There is no indication of that anywhere on the Order Paper.

**Mr. Soley:** My hon. Friend is right, but as I said at the beginning of my remarks, there are two strands to this matter. I shall turn in a moment to the second strand, which might satisfy her, but only to a limited extent. We cannot approach the motion without bearing in mind the overall political context. I make to my hon. Friend the same point that I made to the Conservative party: if we make that mistake again, we will lurch back into the problems that the Conservative Government got into several times when dealing with Northern Ireland. They got stuck on a detail, instead of looking to the long term.

Some of those problems have been referred to already. I remember the Conservative Government having secret talks with the IRA, never mind Sinn Fein. I supported them in that because in my view the talks were necessary and a good idea. The Government were in difficulty with their own side partly because they were reliant for their survival, at that stage, on Unionist votes, and because they could not themselves, as a party, face the difficulty of crossing that bridge. It was a difficult bridge to cross, just as the release of prisoners was difficult. No one should doubt the difficulty of these issues.

There is something else that we in this House, rather than people in Northern Ireland, need to remember: that both Unionists and republicans have made incredible concessions. We ought to respect that. The concessions that they have made could not have been predicted 20 years ago. They became a little more predictable recently. I turn now to some of those concessions because they return us to the core of the motion.

*[Mr. Soley]*

There is a process whereby Sinn Fein, in particular, and some Unionist paramilitary groups, are moving, hesitantly and at times in contradictory ways, towards accepting the democratic process and rejecting violence. There are very few examples in history of such organisations renouncing violence overnight and sticking with that promise. It is almost always a messy, unpleasant, inconsistent and dishonest process, but it is a process, and that is why the phrase "peace process" is so important and why I tell people to keep that in mind.

**Mr. Stunell:** I am following what the hon. Gentleman says, and I agree with him very much. Does he agree, however, that the peace process can go forward or backward, but that it cannot remain stationary, which is one good reason for moving it forward tonight?

**Mr. Soley:** I was going to say that the one thing that Northern Ireland cannot afford to do is to stand still. It stood still for hundreds of years, which did it nothing but damage. At times, we all look across the water at Northern Ireland and think, "This couldn't possibly be Britain." As I used to point out to Sinn Fein, 10 or 15 years ago, nor could it be southern Ireland, because southern Ireland had changed. Britain had changed too, but the idea that Northern Ireland, whether Unionist or republican, was like Britain or Ireland was becoming a nonsense. The more that Northern Ireland dug itself into the violence and hatred, the more different it got. One of the core problems was that we had to pull Northern Ireland out of that process.

I turn now to the second strand of the issue, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) referred. If I were pushed, I would say that there is a difficulty about how far we make concessions about the facilities that MPs can use, even if they got themselves elected on the basis of not taking their seats. There is no great point of principle. This is an argument about where the line should be drawn. More importantly, rather than getting bogged down on the question of whether Members are representing their constituents—a fair point made in an intervention—we should address a different argument that links the matter straight back into the peace process. That argument is that Sinn Fein will move.

In the past, I have made certain predictions about where the Unionists will end up and where the republicans will end up. I have been wrong on both scores at times, but I have also been right on several occasions. I make another prediction tonight: that within about four years, Sinn Fein Members will be taking their seats on those Benches. *[Interruption.]* Let me tell the House why I say that. I have seen statements from Sinn Fein saying that its Members will not take their seats even if we change the Oath, and I shall return to the Oath. When members of Sinn Fein told me that, they did so with the same intensity that they told me they would never take seats in the Stormont Assembly—that they would never accept the idea of a united Ireland by consent because that would mean a Unionist veto. They said that they would stay with the bullet and the ballot box, or the Armalite and the ballot box, until the British were driven out of Ireland. That did not happen and they accepted the present situation.

In saying all those things, I do not wish to underestimate or understate the concessions made by the Unionists. I recognise how far they have moved, especially in recent years. People on the ground in Northern Ireland—the Unionist population—are changing. Seeing them used to make me sad because they seemed to be trapped in the past. Now, however, they are emerging from that and, although their progress is slow and painful, they are moving, and we must help them with that.

The issue of the Oath is important. When I served on the Modernisation Committee three or four years ago, I put it to members of the Committee that we ought to change the Oath. I proposed not that we get rid of the existing one, but that alongside it should run an oath that would enable Members to swear allegiance to the democratic process of Parliament.

Many countries have accepted such an oath. In fact, we have drawn up such oaths for them—it is not the first example of our writing other constitutions rather better than we wrote our own. People ought to have a choice. When I served on the Modernisation Committee I made the point—I think that Baroness Boothroyd refers to it in her book—that such an oath would assist in getting Sinn Fein into the House. I said so because wider issues were involved; it was daft that people such as the late Willie Hamilton should come to the House, take an Oath of Allegiance to the Queen, then stand up in the Chamber and denounce every aspect of the British royal family. That is a contradiction for many Scottish nationalists; it is anomalous that many Members on both sides of the House should have to take the Oath in that way.

Although my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House was right to separate the issue of the Oath from today's debate and vote, it would be a mistake to lose sight of the underlying argument.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Will my hon. Friend reflect on the view of the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) that it may be better to have no oath at all? We would simply be elected to Parliament and declared elected by the returning officer. That would be the end of it; we would then get on with the job.

**Mr. Soley:** That is possible, although there may be value in showing a commitment to the parliamentary and democratic process.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** We could be nominated, then.

**Mr. Soley:** That might be enough, but dictators have emerged in Parliament; it might be a little easier for them to take over if people have not signed up to the democratic process. One can argue about whether or not such an oath is important; most of us who believe in a democratic process should not have any difficulty in taking it. Sinn Fein argues that it is in favour of the democratic process. One can question whether or not it—or, indeed, many Unionist paramilitary groups—has been in favour of it over the years, but it is moving towards that position. The fact that members of Sinn Fein are taking their seats in Stormont, when they said that they would not, and are serving as Ministers, when they said that they would not, indicates that that is happening.

**Mr. Edward Garnier** (Harborough): First, would it not be more intellectually honest of the Government to debate

the Oath or whatever affirmation is required of Members of Parliament, and then come to the debate that we are now having? Secondly, would it not be more intellectually honest of them to deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and refer not to the facilities of the House but step 54 of the peace process?

**Mr. Soley:** It would have been more intellectually honest of former Prime Minister John Major to say that he was having secret talks with the IRA. At the beginning of my speech I said that two things were being held up for judgment: the process by which people take their seats and receive support, and the question of Northern Ireland. I made it clear that although there may be problems with people taking their seats, taxpayers' support and so on, in such a situation we should do something that the British are good at. We should say, "In these circumstances, certain inconsistencies are involved, but there is a greater political gain because we are engaged in a peace process that is helping the people of Northern Ireland enormously."

That is profoundly important. If one sets the issue in that context, it is a mistake to get hung up on the absolutes of black and white, putting things in little boxes and insisting that they stay there. The issue could, by all means, be blurred; if one tries to run politics by logic alone, one inevitably ends up fighting, not least because one person's logic is another person's contradiction.

**Mr. Gummer:** I subscribed very much to the case that the hon. Gentleman has been arguing until he came to the question of how to solve the problem. If there is a genuine problem with the Oath, it should be addressed; otherwise, the issue is about dual Members of Parliament. We are talking about something serious; the wrong issue has been addressed to take the peace process further forward.

**Mr. Soley:** First, the issue is not big enough to get in the way of the wider interests of the Northern Ireland peace process. Moreover, the question of how to move on that is not critically important to the Oath. If members of Sinn Fein were here now and I asked them whether they would take their seats in the House of Commons if we changed the Oath so that they did not swear allegiance to the British Crown, they would say, "No, we will not, because we want to be part of a united Ireland, and this is the wrong place." They would say that, just as a relatively short time ago—perhaps four, five or six years ago—they told me that they would not take their seats in a Stormont Assembly set up by the British. Well, we set up the Assembly and they took their seats; they do their job, some of them are Ministers, and they work with the Unionists.

We must keep things in perspective. One cannot run politics by logic alone—at the end of the day, one has to make judgments about what is best. I shall leave my judgment with the House. We ought to change the Oath, because that would help to keep the process moving and would help us to put more pressure on Sinn Fein Members to take their seats, as I predict they will in a few years' time. We should change it because that is the right thing to do for the peace process in Northern Ireland and, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said, there is no great principle at stake. I accept that there is a difficult question about the right thing to do with people who have stood for election on the basis that they will not take their seats. Although there is a messy argument about that, frankly, the problem is not big enough to justify great displays of opposition, breaking cross-party agreements and so on. I am not totally opposed to parties at times expressing opposition on Northern Ireland—it is sometimes necessary to do so, and I have done so myself—but we should not do so on an issue of such insignificance.

6.8 pm

**Sir Brian Mawhinney** (North-West Cambridgeshire): I made my maiden speech in a debate on Northern Ireland. In the succeeding twenty-two and a half years, I have had the privilege of attending more Northern Ireland debates than most people in the House.

Virtually all those debates were characterised by the way in which the word "principle" came to dominate the discussion. Seldom do Members want to elevate their views to a matter of principle on virtually anything that we talk about in the House—except in Northern Ireland debates. We quickly got into matters of principle this afternoon; I should like to back out of that cul-de-sac as quickly as possible. I remind the House—I have no delusions of grandeur, so it will need reminding—that I was the first Minister involved in the peace process. On Valentine's day 1989, Tom King gave a speech in Belfast in which he said that he would ask me to initiate discussions with the political parties to see if there was any way forward. That was the start of the process. If I had stood up the following day in Belfast and said, "In 12 years, there will be a Northern Ireland Assembly, there will be an Executive, an Ulster Unionist will be the First Minister, an SDLP member will be the Deputy First Minister and Sinn Fein Members will serve—perhaps uncomfortably, but serve—in that Executive", the Secretary of State would have withdrawn me from the process the day afterwards and put somebody else in my place, and both sides of the House would have acclaimed his wisdom.

Here we are, 12 years and two Governments later, with that process—that achievement—in place. That achievement necessitated the taking of risk. Most, if not all, of the parties in the House can legitimately put up their hands and say, "We played our part. We took risks in that process." Some of those risks worked and some did not, but more worked than did not, which is why we are where we are today. I played my small part in that process.

It helps to underline for the House why in opposition I have maintained my consistent support for the peace process and the Belfast agreement. I did so because of the bipartisan approach. It was enormously important that the people of the United Kingdom and the people of Northern Ireland should understand that it did not matter who was in government at Westminster; there was a commitment to them and for them.

That is why I intervened in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) to say that that principle seems to me—I have used the word, and I intend to use it only once—to be still of paramount importance. The hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) was right. He did criticise us when we were in government. He sat on the Opposition Front Bench and I sat on the

*[Sir Brian Mawhinney]*

Government Front Bench, and from time to time he was aggressive in his bipartisanship. We had a good healthy debate, but I did not call into question his fundamental commitment, and I hope that he does not call mine into question today.

I shall not vote in support of the motion tabled by the Leader of the House. There are problems associated with it. Had the Government wanted to move forward in the spirit that I outlined at the beginning of my speech, they could have done so, but they chose not to. My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford is right. I have not taken many opportunities in the House to be critical of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but had he initiated some dialogue around the issues and offered some explanation, that would have helped the House immeasurably to come to a calmer judgment than is likely to be the case by 10 o'clock tonight or whenever we vote. However, the right hon. Gentleman chose not to do that.

The Government have made an even more fundamental mistake. There is no doubt that the subject of the debate is one of a number of issues that have arisen out of secret discussions between the Government and Sinn Fein. The Government are perfectly entitled—indeed, in my judgment it is right—to have secret discussions from time to time with political parties, particularly Sinn Fein. I have no problem with the fact that secret discussions have taken place. The problem arises from the fact that the Government have not told anybody what emerged from those secret discussions, much less tried to explain it.

Instead, the Government have adopted a salami approach to policy. They produce one measure which they know that the House will not much like, and they argue, as the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush has just argued, that that is not big enough to put the whole peace process at risk, so the House must support it. Just as the House holds its nose and supports the measure, along come the Government with another one—no explanation, no justification and no indication of whether it is No. 2 on a list of two, five, 10 or 20.

We go through the same motions. Hon. Members on both sides, but particularly on the Government side, say that the measure is not worth putting the whole peace process at risk, so the House is invited to support it. Blow me, before we get through that, the next one comes. It is rather like buses—one waits for ages and nothing happens, then they come one after another.

The Government have got themselves into difficulty this evening in part because they have not been willing to be straightforward and honest with the House. The House does not know what the Government's agenda is or what Sinn Fein's agenda is. If I may respectfully say so to the hon. Gentlemen on the Front Bench—even worse, the House does not know what the combined agenda is. That contributes to the sense of alienation produced by motions like the one before us.

We have had much debate this evening about the Oath. Hon. Members will be pleased to know that I do not intend to participate in that debate. I am just a simple Belfast boy. We have an Oath; it is a requirement for membership of the House. What may or may not happen in the future is, for the purposes of the motion, totally irrelevant. The Oath exists in its present form. I swore it, the Leader of the House swore it, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland swore it, my hon. Friend the shadow spokesman swore it—we all swore it.

**Mr. Hogg:** Is not my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) right, and am I not right in my suggestion to those on the Government Front Bench, that one of the chief criticisms of the Government's approach to the motion is that they failed to address the question of the Oath first? For many of us, the problem of the Oath should be addressed before there is any ad hominem disapplication of rules in the case of Sinn Fein.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** As my right hon. and learned Friend knows, I hold both him and my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) in high regard and I have frequently benefited from their wisdom. I shall not get into that debate tonight, because whatever the Government should or should not have done, we are faced with the Oath in its present form, and it will not change between now and 10 o'clock. If it does, that will be the story for the "Today" programme.

It has already been said that that constitutes a major problem for Sinn Fein. To it, this is a foreign Parliament. Given that it is a foreign Parliament, I am not entirely clear why Sinn Fein wants to be a part of it, but it alleges that it does. The Leader of the House—I think it was the Leader of the House—drew attention to its focus on abstention and absenteeism. Sinn Fein did not wish to be part of anything. When it said "ourselves alone", boy, did it mean it! Now, Sinn Fein is involved in the Dail, it is involved in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and it would like to be involved in the Westminster Parliament. The difference is that it wants to change the rules to be involved here, as compared with the rules in the Dail and the Northern Ireland Assembly. I hold the Leader of the House in much higher regard than to believe for one moment that he does not understand that. I hope, therefore, that he will take in a spirit of generosity the suggestion that that is one of a number of points in his speech on which he was, at best, disingenuous. However, we ought not to be disingenuous; we should face up to the reality, which is that that is the issue.

Why, then, is so much heat generated by the motion? It seems of no little significance that the thread of violence has run through this debate from its inception and will continue until its conclusion. For what we are talking about is welcoming into this Chamber or Palace people whose hands are dirty with the blood of others. Three Members of this House were killed by the IRA. Some of us have been the focus of personalised and determined assassination attempts. I still recall the evening when I sat in Londonderry and, to my surprise, saw my photograph on the evening news while the newsreader said that the IRA had announced a few minutes before that it had decided not to assassinate the Education Minister during his visit to Londonderry, on the grounds that innocent passers-by would be injured. This debate cannot be separated from that thread of violence.

**David Winnick:** The record of the IRA is known to all of us and to their numerous victims, of whom there are hundreds, if not thousands; but if the yardstick is the record of murderous violence, surely the issue would be the same if the Members in question were to take the

Oath. Whether they have office facilities without coming into the Chamber or otherwise, the issue would be the same. Surely the point is that, whether we like it or not, they were elected as Members of Parliament and that is a fact of life.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, whom I hold in regard on Northern Ireland matters, in the middle of making my point. Perhaps it might have been more helpful if I had waited until I had finished doing so. I wanted to establish that when we debate these matters, the issue of violence is not far from the surface, but I was about to say that if that issue were the only criterion, there would not be a Northern Ireland Assembly today. It is not the only criterion, and it is not a sufficient criterion, given the progress that has been made in the past few years. I think that he will also accept, however, that human beings find it very difficult to switch off from issues of violence.

Before I entered the Chamber this afternoon, I was approached—it was completely unsought—by a number of secretaries who had been working in this Palace when the bomb went off. Their message was, "We don't know, Brian, whether you intend to speak, but if you do, would you tell your colleagues that a number of us who work here are extremely nervous, concerned and unhappy about the prospect of the motion being agreed to this evening, because we have had contact with these people in the past?" I agree with the hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) that violence is not of itself a sufficient criterion—so what is sufficient?

What this debate should be about is whether this House is willing to countenance a two-tier Member system. In my time on the Government Front Bench, I had the privilege of being a Minister of State in the Department of Health. I see some Labour Members who used to upbraid me because Conservative health policy, as they saw it, led to a two-tier health service—of course, they were quite wrong—which was anathema to them. I find it difficult to understand why two-tier representation in this Chamber is not even more of an anathema than an allegedly two-tier health service.

Northern Ireland is the background to this debate, but the issue is simple: should all Members be equal in terms of their responsibility, the facilities that they enjoy and the influence that they can exert, or should some be more equal than others?

**Mr. Eric Joyce** (Falkirk, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** No, I have almost finished, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for not doing so.

Let me refer to what the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush said; this is a parliamentary debate, so I am responding to the last speech made before mine. I think that I wrote down his comments correctly. He said that the issue tonight was not big enough to endanger the peace process and that we should therefore vote with the Government so as not to put the process at risk. Where have I heard that before? I want to tell the House that this issue is not big enough to put the peace process at risk and Sinn Fein will not put it at risk if it does not get this motion. It is for that reason and on that analysis, and on the basis of reaffirming the importance of a bipartisan approach in general but with scope specifically to disagree from time to time, that I disagree with the Government on the motion and will not support them in the Lobby.

6.20 pm

**Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I am very pleased to follow the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney). Indeed, I am also pleased to be unmuzzled, as this is the first time that I have spoken on Northern Ireland since Labour was in opposition, because of my duties as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the last Parliament.

**Mr. Hogg:** Freedom.

**Helen Jackson:** Yes—freedom to speak in a debate that has been thoughtful and interesting, and significant in the context of the many debates in the House to which I listened during the last Parliament.

I have considerable reservations and questions about the issue with which the motion deals, but I am determined to look at it, as I am a good constitutionalist who believes in the democracy that we enjoy here in this House and in its value to all of us here. I do so primarily from two points of view. First, I am not terribly interested in the people who represent the people of Northern Ireland, but I am very interested in the responsibility that we all have as Members of the House of Commons for the life, peace, political process and economic well-being of the people who live in that part of the United Kingdom, so I think that it is their interests that we have to consider first. My second guiding principle in addressing the matter is that of whether voting for the motion will ensure political progress and a continuation of the unsatisfactory but relative peace and ceasefires that that part of the United Kingdom has now enjoyed for some time.

It angers me that the media have characterised the debate on the motion as, "Shall we offer these four Members the benefits of the House of Commons?" They ask whether the four Members should enjoy the "benefits" of having a cup of tea in the Tea Room or entering the Palace. I have great sympathy for the views of hon. Members who have bucked against that interpretation of our debate. They have explained that we are being asked to say to Sinn Fein Members, "If you are legitimately elected by the constituents of West Tyrone, Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Mid-Ulster and Belfast, West, you have a place in this House." I believe that. They were democratically elected to represent 250,000 people.

If we accept that premise, those Members should take up their responsibilities, step by step. It is therefore important to make it clear that being a Member of Parliament does not simply mean enjoying some sort of benefit. We use our office allowances for our constituents. Being a Member of Parliament requires responsibility and public accountability. I agree with the stress that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) placed on the four Sinn Fein Members being as accountable to the public as any other Member of Parliament.

I looked at the new Register of Members' Interests this morning, and read the four Sinn Fein Members' entries, which were nil because they have not taken their seats.

**Mr. Mates:** I want to correct the hon. Lady. The entries are not nil, which would tell people that hon. Members

*[Mr. Mates]*

have no interests. Many hon. Members put nil. The entries simply state that the Sinn Fein Members have not taken their seats. That is a fundamental difference.

**Helen Jackson:** Yes, but the entries are nil in the sense that a member of the public who reads the register has no idea whether those Members receive any benefits from organisations. That is not right. Perhaps a change should be effected so that declaring interests is a requirement, not a request, on being elected rather than on taking one's seat. Let us ascertain whether we can do that. I do not say that it should be done today; I would be happy to do it next week or next year. The matter cannot be left as it is.

I shall go along with the motion, but if it is accepted, we must be sure that the use of the allowances is properly scrutinised. There were some stupid, jeering comments such as, "Money for guns" from Opposition Members. The office allowances of the four Sinn Fein Members should be subject to no less scrutiny than ours. That also applies to the use of their staff's time.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** First, how will the allowances be scrutinised? Secondly, the motion creates a two-tier system of Members of Parliament. That may not be important to some hon. Members to whom Parliament appears increasingly to act as a rubber stamp, but we are dealing with a fundamental description of rights and responsibilities.

**Helen Jackson:** I had started to respond to that point by saying that the same scrutiny should be applied to the four Sinn Fein Members. We should begin by ensuring that we know what their interests are. The next step is to ask about their use of free telephones and headed notepaper in the House. We must ensure that they are used for constituency purposes.

**Mr. Alan Duncan:** The people whom we are considering have not taken their seats and are therefore not Members; because they are not Members, no sanctions can be applied against them. How can they be held to account if they cannot face the same scrutiny as Members who have taken their seats?

**Helen Jackson:** They have not taken their seats and their inability to sit in the Chamber cannot therefore be questioned. However, their ability to use facilities and office allowances can be questioned and sanctioned— [Hon. Members: "How?"] If there is any evidence that the allowances are being used for party or other purposes, sanctions can be applied.

**Mr. Frank Field:** Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

**Helen Jackson:** I shall, but I want to proceed because we must consider the point from another angle.

**Mr. Field:** Let us reflect on the times when hon. Members' conduct has been found unsuitable. The House debates the conduct and applies the sanction of suspension for a period of time. If people do not take their seats in the Chamber, what sanctions does my hon. Friend propose for bringing them to order in the same way as other Members for breaking the rules of the House?

**Helen Jackson:** With respect, my right hon. Friend makes the same point as the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan).

**Mr. Field:** My hon. Friend is a bit rattled.

**Helen Jackson:** No. The sanction is clear: if the facilities are misused, we withdraw them.

I believe that the whole approach should be slightly different. We must put ourselves in the position of residents of Mid-Ulster, Belfast, West, Fermanagh and South Tyrone or West Tyrone. If the motion is accepted, they will know that their elected representatives will come to the House of Commons and use the facilities. If I were such a constituent, I would ask, "What are they doing on our behalf in the House of Commons?" The democratic process would begin to take its course. When that happens, as the Conservative party found to its sorrow in the last two general elections, the result is the transfer of power to someone from another party, and perhaps the beginning of real politics in Northern Ireland.

We must consider the significance of the motion in a wider context. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing and Acton—

**Mr. Soley:** And Shepherd's Bush.

**Helen Jackson:** I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) that we must not believe that the motion itself constitutes the overriding principle. We must reflect that we have come a long way down the road of promoting politics over violence in Northern Ireland. The motion may lead to strengthening the genuine democratic process in the areas of Northern Ireland that we are considering and other constituencies. If so, even though we do not like it, we must make a difficult decision, which will affect us as Members of Parliament. In the same way, many aspects of the Good Friday agreement have been extremely difficult for Unionists and members of Sinn Fein to stomach. However, this matter comes closer to our sensitivities in this Chamber than some other aspects of the agreement.

**Mr. Alan Duncan:** Can the hon. Lady think of any other self-respecting institution that would be so crass as to pay to have itself boycotted?

**Helen Jackson:** The hon. Gentleman describes this as one single issue and does not recognise that we have a responsibility to the wider public in Northern Ireland and to the peace process that has been negotiated satisfactorily over the past few years.

**Mr. Soley:** The points made have been fair, but it should not be forgotten that, whether we like it or not, there was a decision of the electorate.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** They knew that these men were not going to come here.

**Mr. Soley:** I understand the lecturing from my hon. Friend. I am simply making the point that if somebody

who stands says, "I will not take my seat", the electorate know what they can do. My guess is that many vote for such people because they are on the path to peace. If they went back to the path of violence, they would lose a lot of votes.

**Helen Jackson:** We have to decide whether we are taking it on trust that Sinn Fein signed up to the Good Friday agreement and has pursued a policy—by no means on a united basis within the party—to move into the political system and the political process and away from achieving its goals by violence.

For me, that was what the bipartisan arrangement in this Parliament was about. I agree with others who have said that this is not an issue that is bigger than the importance of the bipartisan approach. It is clear that Sinn Fein is eager to participate in a major way in the general election in the Irish Republic next year. Its members will take their seats in the Dail and, as Members of Parliament, we should be asking what interests they will register and how the party is scrutinised there. I am sure that the other parties in the Dail will be watching that closely.

Trust is the key issue. Is there trust that we can move forward? Is there trust that the Unionists will share power? Is there trust that the republicans will continue to work within the political system? I listened to the debate yesterday and it was clear that we have a long way to go. Although some of the democratic and constitutional issues are on the way to being solved, there is still a culture of blame and bitterness.

I have felt for many months that the Opposition's insistence on decommissioning as the touchstone was the wrong issue. The touchstone that affects the people on the street is the obscene level of violence that still exists in both loyalist and republican communities, with acts of grievous bodily harm usually going undetected and unpunished. The key issue for me is the establishment of a civil police service in Northern Ireland. Decommissioning is an issue, but people can go and buy guns the next day. If one stands for Government within a constitutional situation, one goes along with the rule of law. If so, one accepts a police service.

**David Burnside:** The hon. Lady refers to accepting the rule of law and to a civil police service. I have referred to a printed statement from Sinn Fein on posters that are going up in my constituency in Glengormley—a troubled area next to north Belfast—that tells people not to join the RUC or the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and attacks the police as "torturers". How can she say that Sinn Fein is now taking part in a process and recognises as a civil police force the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which has a policing board with representation from all the democratic political parties, but not Sinn Fein? She does not seem to be facing reality; she has left Northern Ireland.

**Helen Jackson:** The hon. Gentleman makes my point. My argument is that we need to agree the motion precisely because we need to bind Sinn Fein as tightly as we can into the political system and the political process in this House. This is our opportunity to do that.

The first reason that I will vote for the motion is that we have to bind Sinn Fein closely into the political process. The second reason—some colleagues will be surprised to hear this—is that the Government's Front Benchers have made the point strongly and, on this occasion, it is absolutely right to go along with the recommendation of the Secretary of State and the Leader of the House. I am very proud, as is most of the parliamentary Labour party, to have been part of a Government who have carried through the peace process over the last five or six years, following on from what the Conservative party started before we came into power.

This is a difficult issue for this Parliament, but one we should go along with tonight. The final reason for doing that is that the politics of Northern Ireland have become problematical when they have become polemical, and that people have started to find the answer when they looked at what works, what works best and what is the most pragmatic way forward. This is a pragmatic step that may take us one step further and may help in the future.

6.49 pm

**Mr. David Trimble** (Upper Bann): The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) touched on an important point when she gave one of her primary reasons for supporting the motion—loyalty to her party and her Front Benchers. In saying that, she uttered a truth about the nature of the debate and tonight's supposedly free vote in that the vote is not free and the debate is not what it should be—namely, a debate on a House of Commons matter treated seriously as such. I am afraid that the Government's approach from the outset showed a failure to engage with the seriousness of the issues and the occasion.

In drawing up the list of speakers, Mr. Speaker was wise to decide that the first Government Member to speak after the Leader of the House would be the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes). Members will have gathered from my comments last night that I have a high regard for him and he produced an argument for the motion, which the Leader of the House did not. The hon. Gentleman's argument, with which I shall engage in a few moments, was made at some length and with great seriousness. In an exchange with Members on both sides of the House, he set out his view sincerely and it deserves to be addressed.

When I came to the debate, I thought that we might hear the Leader of the House's explanation of why the motion has been introduced at this particular moment and the reasons for addressing the matter that were absent in 1997 and 1999, which, so far as we know, was the last time the Government considered it. We did not get that. Instead, the Leader of the House and the Secretary of State, who came to his rescue several times, produced a series of red herrings.

I hope that I have noted the first red herring correctly, but if I do not get the language precisely, we can always correct it later. The Leader of the House suggested that the former Speaker, Baroness Boothroyd, made her ruling in 1997 partly because the ceasefire had collapsed, but that is unfair to Baroness Boothroyd and it is in no way accurate.

It is worth placing on record what Baroness Boothroyd said on the radio this morning when she discussed the issue and referred to her 1997 ruling. She said:

"My concern when I was Speaker and it still is, is not so much the politics of the situation because on that issue when I was Speaker . . . I was totally neutral. My concern then and now was to

protect the rules of the House of Commons and to uphold the rule of law. And the rule of law of course, is the Parliamentary Oaths Act. And I wasn't discriminatory at all when I met with the Sinn Fein members, I explained the position to them, that they either had to take the Oath of Allegiance or they could not take up their full membership of the House of Commons."

I have no doubt that that is precisely what motivated Baroness Boothroyd in 1997 and the Leader of the House may regret his suggestion that other factors influenced her.

**Mr. Hogg:** Will the right hon. Gentleman address the question whether we should have an Oath that many hon. Members who are perfectly honourable about their republicanism—I am not referring to IRA members—cannot honestly take?

**Mr. Trimble:** The right hon. and learned Gentleman makes a point that he made earlier. I shall deal with it if I manage to get through all my notes, but I must describe some other red herrings that Ministers dragged across the debate at the outset.

The Leader of the House also said that the motion restores the position that pertained before the 1997 ruling. Of course, he had to withdraw that and acknowledge that it does not restore the pre-1997 status quo. It puts in place a completely different and novel regime, which, as a number of Members have said, would create two classes of Member of Parliament and, in so doing, open up important issues.

**Mr. Frank Field:** Before the right hon. Gentleman leaves that point, an aspect of the briefing that we were given is that the move being made today is part of the agreement that led up to the Belfast agreement. Was he party to that aspect of the agreement? Are there other parts of the agreement that the House does not know about, but which he knows about, that we shall be asked to approve following an ambush at the end of the Session?

**Mr. Trimble:** The right hon. Gentleman repeats a point made during the debate, which I shall touch on again, but he is right to say that the matter is not in the agreement. People should realise that. It was never raised as an issue on any occasion during the negotiations leading up to the agreement. As far as I am aware, it never arose.

I shall repeat the point shortly, but to those who say that this step is necessary to promote or implement the agreement, I say sorry, but please read it. Occasionally, when people make comments, I have to re-read the agreement to try to find the basis for them and often I cannot find it. That is an important point.

Another red herring was introduced when the Secretary of State repeatedly asked what was the position before 1997. Of course, we should not forget that the issue simply did not arise before then. In two Parliaments, the person elected to represent West Belfast did not take his seat, did not come anywhere near the place and did not seek any facilities, and I dare say that most Members, whatever Bench they sat on, did not turn their mind to the issue, because it did not arise.

The issue arose after the 1997 general election, however, because the two Sinn Fein Members elected made it clear that they would come here and use the facility whereby people enter the Palace before taking their Oath. Necessarily we all do so, and they wanted to use that foothold as a basis to establish a substantial bridgehead and put themselves in a position to conduct God knows what operations, whether of a political or other nature. Of course the Speaker had to consider that matter according to the law and according to practice, and she produced the ruling. The question of what happened pre-1997 is irrelevant.

Another red herring, which is also irrelevant, is the fact that Sinn Fein Members sit in the Northern Ireland Assembly. They participate in the administration of Northern Ireland and do so alongside me and other Members who sit on this Bench. That happens, but again it is not relevant. That takes us to a key point: historically, Sinn Fein was an abstentionist party. It was abstentionist because it did not believe in politics. It was part of a republican movement that wanted to achieve its objectives not politically, but purely by violence.

Consequently, Sinn Fein did not participate in elected bodies and refused to take its seats either in elected bodies in Northern Ireland or in the Irish Parliament or this place, but over the past number of years the republican movement has retreated from abstentionism. Indeed, it has also retreated from republicanism. Although some Members have introduced republicanism to the debate, in no real sense is the modern Sinn Fein membership republican, but that is another issue. Whatever arguments there may be on that point, Sinn Fein has clearly shifted its position on abstentionism.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The right hon. Gentleman is making an interesting case. Surely the logic of it is that he should welcome the fact that Sinn Fein wants representation in the Palace of Westminster and therefore support the motion.

**Mr. Trimble:** I am well aware of the logic of that argument, and I will deal with it shortly—along with the points made by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire, who presented what I considered to be the only coherent case for the motion.

As I have said, Sinn Fein and the republican movement are clearly moving away from abstentionism. The Sinn Fein Members took their seats in the Dail, and also came into the Assembly, which was a very significant act. Coming in, and accepting partition and the consent principle, were massive concessions by republicans, when viewed from a republican position. That raises a question I touched on earlier—are they really republicans?—but it is a peripheral issue, floating around in the background.

The argument that can be presented in favour of the motion constituted the burden of the intervention by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) and the speech of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire. It is that we are dealing with a process of transition, and that it is therefore desirable to draw people who have hitherto been involved in violence but whom we hope and believe are now turning to the normal democratic political process into that process, and bind them into it. If that involves their coming into the Palace of Westminster, it is a good thing.

Members may have various views. The right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) said that violence was an undertone, and spoke of the difficulties that that presented to those who must deal with these arrangements. Again, however, I

suggest that we consider the republican perspective. It is difficult for Sinn Fein Members to represent walking into this building as a step in the direction of a united Ireland; geographically, it is clearly a step in a different direction. In that sense, it could be argued that it is a good idea to involve them in the process—a point made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough. The crucial question is this. If the Sinn Fein Members are to be involved in the process, on what terms do they enter it? Herein lies the flaw in the Government's approach. Like others who have spoken, I think it will be a good day when Sinn Fein representatives sit on these Benches and participate in debate. I dare say that if the motion is passed it will be only a short time before we see a certain bearded figure disporting himself on the Bench just beyond the Bar of the House, knowing that he can return to Belfast, West and tell people there that he is still abstaining; but I nevertheless think that it will be a good day when the republicans take their seats, thus involving themselves in an aspect of our British democratic process—as long as it is done on a proper, clear basis.

Let me now touch on not just the motion, but what could be described as the process generally. As was said last night during our debate on decommissioning, it is crucial for us to be clear about the principles on which we proceed. It is crucial for us to make it absolutely plain that there must be a demonstrated move away from violence, and an unequivocal commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic means. I know that this is a transition period, but we must be clear about the principles involved.

It would be fatal to our hopes of bringing about a peaceful and democratic future to allow those who have been involved in violence in the past to think that the rules will be waived or adjusted so that they need make no hard choices—to think that they can sneak into the process, and that no one will confront them with such choices. As the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough said, it would be very nice if questions were to be put to them about the use of their allowances and so forth; but will such questions be put? Will any rigour be exercised? Who can believe that it will, when the Government are bending the rules—distorting the rules—and taking unprecedented action in allowing these Members to enter the House? By all means let us make it clear that they are welcome to take their seats, but let us also make it clear that they must do so on a coherent basis.

**Mr. Gummer:** Is this not wrong ab initio? Let us leave aside the rigour. The whole allowance will be available to people who will be doing only part of the job, which will suggest to those who come here on those terms that the rest of the job is not important—but it is, in fact, the real reason why we are all here.

**Mr. Trimble:** That is a valuable point, with which I agree. If my comments seemed to point in a different direction, I misled the right hon. Gentleman. When I spoke of sticking to the rules, I included Madam Speaker's ruling in 1997, which I think is right and should be adhered to.

If we are to proceed along the Government's desired path, the question of the Oath of Allegiance becomes the relevant one, and I understand why the right hon. Gentleman raised it earlier. It too has entered the debate as, in some respects, a bit of a red herring, in that it has been discussed in connection with the monarch. Although that aspect is important, there is more to the Oath.

The best context in which to view the Oath is perhaps to be found in a judgment delivered recently by the European Court of Human Rights on the application by one of the gentlemen concerned. I refer to the gentleman who was returned to serve as Member of Parliament for Mid-Ulster, but has not yet done so. The court said that the requirement for elected representatives to take an Oath of Allegiance to the monarch

"forms part of the constitutional system of the respondent State, which, it is to be observed, is based on a monarchical model of government. For the Court, the requirement that elected representatives to the House of Commons take an oath of allegiance to the reigning monarch can be reasonably viewed as an affirmation of loyalty to the constitutional principles which support, *inter alia*, the workings of representative democracy in the respondent State . . . In the Court's view it must be open to the respondent State to attach such a condition, which is an integral part of its constitutional order, to membership of Parliament and to make access to the institution's facilities dependent on compliance with the condition. "

I think that that view of the Oath is right. It refers to the person of Her Majesty, but it goes beyond that: it is an acceptance of the established constitutional order, our democratic principles, and the idea that things must be done in accordance with those principles. There is no difficulty here for a republican—an honest republican.

**Mr. Hogg:** I well understand that a reasonable person could arrive at that interpretation, but given that interpretation there is no argument, in principle, for not reformulating the Oath to make it say more precisely what the court described as a reasonable interpretation.

**Mr. Trimble:** Indeed. It would be perfectly reasonable for the Government, if they wished, to reformulate the Oath so that it spelt out all the things implicit in it. It should not present an obstacle to any honest republican, because at its heart is a statement that the person concerned accepts the existing legal order and democratic process and that, if he or she seeks change, it must be done peacefully, democratically and legitimately.

That, of course, is precisely what we want the republican movement to do. We want it to make plain, not just implicitly but in all its actions, that it will pursue its objectives by exclusively peaceful and democratic means. Here again the Government have made a mistake. Rather than maintaining a position that would nudge the republicans towards acting coherently and honestly, they are conniving at a dishonest fudge that will carry serious long-term dangers in encouraging among republicans the belief that they can bend the law and get away with it. Who knows where that might take them?

Let me repeat what I said earlier. If we want the political process in Northern Ireland to proceed, we should certainly support the Belfast agreement and seek its full implementation; but we should stick to that agreement. Let us not have little add-ons that suddenly come out of nowhere. It is not the first time that that has happened. It happened with the legislation to allow people to sit in this House and simultaneously to sit and hold office elsewhere. That was never part of the agreement. That was never part of a negotiation.

We believe that that earlier provision came from—I am sorry that the Leader of the House is unable to be here; he dropped me a note apologising for his unavoidable absence—a series of moves by Sinn Fein in the last moments of the negotiation, when it saw that an

*[Mr. Trimble]*

agreement was emerging that was uncomfortable for Sinn Fein. It sought desperately to try to get some added advantage and made approaches to the Irish Government. The Irish Government were open about that because they published a letter, but it is reasonable to believe that Sinn Fein may have made approaches at the same time to the British Government.

Sinn Fein raised a number of issues. Among them was that of dual membership: of being simultaneously in the Dail and elsewhere. Alternatively, it also asked the Irish Government whether Sinn Fein Members elected to serve for constituencies in Northern Ireland could have facilities available to them at the Dail in Dublin. I have no doubt that they would have liked to sit and to debate in the Dail but they were willing simply to be in the place—the position that will be produced by the Government's motion.

To my knowledge—correct me if I am wrong—the Irish Government have resisted and refused that. That quest for a novel status within Parliament has been turned down by the Irish Government, who have been more rigorous and honest than our own Government on this issue. It shames me to have to say that.

**Dr. John Reid:** I have been listening very carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. I take it that his reference to dishonesty was a group reference and not a reference to me individually. In all fairness, before I make my winding-up speech, I should ask him if he expressed a view when my predecessor consulted him on the extension of facilities to Sinn Fein.

**Mr. Trimble:** I find the question curious because I have no recollection of saying anything other than that I opposed that. If there is anything to the contrary, I would be willing to say so. I am sorry to say that I have stood here before and heard Governments misrepresent my position. I hope that that will not happen this evening as well.

**Dr. Reid:** I hope that the right hon. Gentleman would not suggest that I am misrepresenting his position. I am talking about a consultation that took place in January 2000. I may have misinterpreted his position in that, but I ask him to reflect before making the imputation that we gave no consideration to it.

**Mr. Trimble:** It would be much better if the Secretary of State, instead of playing with the House, gave us the detail.

**Dr. Reid:** I quote:

"I am writing with reference to your letter of the 12 inst. proposing the granting of access to facilities at Westminster for Sinn Fein MPs who do not wish to take up their seats.

Our views on this matter were clearly voiced to the Prime Minister and yourself at our meeting yesterday. It is the view of my Party that the action Government is proposing is premature. While you are correct in your assessment that political progress has been made that progress has been facilitated by this Party agreeing a sequence of events with Sinn Fein to implement in full the Belfast Agreement. This Party"—

that is, the right hon. Gentleman's party—

"has honoured its obligations under the Mitchell Review but it has yet to be seen if Sinn Fein is to honour its obligations.

I would therefore urge Government to postpone tabling any Motion with regard to this matter until such time as actual decommissioning has commenced and been verified by the International Commission on Decommissioning. It is that action and the continuing decommissioning of weapons which will demonstrate Sinn Fein's true commitment to their obligations to peace and democracy contained in the Belfast Agreement".

I do not say that the right hon. Gentleman should not now be able to reach a different decision. He may have his own views on the process and the pace of that, but I think that there was an imputation throughout what he said that we had disregarded and acted without considering the positions that would be taken by his own party and the various other parties in Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** Order. Before the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) replies, as there has been a full quotation from that document, it would be helpful to the House if the Secretary of State agreed that it should be placed in the Library.

**Dr. John Reid** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Trimble:** I would have appreciated it more if the Secretary of State had, prior to tabling the motion, consulted us about that motion. Had he done so, I would have expressed a view, which would have been precisely the view that I have expressed this evening. If there is a development in thought and greater clarity in what I am saying tonight compared with the contents of the letter then, I ascribe it to further reflection and perhaps the diplomatic nature of the letter on that date, but what I am saying now is what I think this Government should do. Had they consulted, they would have received that advice.

**Mr. Garnier:** Is it not indicative of the regrettable attitude that the Government appear to take on this serious issue that the Secretary of State was willing well into the course of this debate to produce a document out of his pocket and then to seek to trip up the right hon. Gentleman? The right hon. Gentleman is perfectly capable of looking after himself, but it strikes me as deeply regrettable that documents come whipping out of back pockets. The Government should have laid their case out fully at the outset this afternoon.

**Mr. Trimble:** I might be tempted to say something about it being partisanship, but not preceded by any other phrase or term. It is a rather partisan approach, but well and good. The Secretary of State is entitled to do it. I hope that we have dealt with it.

I remind the House of the point that I was making because we took a detour from it. We should stick to the agreement. We should not have these add-ons. I gave the background of one add-on that came from discussions at the tail-end of the agreement between the Government and Sinn Fein. I suspect that the origins of this measure lie there, too. The question arises: if the origins of this measure lie in the dying moments of 10 April 1998, why has it suddenly come up without prior consultation? There was prior notice perhaps—last Thursday, I received notice—but no consultation. Why has it suddenly come at the last moment, at this time? What special reasons have led the Government to introduce the motion? Please would the Secretary of State

not just trot out in response the fact that we have had a beginning of decommissioning. If that were the reason, I would have expected to hear about the motion earlier.

**Dr. John Reid:** It has happened at this time precisely because of the conditionality of the right hon. Gentleman's initial response, that condition having been met.

**Mr. Trimble:** The one thing that I am confident of is that the motion has not been caused by anything that I have said. The Secretary of State is wrong to suggest that. If he wants to say that the Government have brought this forward because of a beginning of decommissioning, let him say that, rather than imputing it to me.

**Dr. Reid** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Trimble:** Well, there are ways and ways of saying it.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Trimble:** No. I am not going to take more interventions on that point, even ones intended helpfully.

I do not want to labour the point, but we should stick to the agreement. This motion is not part of the agreement. Let the Government explain why they are introducing something that is not part of the agreement, that will damage the process that we are engaged in, that will not be helpful and that will not achieve the laudable objective of bringing the republican movement fully into the democratic process, which we can do only on the basis of an exclusive commitment to peaceful and democratic means.

That commitment has not yet been fully apparent. That is demonstrated by the poster on policing that my hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) read out and by the fact that only a few weeks ago, the republican movement decided to republish without any further commentary an article that it wrote exulting in the murder of a Member of the House. That conjunction of events is most regrettable. I am sorry that the Government are proceeding in this way, at this time.

7.19 pm

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and to hear him confirm a point that I made in an intervention—that tonight's motion formed no part of the Belfast agreement.

I wish to oppose what my Government propose tonight. I do not doubt their motives, but I doubt greatly their judgment of what led to the motion. I also question why it has been introduced at this stage. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have asked why it has been introduced now, just before Christmas, without proper consultation. Why is it being slipped through just before we rise for Christmas? The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has not answered those questions. If the motion is about decommissioning, as he confirmed from a sedentary position a few moments ago, why was that not made clear as soon as the so-called decommissioning took place?

Several hon. Members have made good speeches with which I agree, especially the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), who spoke hardly a word with which I disagreed. It is important to point out to all the people watching our debate in Northern Ireland that although the motion has been portrayed as a matter for the House and as a free vote, there will not be a free vote tonight. Ministers have been called back and there will be a Whip on all the payroll vote, which exceeds 100. When the vote is called, I hope that many of those right hon. and hon. Members might still exercise their consciences and vote against the Government; but if the motion passes, people should know that it was not as the result of a free vote.

Some hon. Members have said that the motion will move the peace process forward. They have implied that it will ensure, somehow, that IRA-Sinn Fein are moved forward. My concern is with the perceptions of the pro-Union community in Northern Ireland and how it is feeling tonight. I am especially sad, given the speech made recently by the Secretary of State in which he drew attention to the alienation that the pro-Union community feels, that he is pushing the motion tonight, when nothing appears to suggest that the peace process will collapse if it does not pass.

There have been historic developments in Northern Ireland in the past few years, and I supported the Belfast agreement. I welcomed the setting up of the Assembly and the fact that IRA-Sinn Fein took their seats under the same agreement as the other parties. That was an attempt to bring some normality to politics in Northern Ireland, but it is important to point out that IRA-Sinn Fein recognise the centrality of Westminster. They say that they want to come here, even if they do not want to come into the Chamber. They also said that they would never go to Stormont, but they are now in Stormont. They also said that they would refuse to give up the claim to Northern Ireland, but they have had to accept that.

The Belfast agreement has had many positive effects. It is especially sad, therefore, that the motion, rather than moving the peace process forward for IRA-Sinn Fein, will move it back for the pro-Union community, which already feels that small extra concessions beyond the Belfast agreement have been made to the nationalist community, including dual membership and Northern Ireland's exemption from the introduction of party funding rules. Those issues had nothing to do with the Belfast agreement and were additional to everything else that the pro-Union community—and all people who believe in law and order—found difficult to accept, such as the release of terrorists from prison with little being given in return.

**Mr. Donaldson:** Will the hon. Lady include in the list of concessions made to Sinn Fein-IRA that are not part of the agreement the recent amnesty that the Government offered to IRA terrorists on the run from justice who have never faced the courts in Northern Ireland or in any other jurisdiction? They will be permitted to return home to their families without facing justice, which is a gross injustice to the innocent victims of terrorist violence.

**Kate Hoey:** I share those views and it is a real shame that that will happen, but all those people who have had to leave Northern Ireland under the threat of violence and knee-capping have no amnesty. They will not be able to go back home and spend Christmas with their families.

*[Kate Hoey]*

Although I disagree completely with what the Government are trying to do tonight, something may be gained from recalling that IRA-Sinn Fein has moved away from classic Irish republicanism and adopted almost a John Redmond position. That will not go down very well with the members of IRA-Sinn Fein. It is unfortunate that one of the leading members of Sinn Fein will not be able to watch this debate tonight on television, because I am not sure that Cuba—where he is enlisting the support of Fidel Castro—has the parliamentary channel.

On the question of finance, my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) said that IRA-Sinn Fein were rich and did not need the money. It is worth pointing out that since 11 September the funds sent to IRA-Sinn Fein from America have not flowed as quickly and, taking into account the visit to Cuba as well, that might mean that they need the extra £70,000.

There are many reasons why I do not think that the motion is right politically, but the fundamental issue is the question of a two-tier Parliament with two types of Members of Parliament. We should not allow people to use the facilities of the Palace of Westminster, such as the Members' dining facilities, the Library and the Members' Lobby, without being Members of Parliament. I have been told that they would even be able to come into the House and stand behind the Bar. We cannot have two types of Members of Parliament.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the difficulties that we face is that the motion might send a message to people outside the House of Commons that Back Benchers are of so little import that they can be treated as the lower of the two tiers of Members of Parliament when it suits the Government?

**Kate Hoey:** Many people outside the Palace of Westminster are very cynical about politics and politicians from all parties, and that will be precisely what they will take from the motion tonight.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) made a good intervention about Members of Parliament being here to serve their constituents in Parliament as well representing Parliament in their constituencies. It was suggested that those who voted for IRA-Sinn Fein Members knew that they would not take their seats, but what about all the people who did not vote for them and now have no representative? They will now see public funds being made available for members of IRA-Sinn Fein to come here and use all the facilities without representing the voters in any way. That is undemocratic and wrong. Every Member of this House should be equal and, if the House supports the motion, it will be saying that we can break the rules when it suits us. It will not ruin the peace process if we reject the motion and I urge all decent, ordinary Members to vote against it tonight and give a vote for democracy.

7.29 pm

**Mr. Andrew MacKay** (Bracknell): It gives me great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey). The House listened so attentively to all that she had to say because she has immense practical experience of Northern Ireland, and I agreed with every single word that she said.

Many hon. Members want to contribute, so I shall be brief in explaining to the Government why Conservative Members feel such anger and annoyance at this motion. The same sentiments were clear in the remarks made by the hon. Member for Vauxhall, and by the hon. Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle).

The Government have acted in a shabby manner. The timing is disgraceful. The exercise reminds me of Jo Moore. The Government have sought a way to slip out something embarrassing, nasty and expensive in terms of votes, and they have decided to do it just before Christmas. They hope that the press and the public are thinking of other things, and that hon. Members will not be around. The process has been very shabby, quick and short.

The official Opposition first heard of the Government's intention last Thursday, and the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said that his party first heard about it on the same day. There has been very little time to table amendments or to consider the motion. This is an absolutely classic bounce.

**Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North): Does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that doing something to help the peace process just before Christmas is a very good thing?

**Mr. MacKay:** If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall explain why I think that the Government's action is counterproductive to the peace process, and why it will not help the peace process one iota.

The second shabby element is the role of the payroll vote tonight. This is not a free vote for Labour Members. The Leader of the House made it clear when he was extensively cross-examined last Thursday during business questions that he expected Ministers, Parliamentary Private Secretaries and others on the payroll to be here tonight to vote. Therefore, any suggestion in Northern Ireland or elsewhere that this debate shows the House of Commons at its best, and that Labour Members will have a free and independent vote, is entirely wrong.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), who confirmed that Liberal Democrat Members will have a free vote. The same is true of Conservative Members, but not of Labour Members.

**Mr. Gummer:** Is my right hon. Friend surprised at the Government's actions? After all, the motion would admit to the House of Commons the ideal Member of Parliament as far as Labour party is concerned—someone who can be in the House but who can never either vote or speak against the Government.

**Mr. MacKay:** That is a probably a perfect illustration of the sort of hon. Member that the Prime Minister would like on the Labour Benches. However, the more serious point is that the Government fear that they will not get the motion through if they do not whip the payroll. That is why Ministers have been brought back from abroad. There will be a full payroll vote tonight to force the motion through.

**Lembit Öpik:** If a vote that requires Conservative Front Benchers to withdraw from the bipartisan agreement

is considered to be free, will the right hon. Gentleman say what does not constitute a free vote for the Conservative party these days?

**Mr. MacKay:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that Conservative Members have been whipped to be here because this is important business, but we have been given a completely free vote. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), the Opposition deputy Chief Whip, is in his place. I am sure that he would confirm that if he cared to come to the Dispatch Box.

The second reason for anger is that there is an easy solution to the problem. If Sinn Fein Members were to take their seats after taking the Oath, we would not need this motion. If those hon. Members are serious about representing their constituents, playing a full role in our parliamentary democracy and even influencing events here, that is the logical way for them to proceed. It is deeply regrettable that we have not insisted on that course of action.

Instead, we are going to have a two-tier system of MPs, as the hon. Members for Crewe and Nantwich and for Vauxhall, and my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), pointed out. That is reprehensible and unacceptable. No good reason has been given from the Dispatch Box as to why that is being allowed to happen.

Equally, the motion is an insult to constitutional nationalists in the House. I refer to those hon. Members who belong to Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National party and the Social Democratic and Labour party. All those hon. Members have deeply held views about being part of an independent Wales or Scotland, or of a united Ireland. However, they can take the Oath because they do not feel that it undermines their positions in any way.

If those hon. Members can all take the Oath, I see no reason why Sinn Fein Members cannot—apart from the fact that they have secured a wonderful publicity coup in being given a different tier of membership of the House. I am afraid that the Government have fallen into the trap completely, and that they have given Sinn Fein that publicity coup, at the expense of the SDLP, the constitutional nationalists and other democratic parties represented in this House. That is another example of shabbiness.

The third reason for our anger was well illustrated by what Baroness Boothroyd said on the BBC's "Today" programme this morning. I shall not repeat what she said about why the motion was wrong, or about why she believes that circumstances have not changed since she made her original ruling. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann has already explained all that very fully and correctly. However, I remind Ministers that Baroness Boothroyd went on to say that she could not understand why, in the four intervening years, the Government had not consulted members of other parties in the House to see whether the Oath could be amended, or whether there was a way to allow Sinn Fein Members to take their seats. There has been no consultation at all. I find that strange and unfortunate, and it makes me very cross.

Several hon. Members have posed a perfectly legitimate question and asked why the Government have tabled the motion now. The hon. Member for Vauxhall was right to point out that, if the Government are responding to decommissioning, the original decommissioning verified by General de Chastelain took place some months ago. The hon. Lady asked why it has taken so long to bring the motion forward.

So far, only initial decommissioning has taken place. Most hon. Members were appalled when the Secretary of State said earlier today that there "has been decommissioning", as if that meant that all arms had been decommissioned. I remind the House once more that the Belfast agreement—which the Opposition strongly support—requires the so-called loyalist and republican paramilitaries who are signatories to decommission all illegally held arms and explosives over a two-year period. We all know that they have singularly failed to do so. Only now, very belatedly and after much pressure from the First Minister and others, has there been some limited decommissioning.

I hope that all hon. Members want further decommissioning to take place. However, in the wake of 11 September and the unfortunate incident with the FARC terrorists in Colombia, further pressure must be brought to bear on Sinn Fein-IRA and the so-called loyalist paramilitaries who have not decommissioned a single weapon. We have had more than enough carrots and we now want a little more stick.

**Mr. Hopkins:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way again. Does not he agree that the process has undergone a quantum leap that should be welcomed in the interests of peace throughout Ireland?

**Mr. MacKay:** I think that there has been a modest move, belatedly, in the right direction—I do not define it as a quantum leap. We do not know how many illegally held arms and explosives have been decommissioned. I suspect that not many have been yet; I do not quibble with that, provided that there is more to come. However, there is no sign of more decommissioning. I put it to the hon. Gentleman that this sop to Sinn Fein-IRA—this further carrot, this further undermining of democratic politicians in the Province—makes it less rather than more likely that further decommissioning will take place, and will therefore be counterproductive to the peace process. That is another reason why the motion is mistaken.

Recently, the process has been virtually all take by Sinn Fein-IRA and very little give. That puts great pressure on the Ulster Unionist community as well as on the constitutional nationalists and others in the Province. Whereas the Ulster Unionist community and the constitutional nationalists have stuck rigidly to the Belfast agreement and fulfilled all their obligations under it, the paramilitaries have not fulfilled their commitments, particularly on decommissioning. The suggestion that Sinn Fein Members could take up facilities and use taxpayers' money for office allowances in this House was no part of the Belfast agreement. That has been accepted in this House after debate, albeit with reluctance from the Government Dispatch Box.

Does the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is on duty at the Dispatch Box, understand how undermining it is if one side fulfils all its obligations under the Belfast agreement, which underpins the peace process, and the other side cherry picks and is then given even more cherries to chew, which is the effect of the motion before us? It is counterproductive, demoralising and wrong.

*[Mr. MacKay]*

I hope that when we come to the vote there will be enough Labour and Liberal Democrat Members to ensure that it is a free vote, to take the motion on its merit and throw it out where it belongs.

7.42 pm

**Mr. Malcolm Savidge** (Aberdeen, North): The official Opposition have indicated their extreme distaste for making special provision for Sinn Fein. In his speech, which was, as ever, thoughtful and thought-provoking, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) expressed similar reservations. I, too, feel extreme distaste for making special provision for Sinn Fein. However, I see a solution to the anomalies different from the one suggested by Conservative Front Benchers.

I also feel extreme distaste for many of the compromises that have had to be made in relation to the Good Friday agreement, particularly on prisoner releases. That hardly needs explaining at a time when we are involved in an international campaign against terrorism. But when I compare the Good Friday agreement with the decades of violence that came before it, I am certain which is the lesser of two evils. I would go further—I am certain that it is a positive good. Of course, it needs to be improved on, and we must work to improve on it. Of course, Sinn Fein in particular must do much more, especially on decommissioning and on ceasing all the remaining violence in which it is involved, as must all the paramilitaries. When I listen to some Sinn Fein spokesmen, I could wish for fewer demands and more in the way of delivery.

I was disappointed to hear Conservative Front Benchers talk about deserting bipartisanship. In response to the pertinent intervention of the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), they seemed to imply that they might edge away from saying that they would give up bipartisanship. I hope that that is the case, because bipartisanship remains fundamentally important.

Even so, I have been disappointed over the past few years that Conservative Front-Bench Members have on occasion given the impression of being prepared to support all the popular bits of the Good Friday agreement but of opposing all the difficult bits. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) said that there are difficult choices. One gets the impression that on occasion those on the Conservative Front Bench have been dodging the difficult choices. If we are going to talk about cherry-picking, as the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) did, it sometimes seems that Conservative Front Benchers have been guilty of that.

**Lembit Öpik:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is hard to see what might change if the Conservatives abandoned that bipartisanship? They seem to have been happy to vote against a raft of legislation that has gone through in previous months, and I am at a loss to know what they mean by abandoning bipartisanship.

**Mr. Savidge:** I would be happy to have guidance from Conservative Members on what they mean.

**Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): This party has supported the Belfast agreement but has, for a considerable time, reserved the right to criticise its implementation when things go badly wrong or are handled badly. I refer in particular to prisoner releases and the absence of any reciprocal concessions in terms of decommissioning from Sinn Fein.

The press has decided that we are walking away from bipartisanship; we are not. The Government have walked away from bipartisanship because of the way in which they are carrying out the process. It is perfectly proper for us to do our duty in this place and criticise the Government when they deserve it.

**Mr. Savidge:** I think that it has been accepted in earlier exchanges that bipartisanship has always involved the possibility of some criticism. However, I thought that it was agreed that we would leave the decisions on decommissioning to General de Chastelain. He has made his decisions; decommissioning has started, and we wish to see it progress rapidly.

**Mr. Alan Duncan:** Given that the motion is not part of the Good Friday agreement and that there has been no consultation—it was simply imposed on the House when it was announced last Wednesday or Thursday—how can the actions of the Labour party be described as bipartisan?

**Mr. Savidge:** Whatever our disagreements on this issue, my request to the official Opposition is that they try to maintain basic bipartisanship on as many issues as possible.

I agree with the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford on one point. He drew a distinction between not taking the Oath and not taking seats. He made the point that Sinn Fein Members say that, irrespective of any change to the Oath, they do not intend to take their seats. However, it is perfectly proper to say that, although the motion refers to not taking seats, not taking the Oath is central to the debate. The 1997 ruling by Speaker Boothroyd specifically referred not to whether Members took their seats but to whether they took the Oath.

I wish to concentrate on the Oath. I believe that we should review the Oath without regard to Sinn Fein. Indeed, I would go further—I believe that the House might have reviewed the Oath if it had not been for sensitivities over Northern Ireland and Sinn Fein.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** As that is not what my hon. Friend is being asked to decide, will he tell us whether he intends to support the Government or not?

**Mr. Savidge:** My hon. Friend will not be surprised to know that I shall come to that point in due course. To sustain interest, I shall try to leave the point until later in my speech.

It should be remembered that the Oath of Allegiance does not, as most of the public probably believe, derive from the old feudal oaths of fealty of the House of Lords. The excellent research document in the Library shows that it derives from three oaths, all of which stem from the reformation. They are the Oath of Supremacy of 1534, the Oath of Allegiance of 1605 and 1609 and the Oath of Abjuration of 1701. All those oaths related to the maintenance of the Protestant monarchy and the

Protestant succession. At various stages, they also included other disqualifications or discriminations on religious grounds.

During the 19th century, those disqualifications were gradually reduced to permit Catholics, Jews and members of other religions to become Members of Parliament without difficulty. Then, of course, after the famous case of Charles Bradlaugh, those of no religion were permitted to become Members of Parliament. Until 1997—as the Leader of the House pointed out—that did not mean that people who were fully and properly elected were refused other things. They were allowed to sit below the Bar of the House, although not to speak or vote.

Although the 1997 ruling took account in one respect of a previous decision in 1924, it was in effect a new ruling and was understandable in the circumstances. There was no ceasefire and it was judged that there was a real terrorist threat. There were valid reasons for the fears expressed at the time by members of staff—fears described earlier by the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire. Those fears persist to this day. The ruling was understandable at the time, but in some ways, it was temporary and unusual. It was made before the Good Friday agreement and the ceasefire.

**Mr. Hawkins:** Does the hon. Gentleman consider that, in the light of continuing republican extremist terrorist activity, there is no threat at present? Is he really prepared to tell the House tonight that there is no terrorist threat anywhere on the mainland?

**Mr. Savidge:** There is a terrorist threat from those bodies that are not party to the Good Friday agreement. Most people would agree that there is a threat from the Real IRA and various dissident groups.

I repeat that, in some ways, Sinn Fein and Northern Ireland have delayed the whole issue of review of the Oath. The Oath is an anachronism: it grew wholly and solely out of the European wars of religion—the wars between Catholics and Protestants that disfigured Europe for two and a half centuries, but which have been over for more than two centuries.

Some of us have the impression that the House sometimes takes a while to respond to change—just as some of us have the impression that its lifts take a while to respond to the button. However, it might not be unreasonable—after two centuries—to start thinking about changing our rules. The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) made eloquent and perceptive interventions earlier—one is always inclined to flatter people who make an intervention that is almost exactly the same as one had planned to make, but who express it better. He asked whether, if a Member—not necessarily from Northern Ireland, but from any part of the country—who is properly elected to the House happens not to be a monarchist but a republican, it would be proper for us to say that they should not be allowed to take their seat.

I have a clear view on that question. Indeed, I should go further: in our population, there are a certain number of cranks, oddballs and nutters. They have a right to be represented—[HON. MEMBERS: "They are."] No doubt many people would say that they are over-represented in the House.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** They are certainly well represented.

**Mr. Savidge:** As a brief aside, the new Leader of the Opposition has not been paid sufficient credit for one of his first great achievements: at a stroke he managed radically to reduce the number of bizarre extremists on the Conservative Back Benches. However, I digress.

If an eccentric were to be properly elected to this place—for example, someone who was a passionate Jacobite or someone who, for some other reason, did not agree with the present succession to the monarchy—surely he should have a right to be here. I go further: even for those of us who, as democrats, believe that we should remain a constitutional monarchy for as long as that is the wish of the majority of the population, it can still seem strange that one's first duty here should be to declare—or appear to do so—that one will look after the interests of the monarch rather than those of one's constituents and of the common good of the whole population.

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** Most of the public think that the eccentrics have already been elected to this place.

Surely the hon. Gentleman is arguing for no oath. Should not the election of a Member to the House—by whatever system we decide—determine whether they take their seat?

**Mr. Savidge:** I shall leave the hon. Member in suspense as to precisely what I shall recommend, but he may not be far wrong.

I respect the fact that for some elected Members the monarchy is a symbol of the nation, and that for them the Oath of Allegiance is deeply meaningful. However, I also respect the fact that for other Members the monarchy may seem to be a symbol of wealth, power and privilege. They may feel that the greatest responsibility of the House is to look after those who are weak, poor and powerless. We should respect both views. We should also respect the feelings of—I suspect—a considerable number of Members who feel that the current wording of the Oath is meaningless and that what it asks them to do when they first arrive here is not completely honest. That needs to be considered.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth:** Is not the purpose of the Oath that Members should undertake to owe allegiance to their country, and that Her Majesty the Queen happens to be the sovereign of this country? Other countries have presidents and perhaps we, too, are going down that road—I hope not. However, that is the purpose of the Oath. Mr. Doherty made it clear on the radio this morning that he does not owe allegiance to this country because he believes ours to be a foreign Parliament.

**Mr. Savidge:** The point that I have been making, based on the history outlined in the Library research document, is that the Oath had nothing to do with constitutional democracy—as suggested by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann—or with general loyalty to the country. The Oath derived simply and solely from issues relating to the Protestant succession to the throne—that is all.

*[Mr. Savidge]*

Should we adopt alternative forms of oath and attestation, as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley)? Should we have no oath or attestation, as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) and others? Should membership be by right of election, as it is in the European Parliament and as I would favour?

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) pointed out that when we set up the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly, we created a further inconsistency by demanding the Oath of Allegiance in the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. Some of the charades that went on during the establishment of the Scottish Parliament brought both that Parliament and the monarchy into disrepute. I hope that we can reconsider some of those matters.

I take the point that—as the right hon. Member for Upper Bann pointed out—the European Court of Human Rights did not rule against our Oath, but I still believe that the Oath goes against modern democratic principles. The matter is not merely one of abstract theory; it has practical consequences—and not only for Sinn Fein Members who do not want to sit in the Chamber at present in any case.

There was a disgraceful example when my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—the Father of the House—suffered an injury to his Achilles tendon. Despite that, he gallantly came to the House for the election of the Speaker, but was then incapacitated and warned that he should not attend the House as the injury might become permanent. The 1997 ruling made allowance for that, so he was still allowed to enjoy the facilities, but because he had been unable to take the Oath, he was not allowed to support early-day motions or to take part in other activities. If a Member happens to be hospitalised immediately after an election, it is wrong that his or her electors should be effectively disfranchised unnecessarily.

I repeat that I am not saying this in response to those in Sinn Fein who do not want to take their seats at present, although I hope, with the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, that they will gradually do so. I am saying that, in voting for the motion tonight, I will be asking the Leader of the House and the Modernisation Committee to consider oaths of allegiance and attestations of allegiance in general. I hope that, as many hon. Members have said, it will be made absolutely clear that the Register of Members' Interests should apply to all elected Members, irrespective of whether they have taken the Oath or their seats. I hope not only that the paramilitaries will make progress towards peaceful, democratic politics, but that Parliament will make progress towards modern, democratic politics.

**Mr. Trimble:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will recall that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland intervened on me earlier and read out part of a letter that I had written. My recollection is that he stopped immediately after the phrase

"until such time as actual decommissioning has commenced".

That recollection is correct, and it is particularly unfortunate that the Secretary of State did not quote the next sentence, which refers to the need for

"the continuing decommissioning of weapons",

or the point towards the end of the letter where it states:

"In addition to these points until such time as the total commitment to peace and democracy is evidenced".

It was unfortunate that the Secretary of State did not read the entire letter, especially as hon. Members were asking him to do so, so that people could assess it in the round.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The right hon. Gentleman is experienced enough to know that that is a matter of debate, not a point of order. I understand that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has, as I suggested, made the letter available to hon. Members by placing a copy in the Library. As I said before, it is for the benefit of the House that a document that has been extensively relied on should be made available, and I express the hope that the Secretary of State will ensure that it is now laid upon the Table.

**Dr. John Reid:** Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have no hesitation in acceding to the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes, which relates, in particular, to the reference to

"the continuing decommissioning of weapons".

In fact, I did read out that section, although he is correct to say that I did not read out the second paragraph. My point was not to try to pretend that he had agreed to something in Stormont—*[Interruption.]* As I said, I did read it out, as *Hansard* will show. I read out the words "continuing process" as well. I was contesting the implication that we had acted dishonestly by never asking people for their views on this matter, but I am more than happy to accept fully that the words that I read out give the implication which the right hon. Gentleman seeks to give to them, which is that it was not just the first act of decommissioning, but the continuing process of decommissioning that he, no doubt, would wish to examine and make his judgment on. That is precisely why I said that he was perfectly consistent in taking a different view now from the one expressed in the first section, and *Hansard* will show that as well.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** That contribution is also more a point of debate than a point of order, but I am grateful to the Secretary of State for making the letter available. It is now up to right hon. and hon. Members to judge the issues for themselves, as the document is now available to the House, and it would be better if it were laid on the Table officially.

**Mr. Peter Robinson** (Belfast, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The letter refers to other correspondence. The better to enable hon. Members to make a judgment, could you ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to place all the correspondence in the Library?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The ruling that I gave relates to a document that, in itself, was relied on to a substantial extent in debate by the Secretary of State. Other documents that flow from that must be pursued by hon. Members in the other ways available to them.

8.5 pm

**Mr. Douglas Hogg** (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The House is grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your indication that the document should be placed in the Library. As one of those hon. Members who heard the whole exchange, I am bound to say that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland did a serious injustice to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), and I am glad to think that that injustice will be put right.

This has been a distinguished debate, although I do not think that the House was holding its breath when the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) was explaining how he was likely to vote—I and all other hon. Members knew in advance.

The motion has undoubtedly aroused a great deal of emotion on both sides of the House because many of us feel intensely about it. We are being asked to make concessions to those to whom we owe nothing at all—indeed, in respect of whom we have a deep sense of contempt and, dare I say it, loathing. Many of us knew the three hon. Members who were murdered. Ian Gow and Tony Berry are two who come to mind, and they are but a tiny number of those who have been murdered in the Province and elsewhere by those for whom the Sinn Fein Members are apologists. It is in no sense surprising that this debate has engendered the emotion and disgust that has been manifest on both sides of the House.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to three Members, but there were four, and I look forward to the day when the House will remember them properly and place their coats of arms alongside that of Airey Neave. I am here today because Robert Bradford was murdered, and we have already seen Sinn Fein, through *An Phoblacht*, glorying in that, yet it is said that it is going down the road of peace.

**Mr. Hogg:** The hon. Gentleman is wholly right. What I meant to say, and I apologise to him, is that I knew three Members. I did not know Mr. Airey Neave, but I did know the three other Members. I made the observation in that context, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

We start, therefore, with a proposition on which most hon. Members can agree: there is deep revulsion at making concessions to those who, in a democratic state, have chosen a career of terrorism, intimidation and murder. That is extraordinarily difficult for us to accept.

**Mr. Hawkins:** The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) mentioned the coat of arms of Airey Neave, whom I knew, although not as a fellow hon. Member. I knew Ian Gow, and I knew Tony Berry slightly. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that any hon. Member who wishes to vote for the motion tabled by the Leader of the House should take a moment to look up at the coat of arms that commemorates Airey Neave and consider whether it would be right, in the light of that appalling murder within the precincts of the House, to support the motion tonight?

**Mr. Hogg:** Yes, that would be a perfectly proper thing for right hon. and hon. Members to do, and they should reflect on the names of the other three hon. Members who have died and perhaps, even more importantly, on the thousands of people who have died in the Province and elsewhere. Those are very important issues, but revulsion, which I share, is not conclusive of the issues before the House.

The first question that we should address is simple: whether it is right, and in what circumstances it could be right, for us as a House to substitute our own judgment as to who should or should not be representative of any constituency. My opinion is that it must be a general proposition, to which I admit of almost no exception, that it can never be right to deny to the constituency that may have elected a person, however unworthy that person may be, the right to be represented in the House by that person. I have three reasons for that.

First, as a general proposition, it is for the electorate in a democracy to choose its Members even if they are bad and wicked people. That is an essential part of democracy. Secondly and rather differently, I come to a point mentioned by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and by others. If one excludes a person who is chosen by the electorate, one deprives all the electors in that constituency of representation. That is an extremely undesirable state of affairs.

The third reason was provided by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and I agree with him on this point. If one encourages people, such as Sinn Fein Members, to be present in the House, one draws them out of the political ghetto in which they have existed for many years and exposes them to contrary views that are held strongly and vigorously by other people. That is part of the process whereby one may procure change on the part of those drawn into the House.

**Mr. Garnier:** As my right hon. and learned Friend will know from personal experience in relation to his late father and to Mr. Tony Benn, this House used to exclude peers who stood for election and those who were already Members of this House but who succeeded to peerages. That exclusion was acceptable because it applied across the board. My problem with the motion has been mentioned many times. The Government are attempting to create a different kind of membership of the House. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will come to that point with vigour, but I hope that he will undertake to express to the Government our concerns about a two-tier system of membership.

**Mr. Hogg:** My hon. and learned Friend is entirely right. In fact, I shall vote against the motion for the very reason that he has identified. However, I want to establish the groundwork, because I believe that we shall have to make some important changes.

As a general proposition, to which I admit of very few—in fact, no—exceptions, I argue that, when a constituency chooses a Member, that Member should be admitted to the House. We may thereafter disqualify that person if, for example, he or she becomes a felon or convicted criminal and thus incapable of performing his or her function. The general point is that any Member elected should be admitted to the House.

Another issue follows from that. Are there exceptions to that general proposition if, for example, a Member is a terrorist or refuses to take the Oath? I shall deal with both those points. If a Member is a terrorist, it is perfectly respectable to argue—I have heard this point in the past—

*[Mr. Hogg]*

that one should never deal with terrorists. They have chosen a career of murder, intimidation and terrorism and should be outwith the law. I have some sympathy with that perfectly respectable view, but it is not what we have been doing for the past 10 years.

For the past 10 years—in the House and elsewhere—we have been trying to reach an accommodation with Sinn Fein-IRA and, although I do not suggest that there is a total parallel, we have been urging dialogue and accommodation on countries such as South Africa, the Lebanon and other countries in the middle east. Although the examples are not the same, there are some parallels on which one can usefully draw.

In Northern Ireland, we have admitted into the Executive Mr. McGuinness, whom I understand to be very close to policies of murder. Therefore, it seems to be late in the day to draw back and say that, as a matter of principle, we cannot have such people in the House. Their presence here is the inevitable consequence of the processes that most of us have supported—I honourably except the Ulster Unionists—for the past 10 years or so.

We are entitled to say that Sinn Fein and its associates have not fully performed all that was asked of them and that we should exclude them on those grounds. However, that is not a matter of principle, but of detail and not a firm foundation on which to stand. Therefore, odd though it may be—and I have every cause to abominate terrorism—I wish to see Sinn Fein Members in the House and exposed to the democratic debate that is the ordinary currency of our life in this place.

That brings me to a different question that must be confronted. Are we right to stand on the Oath as a reason for excluding such people? We must return to first principles. If it is wholly wrong to exclude from the House those who have been elected, it must surely be wrong to erect an oath as an obstacle to their presence here, because that is to negate the purpose of the election.

I am not, in any sense, a republican; I am a constitutional monarchist and I value the Crown and the person of the sovereign. They are an important part of our constitutional settlement. However, if I ask myself whether I define my obligations and duties as a Member of Parliament with reference to the Crown, the answer is no. My duty as a Member of Parliament is to the constitution as it is settled, changed only in accordance with the law. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann read the interpretation of the European Court of Human Rights and he was right. My other duty as a Member of Parliament is to speak and vote in accordance with my opinion and my settled judgment, and not otherwise.

**Mr. Gummer:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the other problem with which he has to deal is that the nature of the Oath can mean that there is one belief that a person may not hold if he wishes to become a Member of the House of Commons? In today's world, it is difficult to suggest that there is one thing that one must not believe if one wants to be a Member of Parliament. I find that very hard to accept.

**Mr. Hogg:** I think that I agree with my right hon. Friend and that we come at the issue from the same direction.

**Mrs. Dunwoody** *rose—*

**Mr. Hogg:** Does the hon. Lady wish to intervene?

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** Yes, because I might not come at the issue from the same direction. The problem is not that people are excluded because we decide that they must take the Oath, but that they have decided to exclude themselves because they do not wish to take the Oath. What then is the burden of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument?

**Mr. Hogg:** I am going to come to that; it is a fair question. Although this point does not apply directly to the hon. Lady's argument, it is pertinent to it. Let us consider the position of Mr. Tony Benn, a distinguished former Member of the House, or even of the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks). They are republicans and I suspect that they have great difficulty in honestly taking the Oath as couched in its present language. I seem to remember that the hon. Gentleman took the Oath with his fingers crossed, and I do not wish to create a situation in which honest and honourable republicans—and people are perfectly entitled in this state to be republicans—have to strain their consciences in the way that I have described.

**Mr. Garnier:** My right hon. and learned Friend and I are both Queen's counsel. When we became Queen's counsel, we took an oath of allegiance to the Crown Does he extend his argument to our position then? Is it his view that republicans should be entitled to become Queen's counsel without taking it?

**Mr. Hogg:** Yes, of course it is. I do not want to create constraints that stand in the way of honest and honourable people who work within the framework of the constitution and wish to change it in accordance with the law. I do not wish to establish an oath that prevents them from holding an occupation or that obliges them to lie. That is not a proper thing for us to do. We should either have no oath at all or one that honourable people can honestly take without straining their consciences. I very much hope that the House will be willing to consider the structure of the Oath and will either abolish it altogether or move forward in the way that I have described.

**Mr. Hawkins:** While my right hon. and learned Friend advances an argument that I understand, but with which I respectfully disagree, will he at least consider the possibility that the four Sinn Fein Members decline to take the Oath not for an honest and constitutional reason, for which he gives others credit, and not because they want to change our arrangements by law? The real reason, as opposed to the ostensible and public reason, why they will not take the Oath is because they wish to change our arrangements by force as terrorists, by the bomb and the bullet.

**Mr. Hogg:** I do not know what the real reason is, but I am in favour of putting those people on the spot, and I was coming to that.

I am trying to set out the propositions on which I stand and that cause me to take a view different from that expressed by my hon. Friends on the Front Bench. Do they cause me to vote for or against the Government? In the end, I will vote against the motion, very much for the

reasons advanced by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann. If we are going to make a change, it should not be for the benefit of four individuals who deserve nothing of us. Furthermore, we should not make a change for their benefit when we know that they have not properly performed their part of the deal and when, as the right hon. Gentleman said, it is part of a secret compromise about which we know almost nothing. As the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said—in this respect, we are as one, and very nice it is, too—we would create two classes of Members. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) spoke eloquently on that.

It is my belief that we should be willing to accept Sinn Fein Members in this place. We should not allow the Oath, in its present structure and form, to be an obstacle to that. We should be ready to change the Oath, or to abolish it. Then they can choose what they want to do. They can become Members of the House and conform to the obligations and take the benefits, or they can decline to become Members of the House and refuse the benefits. In that way, we can be certain of one thing: no one would be able to say that the rules and practices of the House have stood in the way of them being able to take their seats. Ultimately, that is a matter for their constituents, not for us.

8.22 pm

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): As this seems to be the evening for truisms, I hope you that will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I begin with one or two short statements. I am proud to be a Member of Parliament, and I am proud to be British and a member of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. That is not a fashionable attitude, but it bears repetition from time to time. One of the sad things about the debate is that we have not so far received any of the answers to which the House of Commons is entitled on such basic and important matters.

We have heard some interesting speeches but there is a singular lack of clarity. I want to know why Her Majesty's Government think it necessary to introduce a motion that will radically change the status of Members of Parliament in such a way that there will be a two-tier system, with two completely different types of Member present within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster. I want to know why this matter has not been fully debated before the motion was placed on the Table and why Members of Parliament were not given a full explanation.

I am extremely fond of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but he did himself and the House of Commons no favours by partially quoting from a letter, which seemed to imply that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) is taking a different line from that which he took at the beginning of the argument. Even listening to the part of the letter that was read out, it appeared to me that the right hon. Gentleman was simply saying politely what he has said consistently all along. Indeed, it added neither light nor information to the debate.

We come back to something that is tremendously important. One hundred years ago, I would not have been welcome in the Chamber because my father did not own property until he was well into his 50s—and then only courtesy of a libel action—and as a woman, I would not have had a vote. When I speak here, I am conscious of the fact not only that Parliament consistently changes, but that it changes its rules and procedures and improves, and sometimes does not improve, the way in which it behaves. It does all that with the consent of its Members not just in one House, but in two.

Those changes are brought about because there is a clear public interest. It does not mean to say that we always come up with the right answers or that the general public have the faintest idea how we propose to change procedure, but we are duty bound in this House of Commons to represent the important aspects of democracy for which we were sent here. That means that we cannot, of ourselves, suddenly decide for political reasons—some of which owe a great deal more to the intransigence of certain groups than they do to the genuine political interests of the people of the United Kingdom—that there will be two different types of Members of Parliament.

The Members of Parliament who are excluded from this place are not excluded because they were not honest with their electorate. They said that, if elected, they would not come here. Whatever happens between them and their constituents, their constituents cannot say that they did not know on what terms they were electing a particular Member. Those Members of Parliament are not excluded because they will not swear the Oath of Allegiance. The Oath has been greatly debated tonight, but it does not seem to have occurred to hon. Members that it is an oath to the state of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It should be very important to us. Those Members are excluded because they choose, for political reasons, to exclude themselves.

I have no problem with that. If I choose to exclude myself from political organisations to which I am elected, who is to say me nay; I still have the vestiges of a brain even after many years in this place.

**Mr. Hogg:** The hon. Lady represents her constituents who do not vote for her. She is a doughty champion of their rights. The problem with her argument is that the electors who did not vote for the Sinn Fein Members of Parliament are also unrepresented here. That is a serious problem.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** If I thought that I was not representing the whole of the constituency of Crewe and Nantwich, I would not come here. I do not see myself as simply a representative of one group, nor have I ever said so. The debate about the Oath is a side issue and it takes us away from the real burden of the debate.

The Government tabled the motion. They did not tell us why and they have not yet given an explanation. They tried to suggest that it is a matter of minor importance—a mild rearrangement of the rules of no real value. If that is so, why did the Members of Parliament concerned need to go as far as the European Court of Human Rights to get a definition of the way in which we operate in the House of Commons? They did that because they know that not only is it constitutionally important but it matters to the role of a Member of Parliament.

I had no idea that a Labour Government would make what is, if I may say so, the unacceptable and indeed shameful suggestion that Members of Parliament can be

*[Mrs. Dunwoody]*

divided in a way that would be totally unacceptable to the electorate if they were aware of what we were doing. That suggestion demeans the role that we are elected to fulfil.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** *rose—*

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** I will not give way because I have taken too long. I have been sitting here since half-past two because I have a fundamental belief that when I vote against the motion tonight, I will be voting not against a small political rearrangement that is convenient for members of Her Majesty's Government but against a motion that demeans the House of Commons, and I am deeply angry that it should have been brought forward in this way.

8.29 pm

**Rev. Ian Paisley** (North Antrim): I rise to oppose this attempt to change the rules to allow IRA-Sinn Fein Members to enjoy the privileges of this place while abdicating their responsibilities. The House is being asked to create two types of Members: those who uphold the rules of the House and take the Oath, and those who refuse to do so, but who will be allowed to enjoy certain benefits of the House, while abdicating their responsibilities.

As the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said, it is Sinn Fein Members' own fault that they do not enjoy those privileges. I have lived through many elections, and I have heard those men and that woman advocate their particular political philosophy. They said, "We will not go to the House of Commons. We will not swear an oath to a foreign Parliament. We will not sit there and represent our constituents." SDLP Members have attacked them for that, asking why people would vote for candidates who will not even go to Parliament. They have made their choice.

The serious question that I must ask is, what is the reason for this motion? Why, at the end of this year, are we to be found debating this matter? There is another side to this coin, and I should like to see it. I should like to know what the deal really is. Before 1997, Sinn Fein never used its resources for the benefit of anyone because it was so busy bombing and killing Protestant and Roman Catholic constituents that it had no time to represent them. Suddenly, it seems to have time.

The House should remember that we have devolved powers to Northern Ireland. Those four Members are already Members of the Stormont Assembly, and one is a Minister in the Stormont Cabinet. He does not need to worry about the education of his constituents because education is a devolved matter and he is the Minister of Education. This talk about Sinn Fein having a real desire to help people by coming to the House is false. They want a platform on which to meet the people who come to the House and to forward their aims, and they want the House to finance that.

The previous Speaker of the House, on 14 May 1997, said:

"I feel certain that those who choose not to take their seats should not have access to the many benefits and facilities that are now available in the House without also taking up their responsibilities as Members."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 35.]

I agree. The present Speaker has also advocated that view. But what has happened? The motion discriminates against Members such as myself who have taken the Oath and who sit in the House. It says, "You, who have done what you are told, taken the Oath and obeyed the laws of the House, don't have a full say." It will create a category that contains four people, which is strange when one considers who those people are and what they have done.

I was amazed last Thursday when I heard the Leader of the House say:

"I make no apology for having a peace process that provides a relative peace and stability that Northern Ireland did not know beforehand. If we want that peace process to continue and we want to avoid murders in the future, we have to show our willingness to enter into that process."—[*Official Report*, 13 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 1018.]

Does anyone here really think that if we allow these Members into the House, the bombing, the killing and the beatings that still go on will stop?

The Leader of the House said that he was glad about the relative peace in Northern Ireland. Last Friday, the *Belfast Telegraph*, which is a strong supporter of the agreement and all that it stands for, carried an article stating that bombing by all republicans had returned to pre-ceasefire levels. What do Members think about that? We are told that, to help advance the cause of peace, we should pass the motion tonight.

The Members who want to come here include, of course, Mr. McGuinness, who remains a member of the IRA army council and was promoted to become its chief of staff. He retains his position on the council along with Thomas Murphy, Brian Keenan, Gerard Adams, Martin Ferris, Patrick Doherty—another Sinn Fein member who wants to come here—and Brian Gillen. Let us look at Mr. McGuinness's history. He was in charge of operations during the trouble in Londonderry. In the McGuinness era of IRA control in Londonderry, there were 87 murders. Five of the victims were innocent children: Kathryn Eakin, a Protestant and nine-year-old child; Gordon Gallagher, a Roman Catholic and nine-year-old child; Bernadette McCool, a Roman Catholic, another nine-year-old child; Carol Ann McCool, a Roman Catholic and four-year-old child; and Kathleen Feeny, a Roman Catholic and 14-year-old child.

I have never heard Mr. McGuinness at any time utter one word of regret for the murder of those children; he is completely silent. A journalist questioning him on television about the Omagh atrocity asked, "If one of your constituents came to you and said that they had information about who was responsible for Omagh, what would you advise them to do?" He said, "I would certainly not advise them to go to the police." That is in the public domain.

We have established that Martin McGuinness was to all effects leading the IRA army council and was busy in Londonderry. Members should know for what type of people they are proposing to bend the rules. One of the saddest calamities in Londonderry was the death of Frank Hegarty, who was murdered on the instructions of Mr. McGuinness. Mr. Hegarty had worked for military intelligence and knew where some of the IRA's most important arms and explosives were hidden in the Irish Republic. When the Irish police raided them the Army, fearing that Mr. Hegarty's cover would be blown, pushed him away to England. Mr. McGuinness then arrived on the doorstep of Rose Hegarty, and told her that he wanted to talk about her son and how he could return.

Twice a week for 13 weeks, Mr. McGuinness dropped by, the family met him and they drank tea together. He assured the mother, Rose, that if Frank came home, he could sort the matter out and all would be well; a firm assurance for a mother's heart torn about her son. She persuaded her boy to come home. A rendezvous was arranged by Mr. McGuinness; afterwards the body was found in a roadway in Tyrone, a bullet through the head. That is in the public domain. Many journalists, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, have written moving stories about that murder.

Mr. Adams has blood on his hands. As recently as this September, he has threatened young nationalists who have dared to suggest that they would join the new Police Service. This is what he said:

"I think they"—

that is, officers drawn from the nationalist community—

"will be accorded exactly the same treatment the republican movement accorded to the RUC. No more, no less."

What was that? The murder of more than 300 members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Gerry Adams was a member of the first Provisional IRA delegation that came to London to negotiate with the Conservative Government. He was released with other members of the IRA to do that. When he returned, he carried out what is known as Bloody Friday, when 22 bombs were set off in Belfast with no warning, killing 11 people, including a child.

Jean McConville, another victim whose name ought to be familiar to the House, was executed by the IRA because she was a Roman Catholic who helped a dying Army man. Like any other woman, she went and put his head on her lap, wept over him and helped to comfort him. She was executed on the command of Gerry Adams. Her body has never been found.

**David Winnick:** As someone who is very far removed from the Christian tradition, I look upon Jean McConville—whether I should do so is another matter, because, as I said, I am not of that faith—as one of the finest Christians whom I could imagine. She was a true Christian. I believe—possibly unlike the hon. Gentleman—that if it had been an IRA man who was dying, she would have done the same.

**Rev. Ian Paisley:** I quite agree. As I have always said, there is no difference between the tears of a Roman Catholic mother and the tears of a Protestant mother. They are both mothers, and they both have the same feeling and the same love.

Every hon. Member knows that we are dealing with ruthless men. They are interested not in peace, but in getting their way. As Martin McGuinness said:

"I apologise to no one for saying that we support and admire the freedom fighters of the IRA."

He has not changed. Now we are asked by the Secretary of State and the Leader of the House to allow those people to be brought into the House and given a special privilege. That is wrong. No matter who they are, there should be no special privileges in the House. There are hon. Members who have legitimate views about the Oath and about the Protestant ascendancy and other matters. However, when we enter the Chamber, we all stand on a common platform.

One of my friends from Belfast, the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), recalled his maiden speech. I was present on that occasion. He said that he had not expected things to happen the way they did. Neither did I. I did not think that I would be leading five Members of Parliament in the House, just one less than the official Unionists. That, my friend, is perhaps the biggest miracle that has happened in Northern Ireland during these sad days.

I trust that hon. Members will think hard. Reference was made to the Rev. Robert Bradford, who was shot dead by the IRA. That Saturday morning, I was to have been shot dead, too. The police found in the house adjacent to my home everything ready to assassinate me that day. Fortunately for me, I had an early morning prayer meeting, which is common in the Church to which I belong. I was out of bed at six o'clock and away to prayer. The gunmen did not get me, but when I looked upon the body of Robert, I said to myself, "The bullet could have been for me." Sometimes politicians in Northern Ireland are severely criticised, but they can always answer—an Ulsterman can always answer and fight his corner—but the House should remember that there is a cost to be paid in trying to serve the people of Northern Ireland. Some of us are trying to do that as best we can, but this proposal does not help us in our efforts.

8.45 pm

**David Winnick** (Walsall, North): I hope that, in expressing my support for the motion, there is no need for me to emphasise how I loathe the murders and violence of the IRA. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), whose viewpoint is very different from mine on the Good Friday agreement and other matters in Northern Ireland, read out a list of some victims. I completely agree with his sentiments. As we have been in the House for many years and have been involved in many Northern Ireland debates—obviously, he has been much more involved than I could be—I hope that he is aware that I demonstrated time and again during the years of violence that I was completely opposed to the IRA and to the loyalist murder gangs on the other side. Indeed, during the early 1980s, I opposed the current Mayor of London when he argued as leader of the Greater London council that there should be negotiations with the IRA. I could see no reason for such negotiations, as the only item on the table for that organisation would be Northern Ireland leaving the United Kingdom.

During the years of violence, it was made clear that it was legitimate to argue for a united Ireland. Ministers in the previous Government made it perfectly clear that it was legitimate to have the unification of Ireland as one's political objective, but illegitimate to try to bring about that aim with violence and terror. As I said in an intervention—this returns to the point made by the hon. Member for North Antrim—if the yardstick in respect of Commons office facilities is to be the background of all or some of the four Sinn Fein Members, the same would apply if they were willing to come into the House and take the Oath. I assume from the remarks that he made when he listed the victims that he would be as opposed to such Members coming into the Chamber as he would be to their having office facilities.

As I understand it, however, that is not the view of the Opposition, who say that if the four Members, who were elected in the same way as we all were—there is no doubt

*[David Winnick]*

that they are elected Members of Parliament—were willing to come into the Chamber and take the Oath, they would have no objections at all. Indeed, I would not expect them to have any objections.

The argument and division is about whether there should be what has been described in this debate as a sort of two-tier membership. I would not describe it in those terms, but I am willing to concede the point. I am also willing to concede that it is a messy arrangement. It is not one that I particularly like—of course not; why should I? I would prefer all those who are elected as Members of Parliament, be they on the mainland or in Northern Ireland, to take the Oath, so this is not the sort of compromise that I particularly like and neither do I believe that the Government like it. Obviously, they would take the same view as the rest of us—or at least most of us, with the exception of the Democratic Unionist party—in saying that these Members should take their seats. In the interests of the peace process, however, I am willing for such a compromise, however messy, to be reached.

**Mr. Hawkins:** The hon. Gentleman says that he is willing for a compromise to be reached. If he had stated in his election address that he would vote for giving £500,000 of taxpayers' money to four Sinn Fein Members of Parliament, is he confident that he would have been re-elected?

**David Winnick:** I shall defend my viewpoint in my constituency, as the hon. Gentleman will defend his view in his. I believe that my constituents know of my loathing of IRA violence. If the issue is raised at the next general election, it is my responsibility as the candidate to defend my position. People can then make up their minds in the usual democratic way.

Sinn Fein Members' attitude to taking their seats in what they describe as a foreign Parliament is not unique. For a time, Sinn Fein refused to participate in a Northern Ireland Parliament; being part of a partitioned Northern Ireland was out of the question. It argued time and again that it would never be involved, yet now some of its members are Members of the Legislative Assembly. Some are Ministers and are therefore involved in the Executive. Sinn Fein has obviously changed its mind.

We should also not forget that Sinn Fein refused to recognise the Republic of Ireland. It was recognised throughout the world, and I therefore do not expect that it was unduly worried about Sinn Fein recognition. However, Sinn Fein recognised the Irish Republic only in 1986 after much internal debate, which led to a split at the time. Now it has one member in the Dail and hopes to have a few more; we shall see after the Irish general election.

As I said in an intervention, I do not believe that the IRA has secured victory. It was not defeated militarily; it can take whatever pride it likes from that. If we had been in a position over 30 years to defeat the IRA militarily, we would have done that. We were not involved in a game; enough British soldiers died in the process. It was obvious that the IRA could not be defeated militarily. However, it has been defeated politically for the reasons that I explained earlier. It came into existence in 1970 with one aim in mind: to bring about the unification of Ireland through terror and violence regardless of the wishes of the majority of people in Northern Ireland. That has not happened, and it is not likely to happen until a majority in Northern Ireland supports unification.

**Mr. Garnier:** The hon. Gentleman said that one member of Sinn Fein had been elected to the Dail. Does that member take part in the Dail's proceedings under different terms from other Members of the Dail?

**David Winnick:** The hon. and learned Gentleman knows the answer. There is no oath in the Dail such as the one that is taken here. Since 1986, Sinn Fein has recognised the Irish Republic and it must therefore recognise its Parliament. Sinn Fein currently chooses to describe the UK Parliament as a foreign Parliament. However, if we agree to the motion and the Sinn Fein Members take the office facilities, is not it possible that they will change their minds in due course? I would welcome that.

The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) made clear his views about the Oath. He believes that it could be changed. I made the same point during business questions on 2 December 1999. With the possibility that Sinn Fein Members might wish to take their seats in mind, I asked the then Leader of the House:

"Will she consider the possibility of a change of wording that would allow Sinn Fein MPs to take their seats?"—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1999; Vol. 340, c. 434.]

It appears that Sinn Fein Members are not willing to take their seats, regardless of the Oath. However, if they were, like the right hon. and learned Gentleman, I should be prepared to reconsider it. I believe that those who are elected should have every opportunity to take their seats.

In previous times, this House was involved in a great deal of controversy about Members who wanted to take their seats but could not do so. It was not until 1829 that Catholics were allowed to come here. It was a long time from the Reformation until 1829, and it was likely—although I have not read the debates of the time—that there was a great deal of controversy and discussion about that. It was not until 1860 that orthodox Jews—who could not take the Christian oath—were allowed to come here. Prior to 1860, such a measure was debated but defeated in the Lords. It took some 15 or 20 years before it was finally agreed to, when Baron Rothschild could take his seat as an orthodox Jew.

The position of Charles Bradlaugh was even more controversial. Despite being a non-believer, he was willing to come here and take the Oath but the House came to the conclusion that it would be hypocrisy to do so. He was refused admission four times. I agree that these were Members who wanted to take their seats; obviously, Charles Bradlaugh, the Member for Northampton, wanted to do so. But we must look at the controversy that occurred and the number of Members at the time who said that it would be quite wrong for a Christian country to allow a professed atheist into this House. At the end of the day, the law was changed. Indeed, Charles Bradlaugh lived long enough for an apology to be given to him. While we are debating a different matter—those Members who do not want to take their seats—I would say that the controversies of the past have some relationship to what we are discussing at the moment.

The hon. Member for North Antrim is not in favour of the Good Friday agreement; he believes it to be wrong, inappropriate and a betrayal of the people of Northern Ireland, but that is not the position of the Conservative Opposition. This proposal may help the peace process—perhaps it will not—or consolidate what was agreed at the time; a new Government for Northern Ireland and fairness in governing on behalf of both communities. If it helps the process, I see no reason why I should not vote for the motion, and I shall do so at the appropriate time tonight.

8.57 pm

**Mr. David Wilshire** (Spelthorne): Throughout my 14 years in this House, I have taken a close interest in the affairs of the Province. Whoever has been in government during those 14 years, I have spoken up without fear or favour for a principle that I hold dear and continue to hold dear: that appeasing evil is wrong and doomed to failure.

For the avoidance of doubt, I wish to make it clear that my views are my own, and mine alone. All members of my party tonight have the ability to speak as we will and vote as we will. What we do later this evening is entirely a matter of conscience for each and every one of us.

Before I get to the substance of my speech, I suppose that I must declare an interest of a sort. Some years ago, the views that I hold got me on to a Sinn Fein-IRA assassin's death list. I have always assumed that at least two of the four people whom we are seeking to help tonight approved of my being put on that list. I therefore readily accept that I need to approach this subject in a calm and rational way, rather than with personal feeling and emotion.

Whatever approach I adopt, I come to the same conclusion—that I am implacably opposed to this motion, whatever the arguments that are used and whatever the justifications that are attempted. I am against it for three reasons. As the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said, this motion demeans democracy; this motion allows armed terrorists into the Palace of Westminster; and this motion creates two classes of Member of Parliament, when we should all be equal.

As I said, the motion demeans democracy. If democracy means anything, it is about governance and change exclusively via the ballot box. Yet the motion will help those who support using violence to overthrow the state. Neither the motion nor the Leader of the House has set out the official line as "They must renounce violence first and give up their guns and explosives."

The Government want us to believe that Sinn Fein and the IRA are different. They are not. I had wanted to make it clear why I consider them to be the same, but I do not need to do so, because the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) achieved that far more eloquently than I can. He told the House that three of the four whom the Government want to help are believed to be members not of the Sinn Fein Council, but of the IRA army council—they are one and the same. He also said that at least two of the four have blood on their hands: they have not only authorised and instructed the killing of others, but have been involved. The four whom the Government want us to help are terrorists. They should be treated accordingly, instead of being welcomed into the heart of British democracy.

**Mr. Hawkins:** My hon. Friend and I tabled an amendment that, sadly, was not selected for debate, so he knows that I agree with each and every word he has said—and I am sure that I shall agree with the rest of his speech. Does he agree that much of the debate has shown that the emperor has no clothes? Many speakers consider the people whom the Government want to help to be democrats who wish to participate in our processes, but as he rightly says, they spat in the face of democracy time after time through all their terrorist activities.

**Mr. Wilshire:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right; of course they are not democrats. They are armed terrorists who keep their weapons and explosives for a simple reason: if they cannot get their way, they will use them. If they are not like that, why do they keep guns and why would they need Semtex, save to undermine democracy as we know it? By demeaning democracy, the motion will not only let those armed terrorists—the four Members of Parliament who have never renounced terrorism or denounced violence—into the Palace of Westminster, but will make staff passes available to them.

Sinn Fein-IRA have twice got bombs into this building without passes, so one can only speculate about how much more murder and mayhem may be achieved if we give those people passes to enable them to pass through the security screens with whatever they like. The motion will also leave those on Sinn Fein-IRA death lists open to attack within the precincts, but I have yet to hear the Government offer any suggestions on their plans for extra security and extra protection.

The third matter of principle is that the motion will create two classes of MP—an issue that has generated much concern and much debate. There are 655 of us who believe in democracy, although we may have different views on it, but another four hold us, the House and our country in contempt. The Leader of the House claims that those of us who oppose the motion are trying to create two classes of MP, but that is utter rubbish. It hardly warrants being taken seriously as an argument.

Currently, all Members of the House, whatever their views, are the same. The Sinn Fein-IRA four are deliberately putting themselves at a disadvantage. We are not doing that; they are doing it themselves, and it is unnecessary. Consider the position of the Social Democratic and Labour party. It wants a republic in the north of Ireland. It wants out of the House of Commons. It wants a united Ireland. I may not agree with those policies, but they are all perfectly honourable if pursued solely via the ballot box. Those who do not agree with them can vote against them, but I defend the right to believe in them.

If members of the SDLP can pursue the dream, as they see it, of a united Ireland through this place, why cannot Sinn Fein-IRA? There can be only one conclusion: that the SDLP has renounced violence, and Sinn Fein-IRA have not.

Sadly, the Government have a majority which they intend to use to force the motion through. I suspect that the best that we can hope to achieve is the passing of some amendments. On the Order Paper is a group of amendments that seek to do four things; I think they should be touched on briefly before the end of the debate.

The first of the amendments deals with the question of when the new arrangements should be brought into effect. The Government say that it should happen as soon as we return from the Christmas recess. There is a raft of

*[Mr. Wilshire]*

amendments suggesting other times, but there is a common theme: all the amendments suggest in one way or another that if the House is determined to make the proposed arrangements, it should not bring them into effect until the terrorists have disarmed and renounced violence. If the House is determined to follow a route that I oppose, I beg it to do that only when dealing with democrats rather than with armed terrorists.

The Leader of the House tried to suggest that amendments of this sort presented obstacles—by supporting amendments requiring decommissioning and a renunciation of violence, we were somehow placing an obstacle in the way of four Members of Parliament. There is an easy answer to that: all 659 of us should be required to renounce violence, and say that we will not hold guns and explosives. I doubt that any Member would not agree to such a requirement; only the four who are setting themselves apart consider it unreasonable.

Amendment (m), tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), would prevent the payment of allowances. If we do our arithmetic correctly, we see that the motion will give armed terrorists some £400,000 a year to further their campaign to overthrow the state. Moreover, they will not even have to account for themselves: the Leader of the House confirmed that they would not be required to complete the register. That is a disgrace.

I am glad that the Leader of the House has now returned to the Chamber. If he will not listen to anything else said by anyone here, I hope that if he gets his way tonight he will immediately give some thought to requiring all MPs, regardless of whether they take their seats, to complete the register and be subject to the same rules as the rest of us.

Amendment (p), tabled by me, seeks to prevent Sinn Fein-IRA staff from having access to the services and facilities of this building. As I said earlier, issuing passes to those staff will allow unchecked and unrestricted access. It will allow free access of guns and explosives to the Palace. It will also do something else which I find utterly objectionable: it will require staff of the House to assist people in their avowed intent to undermine this state. I think it dreadful to put loyal servants of the House in a position in which they are required to assist terrorists, and assist subversion.

If the Government will not listen to the argument about staff passes, I urge them to do a number of things. If they are determined to have Sinn Fein-IRA terrorists in here wearing staff passes, they should require them to go through the security screens every time they enter the building. They should make certain that none of those people—none of our staff, in fact—can use the facilities of the House to further terrorism. We must ensure that no one in this building is required to help Sinn Fein-IRA to undermine the state.

Amendment (ii) seeks to put some restrictions on whom Sinn Fein-IRA can choose as members of staff. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who tabled the amendment, would agree that we could happily put that restriction on every Member of Parliament, so that we would all continue to be equal. Anyone who has a pass to this place should not be, or should never have been, a member of a proscribed organisation and should never have been convicted of an imprisonable offence. I do not see why we cannot have that requirement, even if the Government insist on their motion.

The motion is not about enabling duly elected Members of Parliament to do their job. It is not even, as we discovered earlier, about implementing the Good Friday agreement; there is nothing in the agreement about such a measure. The motion is about surrendering to murderers, trying to appease those who have guns pointed at us and who are willing to use them, handing over millions of pounds to terrorists to help them to do their work, and forcing the staff of the House to help people of violence. Those who are in favour of the motion demean democracy. Those who support the motion are bowing down to armed killers and creating two types of MP. In my book, that amounts to appeasement. It will not work. It never has done and it never will.

9.12 pm

**Mr. Frank Field** (Birkenhead): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) but I wish to begin by disabusing him of one point. Much of the debate has been about whether we will create two tiers of Members of Parliament. We have two-tier membership of Parliament already: those who represent seats in Northern Ireland and the rest of us. It is clear from many debates over the years in the House that Northern Ireland Members run special risks and face particular horrors that the rest of us do not. I therefore wish to recast the debate and discuss whether we should create another tier of Members, and not by levelling up our actions, beliefs and aspirations to meet those of Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies, but by lowering them to allow people to come in without buying the full package.

It has been noticeable that although the Government sensibly deployed their best speaker and most able advocate to open the debate, it has run away from them. I hope that I cause no offence to those hon. Members who have spoken in favour of the motion when I say that they in their hearts probably know that they are not winning the argument.

I have been here about 20 years. About 15 years ago, the media began one of its regular crazes, saying that no one in the House of Commons could put two words together, let alone two sentences. The Leader of the House, as he did on many occasions, led for the Opposition then and, as always, slaughtered all those before him. My normal seat, in all those barren years, was four up from the Front Bench next to the Gangway. Enoch Powell sat just the other side of the Gangway and he commented to me, after my right hon. Friend had finished, to the effect that we heard much about the lack of orators in the House of Commons, but that anybody who had ever heard my right hon. Friend speak would know that that was untrue. Although the Government were right to put their most able speaker up to try to convince the House of the wisdom of the motion, even his skills have failed to convince a large proportion of Members.

**Mr. Garnier:** The right hon. Gentleman is right that the Leader of the House signally failed to convince the majority of those who have been in the Chamber all afternoon. From his sadly brief experience of being in the Government, does the right hon. Gentleman hold out any

hope that the Government may see some sense, listen to the voices of those who have spoken tonight and withdraw the motion?

**Mr. Field:** What happens when the vote comes is up to us. We are sent here as free agents, albeit with party loyalties, and at the end of our stewardship we have to account for how we spend our time. I would hope, given that the argument has gone against the Government tonight, that if they put the motion to a vote, they will lose. Other issues have arisen from the debate that suggest that any Government who wished to appear wise and considerate of views expressed here would bring other motions before us, shortly after Christmas, so that we can attend to those matters.

**Lembit Öpik:** I have great respect for the right hon. Gentleman and for the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), and I am sure that his position is sincerely held. Will he accept that many of us of the opposing view genuinely and sincerely feel that it is in the interest of the peace process, on a cost-benefit analysis, to support the motion?

**Mr. Field:** My hon. Friend, for I call him that, took half an hour of the House's time. I am more than prepared for Members on both sides to judge whether he convinced them on the argument and the quality of his judgment.

We have spent two whole days debating issues that affect one part of this kingdom, Northern Ireland. I sat through yesterday's debate, not wishing to speak. I have sat through this debate and, happily, I have been called to speak. Unfortunately, I missed the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), but as she will understand, there are times when, after one has been in the Chamber for seven hours, it is necessary to leave.

One of the themes of both debates has been the view that history somehow progresses in a line. It has been said that our job here is to push it forward and that history shows that events always move forward. I suggest that that is a mistaken view of how human events unfold before us. Indeed, if we were having this debate in the 1930s, some people would have lost the argument about the Government's line then on Nazi Germany. Some would have suggested that even though we had made a series of concessions that had not worked, we needed to make some more. On this issue, too, I caution the House to stand back for a moment from the contributions that we have heard, because underlying them is the belief that the peace process is heading in the one direction that all of us wish to support. It is suggested that the only thing that we need to do to keep the show on the road is to make more and more concessions. That might be true, but there may come a time when people would doubt that.

The right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) set the debate alight when he said that we should not get bogged down in principle. That was a wonderful wheeze on his part, and typically British. It relaxed us all, because none of us likes to speak from points of principle. However, those who attended to his speech will have understood that it was notable for its point of high principle. The single theme that ran through it was picked up by other hon. Members, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich.

That theme is that this is not a simple little motion about whether we believe in the peace process but a crucial test of how hon. Members regard the House of Commons, and of our role in it. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that the motion was a "limited" measure. I beg to disagree. I believe that we are discussing a most fundamental measure.

A similar matter arose in the first Parliament to which I was elected. The then Government faced the question of whether to bring the trade unions within the law as the House of Commons defined it, or whether the unions could define the law within which they were prepared to operate. The House of Commons decided that hon. Members would set the framework within which organisations and people in this kingdom should work. I believe that the Government were right then to do that, and that today's Government are wrong to try to suggest that we should behave differently.

Hon. Members have already noted that the House of Commons is regularly ambushed by the Government. We often hear on the radio news at 7 or 8 am that later that day the Government will announce another stage in the peace process. Such announcements always mean that the House has to make major changes to the organisation of its affairs. The House has already approved the extraordinary proposition that a person can belong to two Parliaments, even though those Parliaments have different loyalties and programmes.

The House was given only a couple of days' notice of the motion before it today. My argument is that it changes the fundamental nature of the House of Commons, where we have the privilege to work. Hon. Members must decide whether this motion is the final throw in the concessions needed to keep the peace treaty alive, or whether we will be faced with other concessions later on, in the new year.

The Belfast agreement used to be called the Good Friday agreement, but the name was changed when things got more difficult. The change had substance, as religion and the symbolism that goes with it were removed. An Easter agreement has extraordinary connotations, especially to people in Northern Ireland, about the resurrection and so on. Before hon. Members vote tonight, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will tell us, when he winds up for the Government, whether the Belfast agreement contained other elements that were neither made public nor debated. If so, will we be asked to approve them at some later stage?

I am told—and I regret that I did not hear her—that my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich brought us back to the centre of the debate. How do we see the role of an MP? The Government are standing on their head when they answer that question. They seem to believe that our job here is to answer letters from our constituents and do the other good works that the majority wish us to undertake. Our constituents do not send us here for that function; they send us here to be their representatives in this Chamber. Sometimes we try to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that we can make our contributions, however inadequate, to the debate and be full members of the committee.

We undertake our work in our constituencies because human sympathy makes us want to help people who are less well placed than we are. By doing so, we learn about the process of government—about what is wrong and

*[Mr. Field]*

what needs to be changed—and use that experience to shape our amendments and help guide our debate. It is not the essence of our work as Members of Parliament, although it is an important part. We are not here to act as very well paid social workers but to represent the views of our constituents.

I was asked earlier whether I thought that the Government would withdraw the motion. One can but hope. As for whether the Government will pick up messages from the debate that will be valuable to their long-term survival and the well-being of our nation, the answer is yes.

Although it is not central to this debate, many of us must have been surprised to have heard the views expressed on both sides of the Chamber about the Oath and whether its wording is appropriate. Our constitution continually and continuously evolves. The words of the Oath, which at one time might have summed up what the Oath really represented, may not necessarily be appropriate now. I suggest that loyalty to the Crown in times past would have unified us and made it easy for most of us to gain admittance to the House of Commons. Now it may be a barrier. If that is so, our constituents will want us to think about the essence of the Oath and what it is supposed to encapsulate—not in a hurried, end-of-term debate, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) said, in a considered and careful way. As I tried to suggest in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), the Oath sums up our commitment to a way of life as democrats, and the House would be well advised to look at it carefully.

For much of the time that I have spent in Parliament, the Labour party excited itself with the wonders of what it was proposing, as Labour voters walked away. They did not walk away because of a particular policy but because they thought that we were breaking what they regarded as the common decencies that sum up a wisdom that nations acquire over time. Although our constituents will probably not be particularly interested in the minutiae of the debate that we have necessarily had tonight, they will know that the Government's motion asks us to cross and break those common decencies. There is enormous danger for any political party that does that once—let alone more than once. I appeal to my right hon. and hon. Friends, in a proper Christmas spirit, to take what the Whips tell us is a free vote and act as though we believe it by throwing out the motion and asking the Government to come back with a much more considered programme of reform—which we need—when we return from the Christmas recess.

9.30 pm

**Mr. Roy Beggs** (East Antrim): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) who is acknowledged by colleagues on both sides of the House as a Member of high principle.

This is a sad day for the House of Commons. The case presented by the Leader of the House was uncharacteristically poor; he did not produce a convincing argument to support a motion that has clearly exposed the Government's willingness further to appease Sinn Fein-IRA.

What makes this place so special is its history—as the mother of Parliaments and of democracy. Since the awful events of 11 September, we have seen countless ceremonies in the United States at which American patriotism was to the fore. Millions of grieving citizens found enormous comfort in a shared love of their great nation and its illustrious history. I admire them for that.

I am always struck by the sense of envy exhibited by American citizens who are in awe of our British history. For more than 700 years our parliamentary democracy has stood against those who sought to undermine it. When our forefathers in the House of Commons were challenged, they fought back.

I fully support Mr. Speaker's ruling and, indeed, that of his predecessor, now Baroness Boothroyd. They sought to uphold and defend the rights of each and all of us. Today, however, we are being asked to roll over and accommodate Sinn Fein-IRA. If we accept the motion, it will afford privileges to four individuals who have no respect for this House, for the proud history of our nation, for our Queen or indeed for anything that can be regarded as British—apart, of course, from British banknotes.

Those individuals have spent their whole adult lives trying to undermine our nation. Three of them have done so through acts of murder and violence and, indeed, all three remain key figures on the IRA's army council. Despite that, Her Majesty's Government want us to accept those people into this building with open arms and to hand them several hundred thousand pounds of taxpayers' money. For what? To do good? To benefit this nation? To enhance our democracy? Not a bit of it. We all know that that access and money will be used by those people—and their henchmen—to further seek to undermine our nation. Who knows for what purpose some of the finance might be used?

**Mr. Hawkins:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Beggs:** I am sorry I cannot do so—I have only a few minutes for my speech.

I am well aware that my party and representatives of other Unionist parties sit with Sinn Fein representatives in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I am also fully aware that we sit with them in district councils throughout the Province. However, the difference is that Sinn Fein members entered those forums under the same rules as everyone else—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Today, however, the Government are proposing to allow Sinn Fein MPs and their staff access to this place and to their allowances on a different basis from the rest of us. That is what I find most objectionable.

Why are the Government asking us to do that? The answer is, of course, so that they can continue their policy of appeasement towards Sinn Fein-IRA. The Government are determined to feed the hungry republican tiger, no matter what the consequences are for anyone else.

Last night, we discussed a five-year extension to the deadlines for decommissioning, despite the fact that, as we all know, that process should have been completed more than 18 months ago. Before that, there had been a conveyor belt of concessions to the terrorists with which we are all familiar—prisoner releases, reform of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, promised amnesty for terrorists on the run from the law of the land and a review of criminal justice. The list goes on. Why? To keep terrorists happy.

Have the Government not a prior duty to keep their law-abiding citizens and law-abiding Members of Parliament happy? The Government fail to understand that Sinn Fein-IRA will never be satisfied. No matter what they get, they will simply ask for more, and the Government, to date, have always been keen to oblige. The motion is yet further evidence of that. Christmas is almost upon us, but, when it comes to Sinn Fein-IRA, the Government are happy to play Santa Claus 12 months of the year.

Like many other right hon. and hon. Members, I have lost friends at the hands of Irish republican terrorists. We in the House remember Robert Bradford, Tony Berry, Ian Gow, Airey Neave and many others. Those distinguished Members of this House were murdered by Irish republican terrorists—

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): Including McGuinness and the other fellow, Adams.

**Mr. Beggs:** Indeed, and they are still unrepentant. Let us imagine what the great men who have been murdered would think if they knew what we were being asked to do today—or, to be more precise, what the Government intend to do to us today. The Government are forcing through the motion; there is no free vote. Those on the payroll vote have been leaning on others, and those who vote for the motion, if it is carried, will bring shame and embarrassment on themselves.

I shall conclude as I began. This is a sad day for the House of Commons. Parliament should not be abused in this way. Gerry Adams has said openly that what the House is likely to agree to today has come about as a result of an agreement with the Prime Minister. A secret, dirty little deal has been done, disregarding long-established custom and practice in the House. I find it insulting to the House that the Prime Minister is seeking to sell out centuries of democratic history by introducing this motion, and I hope that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will oppose it.

9.38 pm

**Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): I have only a few minutes in which to speak in the debate—I had hoped to be called earlier—so I shall not rehearse the speech that I wanted to make. Having listened to the debate, I have to tell the Government that they must answer some serious outstanding questions before they can have my vote tonight. I had intended to vote for the motion, but much has been said about two-tier membership—a concept with which I do not agree.

A two-tier membership is possible if Members can have their office costs and allowances in this place—we may argue about that—but do not have to register in the Register of Members' Interests. It was clear from the opening speech made by the Leader of the House that Members have to register their interests within three months of taking their seats. If Members do not take their seats, they do not enter their interests on the register. All Members should have the right to carry out advocacy work on behalf of their constituents, regardless of whether they have taken the Oath. If they cannot represent their constituents and are not treated the same way as all other Members, we shall create a two-tier membership. I could not vote for a proposition that allowed that to happen given the fact that, correctly, we are all under the most intense scrutiny. When we deal with public funds, the public want us to be subject to even more scrutiny and they want to be aware of our interests when we speak in the House or carry out business on behalf of our constituents.

If the motion is carried, it will present a great dilemma for Sinn Fein. It will take the Queen's shilling and it will cross the great divide between its open advocacy of republicanism and using the assets of, and taking a place in, what it sees as this foreign Parliament. That dilemma for Sinn Fein is just as great as the one before those on the Unionist Benches who do not believe that Sinn Fein Members should be allowed to come here under any circumstances.

I shall not make the speech that I had hoped to make, but I hope that the Government will answer those questions because I am seriously in doubt as to whether I can give them my support.

9.40 pm

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) has well illustrated the difficulty that the Government have brought upon themselves in this debate and with this issue. He is not the only Government Back Bencher to have voiced unease and disquiet about the motion. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and even—if I can put it that way—the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson), who started her speech by saying that she had considerable reservations about the motion, have seen the difficulties that this ill considered motion will cause.

In the brief time available to me, I want to touch on two or three salient issues that have arisen in the debate. The first and very obvious one is the matter of timing and the matter of concessions. Opposition Members have repeatedly asked—my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) and my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) illustrated this point as well as or better than most—what point there is to premature concession. What on earth is the point in what is called a peace process of making such an important concession to people with whom one is supposed to be in dialogue and whom one is supposed to be persuading further to disarm and to move towards peace? We see no sense at all in making such a concession and it is perfectly obvious that many right hon. and hon. Members on the Government side do not see the sense of it either.

We have yet to receive a proper explanation from the Government as to why Ministers have felt the necessity to come to the House at this stage and offer this highly contentious concession to Sinn Fein-IRA when the Government have apparently—unless we are told otherwise by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—received no undertaking of any kind that it will give rise to further progress.

Another issue has risen time and again in the debate, and I shall categorise it as the two classes of MP. The phrase has been used by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell, my hon.

*[Mr. Eric Forth]*

Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and by many others. The issue is simple and it highlights starkly what the debate has turned out to be about. It is the unease and unhappiness that Members feel when a measure, such as the one before us, effectively creates two different categories of Member of Parliament.

The Members present have chosen to take their seats and to do their job in the fullest sense of the word. They do not just represent their constituents and help them with problems but exercise their judgment in the House on issues such as those that affect Northern Ireland. However, we are now being asked to accept into the House—along with families and staff—those Members who have chosen of their own accord not to take their seats in the House. We must assume that their electorate elected them on that basis, so we cannot be told that those voters are somehow deprived by the fact that their Members of Parliament have chosen not to take their seat. The voters knew about that at the time.

**Mr. Joyce:** As I understand it, a minority of voters in those constituencies—90,000 out of 250,000—voted for Sinn Fein, so the right hon. Gentleman's thoughts should surely be with those who did not vote Sinn Fein in those constituencies.

**Mr. Forth:** I am an old-fashioned believer in the first past the post system and acknowledge its results in constituencies both in Northern Ireland and throughout the land. I was referring to the relationship between the majority who voted for the Sinn Fein Members and sent them here knowing that they would not take their seats.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne touched on the security issue. There is a distinct feeling of unease among hon. Members and, in particular, officers and staff in these buildings and precincts about who we may be inviting into our midst. In that context, the green form that we expect all staff to complete is of great relevance. It starts by saying:

"It is the Government's policy that the departments and agency will carry out a Counter Terrorist Check . . . in the interest of national security before anyone can be: authorised to take up posts which involve proximity to public figures at particular risk of attack by terrorist organisations".

It goes on to say:

"The purpose of such checks is to prevent those who may have connections with terrorist organisations, or who may be vulnerable to pressure from such organisations, from gaining access to . . . premises, where there is a risk that they could exploit that position".

Nothing could better sum up the risk that everyone in the precinct believes that they run if we allow on to the premises families, staff and so on of the Members who are referred to in the motion. Those people will be asked to answer the questions on the green form, including:

"Have you ever been involved in: espionage? terrorism? sabotage? . . . Have you ever been involved in actions intended to overthrow or undermine Parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means?"

That sounds to me like a thumbnail sketch of Sinn Fein-IRA.

The question arises—it will ultimately perhaps be for you, Mr. Speaker, and certainly for the Serjeant-at-Arms, to determine—as to how we can be satisfied that sufficient measures will be taken to guarantee that anyone who fills in the form and who is associated with the Members covered by the motion will not come under that description on the green form.

The questions on the form continue:

"Have you ever been a member of, or supported a group or groups involved in any of the above activities?",

and so on. The message is clear. How will we be given a guarantee that will work and hold water so that we feel secure against the possibility of such people coming on to our premises?

**Mr. Tom Harris** (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Forth:** No. I am about to finish.

My final point relates to what the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough said. Others also touched on the issue, and it will require some thought. What relationship will the Members who have chosen not to take their seats, whose families and staff will be able to roam the premises, have with our code of conduct and Register of Members' Interests? Will they be obliged to fill out the Register, like the rest of us? It would appear not. If they do not, will there be sanctions against them? It would appear not. We are creating another class of Member who will not be subject to the same rules and codes of conduct that rightly cover other hon. Members.

The measure is unnecessary. The Government have given no cogent reason why we are being asked to support it now. It is dangerous because it introduces the concept of two completely different types of Members of Parliament, something that I am sure that all of us in any other circumstances would resist stoutly and definitely. In addition, the proposal raises serious security issues. I hope that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will tell us, at the very least, how the Government will liaise with the House authorities to give every guarantee that security checks and measures will be applied to the families and staff of the Members concerned if they are allowed in under the terms of the motion. We need a guarantee that they have not, and will not have, any connection with any organisation that seeks to undermine our constitutional arrangements.

The measure is bad, unnecessary and divisive. It will not promote the peace process and we should not support it.

9.49 pm

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid):** I shall start by giving a direct answer to a direct question. The staff of any Member who uses the facilities will be vetted in the normal fashion.

**Mr. Forth:** That is what we are worried about.

**Dr. Reid:** In that case, the right hon. Gentleman need not worry. Decisions will be put to Mr. Speaker in the normal fashion and made in the normal fashion.

Not surprisingly, there has been a great deal of heat in tonight's debate. There has also been a great deal of light, not least in the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and for Walsall, North (David Winnick), both of whom are consistent contributors to debates on Northern Ireland.

*[Interruption.]* They may not be regarded by some on the Opposition Front Bench as people to be listened to, but most Members of the House would agree that they make a major contribution to the debate, particularly by alerting us to what my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire called the beginnings of a possibility of a sea change that assists in drawing Sinn Fein further into the political process. They both pointed to the republican movement's gradual but perceptible shift over the decades into political engagement, first, in the Dail, then in the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive and now in the precincts of this House.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) also displayed a broad and deep knowledge of the peace process, highlighting in particular the risks taken by the previous Tory Government. I fully accord them the accolade that they deserve for the role that they played in getting the peace process under way. The hon. Gentleman pointed out that although there was a great deal of controversy about those measures at the time, they were undoubtedly the building blocks for the peace that we have now. Despite all its imperfections, that peace is light years ahead of any situation that previously held in Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman, like the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), asked whether Sinn Fein Members will be subject to the same scrutiny as other Members. As I said, the answer is yes.

**Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) *rose—*

**Dr. Reid:** If the right hon. Gentleman will permit me, I will continue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) said that it is important to remember that we have a process by which paramilitaries, both loyalist and republican, are hesitantly and reluctantly moving—but nevertheless moving—away from violence. Part of that process was the Conservatives' efforts to engage, at one stage even in secret, in talks with the Provisional IRA. That was another risk taken by a Conservative Government, and one of which we are now all the beneficiaries.

A number of standard objections were made that I want to address very briefly. One is that the motion will create two classes of Member. Let me make it absolutely plain that the two classes of MP were created by the 1997 decision. In response to the question asked by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), I shall read from the 1989 edition of "Erskine May". I realise that I have been in trouble for reading from documents tonight, but this one might be more enlightening. It says that

> "although until he has taken the oath a Member may not sit and vote, he may vacate his seat by the acceptance of the Chiltern Hundreds and is entitled to all the other privileges of a Member (but not to his salary), being regarded, both by the House and by the law, as qualified to serve, until some other disqualification has been shown to exist."

That was the position up to 1997. Far from creating two classes of MP, we are reducing the differences between the two classes that were created by the 1997 decision.

It galls me tremendously to hear Conservative Front Benchers, who have spent the past four years demanding that we create two, three or four classes of MP in the House by limiting the voting rights of Scottish and Welsh MPs and possibly those of London MPs, suddenly discover their crocodile teeth beneath their crocodile tears and their allegiance to one class of MP when it suits them. It is nothing but a camouflage for what they were doing.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) cannot stand away from his seat. If he wants the Minister to give way, he stands in his place; he does not move across the Chamber.

**Dr. Reid:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I give way, it will be claimed that I have not addressed the arguments that were made in our debate.

We heard the argument that Sinn Fein Members stood on an abstentionist ticket, and that constituents knew what they were getting before they voted for them. That overlooks two things—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to respond to the debate.

**Mr. William Cash** (Stone) *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please sit down?

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** The Secretary of State is obliged to give way.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I am chairing the proceedings. Does the Secretary of State wish to give way?

**Dr. Reid:** I am attempting to respond to Members who were present during our debate.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Does the Secretary of State wish to give way?

**Dr. Reid:** No, I do not, Mr. Speaker; I wish to respond to Members who advanced arguments during our debate.

The argument about Sinn Fein standing on an abstentionist ticket overlooks two things. In the four constituencies where 90,000 people voted for Sinn Fein, nearly 100,000 people voted for other parties. Like all elected Members, Sinn Fein MPs have a responsibility to represent their entire constituency, including those who did not vote for them.

Another line of argument, in much of what has been said, is that it would be fine if only Sinn Fein came here, accepted the Oath and entered the Chamber. That is rather like saying that the problem with Irish republicans is that they are Irish republicans. Of course, that creates a problem, but we are trying to grapple with it.

**David Burnside** *rose—*

**Dr. Reid:** Let me just turn to Opposition Front Benchers—

**Mr. Gerald Howarth:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would you be good enough to confirm that the debate is

*[Mr. Gerald Howarth]*

open ended and does not necessarily need to end at 10 o'clock? The Secretary of State therefore has plenty of time to take interventions, should he wish to do so.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman is quite right that the debate is open ended.

**Dr. Reid** *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Will the Secretary of State sit down for a moment? Giving way is at the discretion of any hon. Member who is addressing the House. The Secretary of State indicated where he is going on the question of giving way.

**Dr. Reid:** There are three reasons why the House should support the motion. First, the House should support anything that moves people who have previously been in conflict into dialogue and democratic entrenchment. We cannot solve decades and centuries of conflict by choosing to deal with other people. The only way to end a war, guerrilla or otherwise, is by agreement with those who have been involved in it.

**David Burnside** *rose—*

**Dr. Reid:** The second reason is that there are constituents who should be supported—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The Secretary of State is not giving way.

**Dr. Reid:** There are constituents to whom we should extend the franchise and the right to have representation in the House.

**Mr. Cash** *rose—*

**Dr. Reid:** I shall end with two quotes. First:

"The sensible democrat helps the embryonic democrat to find the way to democracy"—*[Interruption.]*

This is a marvellous display of democracy. I repeat:

"The sensible democrat helps the embryonic democrat to find the way to democracy."—[*Official Report*, 8 February 2000; Vol. 344, c. 145.]

Those are not my words; they are the words of former Prime Minister John Major. What a pity there are not more Members of his mettle on the Opposition Benches tonight. "Making peace," he said, "is a messy business." However, it is necessary and it leads to enormous benefits for all the people in this kingdom.

**Keith Hill** (Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

*Question put,* That the Question be now put:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 328, Noes 112.

**Division No. 117]** **[9.59 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John

Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Fraser Kemp and**
**Mrs. Anne McGuire.**

**NOES**

Ainess, David
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brake, Tom
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Leigh, Edward
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Price, Adam
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spink, Bob
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*

Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Gerald Howarth and Mr. Richard Bacon.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Question put accordingly*, That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 168, Noes 357.

**Division No. 118]** **[10.14 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Dr. Julian Lewis and Mrs. Cheryl Gillan.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew

Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mrs. Anne McGuire and**
**Mr. Fraser Kemp.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),*

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion in the name of Mr. Robin Cook and Mr. Secretary Reid may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

*Question agreed to.*

*Amendment proposed:* (t), in line 1, leave out

"chosen not to take their seats"

and insert

"not affirmed or sworn the oath of allegiance".—*[Mr. Quentin Davies.]*

*Question put*, That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 169, Noes 350.

**Division No. 119]** **[10.27 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Dr. Julian Lewis and**
**Mrs. Cheryl Gillan.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*

Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mrs. Anne McGuire and**
**Mr. Fraser Kemp.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Amendment proposed:* (x), in line 7 at end, add:

"but all such facilities will be withdrawn if the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland confirms that any organization with which such Members are associated has been involved in any act of terrorism."—*[Rev. Ian Paisley.]*

*Question put*, That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 166, Noes 347.

**Division No. 120]** **[10.39 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David

Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clapison, James
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hoey, Kate
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Nigel Dodds and**
**Mr. Gregory Campbell.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay

Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Fraser Kemp and**
**Mrs. Anne McGuire.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Main Question put:—*

*The House divided:* Ayes 322, Noes 189.

**Division No. 121]** **[10.51 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John

Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Tony McNulty and**
**Mr. John Heppell.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M

Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'rns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and**
**Dr. Julian Lewis.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That, with effect from 8th January 2002, those Members who have chosen not to take their seats and thus do not qualify to participate in the proceedings in Parliament may use the facilities within the precincts of the House and the services of departments of the House, and may claim support for their costs as set out in the Resolution of 5th July 2001, relating to Members' Allowances, Insurance &c., and the allowances relating to travel within the United Kingdom for Members, their families and staff.

# Orders of the Day

## International Development Bill *[Lords]*

*Bill, as amended in the Standing Committee, to be considered tomorrow.—[Angela Smith.]*

### PETITIONS

## Rural Petrol Stations

11.3 pm

**Mrs. Angela Browning** (Tiverton and Honiton): I wish to present two petitions. The first is to the House of Commons from the rural residents of the United Kingdom and it declares that

rural petrol filling stations provide essential services for the motorists living in rural areas, and to rural communities as a whole; that such businesses are subject to predatory competition from large oil companies; and that such competition should not be allowed to deprive rural residents of the services provided by rural filling stations.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to investigate the practices of large oil companies to take such action as is appropriate to prevent further large-scale and widespread closure of rural petrol forecourts, and to set minimum requirements for forecourt services.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

*To lie upon the Table.*

**Mrs. Browning:** The second petition is to the House of Commons from the petrol retailers and motorists of the United Kingdom. It declares that

major oil companies in the United Kingdom are alleged to set the prices of their own petrol and diesel products at selected forecourts with the aim of forcing competitors out of business; and that motorists should not have to pay more for their essential fuel purchases because of where they choose to live.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to bring forward legislative proposals to control the powers of major United Kingdom oil companies to engage in predatory pricing.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

*To lie upon the Table.*

## Secondary Schools (Kent)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Angela Smith.]*

11.4 pm

**Miss Ann Widdecombe** (Maidstone and The Weald): I am grateful to have the opportunity to raise an issue that is of huge concern to my—

**Mr. David Clelland** (Tyne Bridge): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What about the other petition?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** I have a record of only two petitions on the order of business in front of me.

**Mr. Clelland:** Only one was presented.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Two were presented. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman may not have followed the detail. They were related, but two separate petitions were presented.

**Joyce Quin** (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I expected to present a petition and understood that it was part of our order of business this evening.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** We appear to have no record of that fact. It was certainly not on the agenda that I saw earlier in the day. If there has been a misunderstanding, I am sure that that can be remedied at an early date, but the order of business to which I am working refers only to the two petitions that were presented by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). I apologise to the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin), but I am sure that the problem can be put right very soon.

**Miss Widdecombe:** Before that unexpected diversion, I was saying that the issue is of massive concern to many of my constituents in Kent. It comes up every year when the time comes round for parents to indicate their order of choice for schools in Kent.

Kent is in many ways exceptionally fortunate. It has a wide variety of schools between which, theoretically, parents can choose. Kent has grammar schools, single-sex grammar schools, mixed ability schools, high schools and quite a wide range of specialist schools. On the face of it, parents have a fortunate choice, but in reality the opposite is true. Too many parents find that the system militates against being able to choose a school for their child and to have confidence that that choice will be respected.

It used to be the case that two separate lists ran for grammar schools and high schools. Parents could indicate an order of preference for grammar schools and then an order of preference for high schools. The adjudicator ruled, however, that the lists must be combined. If the children of parents who want them to take the 11-plus and who put down a grammar school first fail, those children are classified as late entrants to the high school that they have listed second and go to the bottom of the heap for consideration. If the high school is popular, successful and over-subscribed, they have no hope of getting in. Is that a covert way of discriminating against grammar schools?

There was a major campaign in Kent to get enough signatures to trigger a ballot. That campaign failed abjectly because most people in Kent want to keep grammar schools. It seems to me that the arrangement now in place is another way of deterring children from taking the 11-plus.

The wider issue of parents in rural areas applies to all parents, in particular to those who seek their child's admission to mixed ability schools or high schools. Every year, one or two villages are told right at the start that their children will not be admitted to big successful schools such as the Cornwallis school and Angley school, both of which are in my constituency and are heavily over-subscribed year on year. Every year, children are being told that they will not be considered simply because they live a certain distance from the school.

I want to ask the Minister very specific questions. Heads say that they more or less have to apply the criterion of distance. Although, theoretically, they can set their own criteria for foundation schools, in reality those would be capable of legal challenge because the local education authority sets in stone, for its own schools, the requirement to use distance as the criterion. That idea comes, in turn, from the Department, so there is a general view that distance is a must. If, instead of rejecting everybody outside a certain radius because there were already too many applicants from inside that radius, a school turned the situation round and simply asked whether it was the nearest school to the child—which is also about distance, but a different sort of criterion—would that practice be sustainable?

We have the ludicrous situation that there are children in outlying villages who cannot get into their nearest school because nearness is a comparative and, every time, they are discriminated against in favour of children who more or less live on top of the school. If one lives in a town, one has a choice of schools, but if one lives in an outlying area, that choice is restricted so long as distance is used as a criterion. Parents in villages in my constituency—in Staplehurst and East Farleigh in previous years and in Marden this year—have had inflicted on them the anguish of being told from the start that their children will not be able to go to the large, popular schools of their first choice.

Because the grammar schools proceed to cream off a certain percentage of the applicants, however, places become available, so parents are put through all the anguish of thinking that places will not be available, only to find that they are. Kent has put forward a solution to that, and asked that parents be allowed to indicate preferences after the 11-plus has been taken and the creaming-off has been done, when the schools know how many of the children who have applied to them will go to a different school.

Apart from those questions, there is the issue of free transport. Nonsensically, in some parts of my constituency parents will put down as first choice a school that is not their first choice. They do that so that they will qualify for free transport, because if the school rejects them, the county will supply free transport to the school of second choice, even if it is outside the distance criterion used for assessing eligibility for free transport. Parents have to play a game of bluff. They put down as first choice a school

that they do not want so that they get their second choice, which they do want, and qualify for free transport. Ingenious as that may be to politicians who like playing such games, it seems to me a rather strange thing to ask parents to go through every year.

The solution to all those problems would be to free schools to set their own admissions criteria, and not to place artificial constraints on them. It should be made extremely clear that schools can reject children who live close to them and accept those who live further away if that leads to greater parental choice across the area as a whole.

It is not only parents and children who suffer through the present unsatisfactory arrangements: the schools themselves do too. Every year, there is the same sort of uncertainty for the schools as there is for the children. There is also public opprobrium, which stems from schools appearing to have turned their back on whole villages when, in reality, they are restricted by the criteria that they have to apply.

I therefore hope that, first, the Minister will say that schools are completely free to set their own criteria, which would do away with the argument that enables schools to say that they have no choice but to act in that way. Secondly, will she reconsider Kent's request for parents to indicate preferences after the 11-plus has been taken? Thirdly, will she reconsider making the rules on transport more flexible? I have been on about that for many years; when I was first in opposition, I introduced a ten-minute Bill which made no progress—such Bills do not—to alter those rules. When a parent indicates a first choice, it should not be part of an elaborate game of chess but a first choice that they want to prevail over all the other choices on the list.

11.16 pm

**The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge):** I congratulate the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on securing the debate. I am grateful to her for giving me the opportunity to outline what the Government propose to do in the Education Bill and how that will affect parents and children in Kent. We are committed to maximising parental preference while raising standards of education for all children, which will make parents' preferences more meaningful.

As the right hon. Lady knows, the supply of school places is a necessary element in parental choice. Each local education authority must ensure that there are sufficient school places for children of compulsory school age in its area through its school organisation plan. LEAs are required to review the position annually, and take steps to ensure that they provide sufficient school places to meet demand. The plan must be made available for local consultation and show the projected demand for places and the LEA's proposals for meeting that demand, for example, by expanding existing schools or opening new schools. She will know that in her constituency in Maidstone, the LEA plans to meet the projected increase in demand by adding 680 secondary school places by 2005-06.

As hon. Members know, legislation gives parents the right to express a preference for the school at which they wish their children to be educated. There is a duty on LEAs and school governing bodies to comply with that parental preference except in specified circumstances. The most common reason why parents cannot get a place at their preferred school is over-subscription. Schools must publish details in their prospectus of how the available places will be allocated if there is too much demand. The LEA must publish a composite prospectus giving a summary of admission policies for all maintained schools in its area. In large areas such as Kent, there may be more than one composite prospectus. Admission arrangements are set following an annual statutory consultation involving the LEA and schools. Any admission authority consulted may object to the schools adjudicator if it has concerns about any aspect of the determined admission arrangements.

In the case of some partially selective admission arrangements, local parents can also object. The adjudicator who takes the decisions when there is an objection is, of course, independent of the Government; we have no input to his decisions, which can be overturned only by the courts. If we followed the right hon. Lady's suggestion that schools set their own admissions criteria, it would add to the problems that I know that her constituents and families in Kent face. It would add to the chaos, produce greater differences, and there would be even less uniformity and more distress to parents and families, which I accept is what has given rise to this debate.

This year, the adjudicator in Kent made decisions which, judging by representations to the Department, seem to have resulted in much misunderstanding and confusion among parents and schools alike. It may be helpful if I clarify their main effects. This year, Kent LEA decided to introduce county-wide secondary transfer arrangements whereby children sat the grammar school selection tests before parents stated their preferences for schools, an arrangement that had previously operated only in one area of Kent. As the right hon. Lady knows, opinion is split among Kent schools and parents over whether it is fairer to test children before or after preferences are made. She came down on one side of that argument.

The argument has been the subject of much heated debate in the county, and some of Kent's own-admission authority schools objected to the adjudicator about the change. That was why the adjudicator became involved. In July, the adjudicator considered the objections and a counter-objection from the LEA to the arrangements of some own-admission authority schools.

The most significant of the adjudicator's determinations on the objections were that parents must now be asked to express their school preference before entering their child for the grammar school selective test, and that all schools must adhere to the admissions timetable set by the LEA. The adjudicator took the view that, in effect, testing before preferences gave some parents two first preferences, putting them at an advantage over parents who wanted a place only at a non-selective school. I hope that the right hon. Lady will accept the validity of that argument.

The LEA then made a number of changes to its admission arrangements to implement the adjudicator's decision, but that resulted in complaints from selective schools, which considered that the LEA was introducing more changes than were necessary. The most controversial was the LEA's decision that only those children whose parents had named a grammar school as

*[Margaret Hodge]*

their first preference school should be permitted to sit the selective test. As a result of those complaints, the LEA referred details of its proposed changes back to the schools adjudicator for consideration. I sympathise with the confusion that that must have caused to parents in the area that the right hon. Lady represents.

In October, the adjudicator made a decision on Kent's proposed changes, ruling that any child whose parent had named a grammar school as one of their preferred schools should be allowed to sit the 11-plus, regardless of whether a selective school was their first preference. A closing date of 30 November was set for the expression of preferences, as was a common date—20 December—for notification of allocation of places at non-selective schools.

Although this decision seems to have recognised the concerns of most parents and the selective schools that complained about the original decision, many non-selective schools are now unhappy. My officials have had complaints from parents of schools choosing to interpret the adjudicator's decision in their own way, or simply ignoring it. We are investigating the complaints on a case-by-case basis and, even at this late stage, the adjudicator has considered an application from an own-admission authority school to vary its admission arrangements to take account of the October determination.

In the Education Bill, we are proposing changes to legislation that I hope will be helpful. LEAs will be required to co-ordinate the admissions process for their areas. That does not prevent aided and foundation schools from applying their own admission policies; it recognises the need to simplify the process for parents. That was highlighted by the research that we commissioned jointly from Sheffield Hallam university and the Office for National Statistics, which was published in June. We consulted on our proposals for changes to the admissions framework, and had substantial agreement to that recommendation—88 per cent. of respondents were in favour of an LEA co-ordinated approach.

What we have proposed allows a scheme for co-ordinating the allocation of school places to be agreed locally. I hope that the right hon. Lady will accept that agreeing these matters locally is the best way to proceed. Parents will complete a single, common application form naming their preferred school or schools and return it initially to a central point. On a locally agreed date, LEAs will make one offer of a school place to the parents of each child living in their area. That has the advantage of dispensing with the unfair situation that we have often seen in which some parents hold multiple offers of school places and other parents have none.

The system will also require greater sharing of information between admission authorities and their LEAs and between neighbouring local education authorities. That will give LEAs the information that they need to identify children who have not been placed and enable them to intervene at an earlier stage where it is necessary to do so. The new system that will be introduced if the Education Bill is enacted by the House will not deal with all the issues that the right hon. Lady raised unless the schools in the area that she represents are willing to co-operate in the best interests of parents and children, so that the confusion that they are currently experiencing in respect of the fact that there are different admission arrangements in the different schools can be lessened. Parental preference can work well only if parents have a choice between equally good schools, as I hope she will accept. That is why we have put raising standards in all schools for all children at the forefront of our agenda.

Although GCSE results have improved and the number of children leaving school without qualifications has fallen, there is still a great deal to be done on that agenda. Part of our solution is to extend diversity in secondary schools—I hope that the right hon. Lady welcomes this also—so that every secondary school can develop its own unique ethos. We are expanding the successful specialist schools programme, with every school ready for specialist status being encouraged to seek it and support being given to those who are working towards that status. By 2005, we would expect to see at least 1,500 specialist schools. We are giving successful schools greater freedom, which I also hope that she welcomes, to take full responsibility for their mission to raise standards. They will be encouraged to excel and innovate, with the best schools gaining greater freedom, for example, to take new approaches to staffing or accelerated learning.

We want to spread good practice and are establishing a schools innovation unit that will work with teachers and heads to help to stimulate and disseminate new ideas, especially in relation to catering better for pupils' different requirements and aspirations. Governing bodies will also be able to work together to create families of local schools, sharing problems and pooling resources in everyone's best interests.

We are already encouraging selective and non-selective schools to work together by inviting partnerships of such schools to apply for new funding of up to £20,000 per partnership to develop collaborative projects. We hope that that will help to break down the perceived barriers between the two sectors and raise standards in teaching and learning. I am sure that the right hon. Lady will welcome, as I do, the fact that, of the 28 partnerships that have been approved so far, six are within Kent. The type of project in which they are engaged ranges from collaboration on post-16 courses to staff exchanges. I have some hope that, by establishing these new partnerships, there will be greater collaboration on admission arrangements, so that life can be made easier for parents when they come to choose a secondary school for their children.

We also support greater innovation and excellence in creating new schools. If a new maintained school is required, the local education authority will advertise so that an interested party can put forward proposals and have them considered on their merits by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Any proposed new school will have to be covered by one of the existing categories, or be an academy, and will have to meet the usual statutory requirements concerning, for example, the national curriculum and teacher employment.

We are responding to the wishes of many parents in trying to ensure that successful and popular schools can expand more easily. Perhaps that will also help the right hon. Lady. The governing bodies of successful schools will be able to appeal to the adjudicator if their proposals for expansion are turned down by the school organisation committee.

We recognise the need to tackle low standards in schools, and we have therefore introduced new measures. Some schools that face challenging circumstances will receive a programme of support with the aim of ensuring that at least 25 per cent. of pupils at every school obtain five GCSEs at grade A to C by 2006. Kent has 28 schools where 25 per cent. or fewer pupils attained five or more GCSEs at A to C grade in 2001.

If we can improve the achievement in those schools, we will provide diversity and better choice for parents who live in the area. All those schools received targeted school improvement grant of up to £70,000 per annum to support them in raising attainment. As the right hon. Lady knows, the schools are subject to monitoring visits from Ofsted to ensure that they focus on agreed action, which will have a sustainable effect on pupils' attainment. Local education authorities will invite, or if necessary, be instructed to invite, external partners to help turn around failing schools.

All those plans to improve standards can come to fruition only if we have sufficient well-trained and well-motivated teachers. Therefore, our policies on teacher recruitment and retention are vital. In the lifetime of this Parliament, we will recruit 10,000 more teachers, 20,000 more support staff and 1,000 more trained bursars.

We are also reviewing teachers' work loads so that we can find ways to ensure proper time for preparation, development and management. That work is being overseen by a group that includes representatives of teaching and head teacher associations.

Tackling disruptive behaviour is another important factor in ensuring equality of standards. An additional 40 pupil referral units will be opened, more learning support units and learning mentors will be introduced, and parenting orders will be extended to ensure that parents take responsibility for their child's behaviour. Admission forums will be made mandatory; one of their tasks will be to consider schemes for sharing challenging pupils fairly among all schools.

Ensuring that all parents get their preferred choice of school depends on local institutions co-operating and working together. I hope that the right hon. Lady will work in her locality to ensure that we can achieve that. The effect of our initiatives will be to raise standards. That will make parental preference more meaningful to more parents.

## PETITION

# Queen Elizabeth Hospital (Gateshead)

11.34 pm

**Joyce Quin** (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to present a petition on behalf of some 600 constituents and residents of the Gateshead area who wish to raise fundamental concerns and questions about the treatment of a number of women patients at our local hospital during the 1980s and 1990s at the hands of two consultants who have since been struck off the medical register.

The issue has caused much local concern, and much anguish and suffering to the women affected, some of whom live in my constituency. Others live in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland), for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) and for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam).

The petitioners request:

That the House of Commons takes steps to obtain redress of their grievance by calling on Her Majesty's Government to set up a public inquiry into the mistreatment, negligence and misconduct of consultant Peter Silverstone and Dr. Janusz Wszeborowski and the subsequent cover-up by the Queen Elizabeth hospital authorities.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

*To lie upon the Table.*

## ADJOURNMENT

*Resolved,*

That this House do now adjourn.—[*Angela Smith.*]

*Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes to Twelve midnight.*

# House of Commons

*Wednesday 19 December 2001*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## INTERIM REPORT ON THE ENGLISH NATIONAL STADIUM

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of the Interim Report made by Mr. Patrick Carter in December 2001 in respect of the English National Stadium Review.—*[Mr. Caborn.]*

# Oral Answers to Questions

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### Pre-Budget Statement

1. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): If she will make a statement on the implications for her Department's spending plans of the pre-Budget statement. [21882]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short):** The pre-Budget statement committed my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to increase significantly the amount of our development aid and its share of national income. Details will be worked out as part of the spending review over the coming year. I hope that hon. Members in all parts of the House will support a substantial increase in spending, for reasons of moral decency as well as of the safety and the security of the world.

**Mr. Thomas:** I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. I certainly give her my support for what was contained in the pre-Budget statement. I know that the right hon. Lady will do her best to spend the money wisely.

Another wish shared by hon. Members of all parties is that our spending on overseas development should be raised to 0.7 per cent. of gross domestic product. The Chancellor said that the percentage of GDP that we spend on overseas development would rise, but what is the timetable for achieving that target? Will it be achieved in this Parliament?

**Clare Short:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support for increasing the aid budget. Successive British Governments have committed themselves to reaching the target of 0.7 per cent. of GDP. The previous Labour Government reached 0.5 per cent. The level was 0.26 per cent. when I came back and we are on our way to 0.33 per cent. We do not have a timetable for the 0.7 per cent. target. As we go to the United Nations conference on financing for development, to be held at Monterey, many non-governmental organisations and other countries say that every country committed to that target should give a timetable. The debate is useful, but the UK has not yet set a timetable.

**Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): I congratulate my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the work that they have done at international level on this issue, and especially on the way in which they have brought to the fore in this country the need to assist developing countries around the world. However, my right hon. Friend will know that there are still more than 1.2 million people living in absolute poverty. Would not it be symbolic if the UK could say that it would achieve the target of 0.7 per cent. of GDP within a certain time? Will my right hon. Friend take that message as a matter of urgency to the Cabinet table and to my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, so that we can consolidate the good work done to date and ensure that the developed countries achieve by 2015 the targets laid out by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Chancellor?

**Clare Short:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I should be delighted to take the messages expressed by him and by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) to the Cabinet table and to my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor. I shall make sure that that is done.

We need to improve both the quantity and quality of aid. The World Bank and ex-President Zedillo of Mexico have done studies to determine the amount of resources that should be devoted to aid and how those resources should be used to invest in creating the conditions in which poor countries can grow their economies and provide better services for their people. To meet the millennium development targets, current resources must be doubled. At present, there is $55 billion worth of overseas development aid in the world system, and the estimate is that twice that amount is needed.

The value of the amount of aid resource contained in the budgets of other countries could be increased. That is not true of the UK, but the European Union budget, for example, is not as effective as it could be because of the way funds are tied or misdirected away from where the poor people and the reformers are. To meet the targets to which the whole world has signed up, the amount of resources devoted to aid must be doubled. We in this country have our duties, but we must also mobilise the international community to be more serious.

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk): Sustainable development and the reduction of poverty are the key objectives of the Department and of the Secretary of State's budgetary and spending plans. What account has the right hon. Lady taken of the consequences for sustainable development in Tanzania of the determination of the Ministry of Defence to push through the sale of the BAE

Systems military air traffic control system, which costs £28 million? Does not the episode demonstrate a failure of joined-up Government?

**Clare Short:** I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I have taken deep and full account of that matter. However, I am not in a position to make an announcement today.

**Glenda Jackson** (Hampstead and Highgate): My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Chancellor have done remarkable work in winning the argument about tackling real poverty in the developing world, with the result that a policy of debt relief has followed in train. However, does not my right hon. Friend think that the Government's influence at the Monterey conference may be reduced by the current confusion over the proposed sale to Tanzania of a vastly expensive and utterly unnecessary air traffic control system?

**Clare Short:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for everything that she has said. I shall make sure that her message is conveyed to the appropriate quarters.

## Zimbabwe

2. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): If she will make a statement on the measures taken by her Department to encourage free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. [21883]

6. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): If she will make a statement on her Department's efforts to ensure free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. [21887]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short):** The Government are working with the international community to try to ensure that free and fair elections are held in Zimbabwe. My Department has provided support for civic education programmes and the training of independent election monitors. However, recent developments have been very worrying, as the House knows. The economic and political situation in Zimbabwe continues to deteriorate and is causing great suffering and a terrible growth in poverty.

**Mr. O'Brien:** I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Crucial as the freedom and fairness of Zimbabwean elections in April next year are, what are the right hon. Lady and her Government doing before then to penalise Robert Mugabe's tyranny in having declared war upon the opposition, which could lead to a Rwanda-type genocide? What, in particular, does she say to the Zimbabwean farmer who has written to my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan)? The letter says:

"For every day that this situation here is merely a point of discussion in the corridors of world powers, more men, women and children will be deprived of their lives, their dignity, their homes and livelihoods and their basic rights as humans."

**Clare Short:** I agree that the situation in Zimbabwe is a tragedy. Zimbabwe also has the highest level of HIV/AIDS in the world: 35 per cent. of adults are infected, and more than 20 years of life expectancy will be lost very quickly. On top of everything else, Zimbabwe, which should be a wealthy economy and an African reformer that helps its neighbours and helps the continent forward, is going ever backwards and the Government, who are misbehaving in almost every conceivable way, are causing enormous suffering.

The United Kingdom is engaged in trying to contain the situation and get a commitment to free and fair elections and reform. The European Union is fully engaged, as is the Commonwealth, the Southern African Development Community and the surrounding neighbouring countries. However, I am sad to say that the country continues to deteriorate.

**Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): How can the Government ensure that the ordinary people of Zimbabwe do not suffer more as a result of the actions that we take to ensure that the elections next year are free and fair? We are quite rightly worried about the direction in which events are moving in Zimbabwe, but action can mean that the hard pressed whom we most want to help suffer the most.

**Clare Short:** There has been some criticism of this, but we have a big HIV/AIDS programme in Zimbabwe. Some people say that we should cut off our entire aid programme completely, but I think that that is wrong. People are already suffering because of misgovernment, and we should not inflict further punishment on them. We must make sure that we do nothing to strengthen the Government's misbehaviour, which we are trying to do. We are also doing all in our power to ensure that the elections will be free and fair, but there are worrying signs that they may not be.

**Mr. Brady:** If the Mugabe regime uses force to prevent free and fair elections in the spring of next year, does the Secretary of State agree that it would be entirely inappropriate and would send out the wrong signals if Zimbabwe were to be welcomed as one of the civilised nations competing in the Commonwealth games in Manchester in the summer of next year?

**Clare Short:** I think that all of us who care about the people of Zimbabwe and the future of Africa must do everything in our power to ensure that there are free and fair elections and that outside observers are present, and so on. There are great worries about that, but we should not prepare for failure. *[Interruption.]* We should not; and it is not funny. We should do our best to succeed, because preparing for failure means that we tend not to try to succeed. The Commonwealth is actively engaged in considering not only what happens at the Commonwealth games but at Commonwealth conferences. The Commonwealth and the CMAG—the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group—are meeting to decide what the Commonwealth is going to do about the situation in Zimbabwe.

**Hugh Bayley** (City of York): Although I share the concern of Members on both sides of the House about the political situation in Zimbabwe, can I impress on my right hon. Friend the importance of working through international bodies such as the Commonwealth and the SADC? If we act alone, there is a danger of letting Mugabe off the hook by allowing him to accuse us of playing the role of an ex-colonial power. It would be wrong to give him that ammunition against the opposition

in Zimbabwe, so will my right hon. Friend confirm that we will do what we can through international organisations?

**Clare Short:** I agree with my hon. Friend. The story that President Mugabe tells his people is that he got on really well with the Conservative party when it was in government, but that the wretched Labour Government does not co-operate with him in the way the Conservative party used to. The story then goes that there should be land redistribution in Zimbabwe, which there should be, and the delay is somehow blamed on the Government. That is a piece of nonsense, of course—we strongly support land redistribution, but it must be transparent and focus on the needs of the landless or of those living in overcrowded communal lands. That is President Mugabe's story to his people. He is using land hunger to excuse what he is doing. It is very important that the whole international community be involved in pressing Zimbabwe to hold free and fair elections, and that Mugabe is not allowed to pretend that this is just an issue between Zimbabwe and a former colonial power.

**Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): Does not the right hon. Lady understand how many of our constituents have families who are the victims of Mugabe and his thugs? All her fine words do not produce action to deter Mugabe, and many Conservative Members and our constituents have long memories. We remember how many leading spokesmen for the right hon. Lady's party encouraged Mugabe for years while he was coming to power. The party that she represents should not treat with terrorists and tyrants.

**Clare Short:** The hon. Gentleman is very silly to make such a foolish argument. Mugabe was elected by the people of Zimbabwe. As a Government, we support democracy and the right of people to elect their own Government—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says, "Look what we've got". The people of Zimbabwe elected President Mugabe. Members on the Conservative Front Bench are not allowed to tell the people of Zimbabwe which Government they should have—that is what caused all the bitterness in the independence struggle in Zimbabwe in the first place.

I understand that some people in this country have relatives in Zimbabwe about whom they are worried. There are also Zimbabwean refugees in this country and they too are worried. People throughout the rural areas and in the towns of Zimbabwe are worried and I am worried on behalf of all of them—not just some of them.

**David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): Is not Mr. Mugabe's planned public order and security legislation worse than anything that was seen in colonial Zimbabwe and apartheid South Africa? Will it not effectively remove freedom of movement, speech and association and is not that an appalling backdrop to free and fair elections?

**Clare Short:** As I have said, the situation in Zimbabwe is extremely worrying. People are being oppressed, violence is being used, the rule of law is not being honoured, the economy is in a desperate state, poverty is growing and the country has the worst incidence of HIV/AIDS in the world. We are anticipating elections, but there are deep worries throughout the international community that they will not be free and fair. Everything about the country is worrying. We are all doing everything in our power to ensure that the elections are free and fair, but that cannot be easily done—whatever nonsense is spoken on the Opposition Front Bench.

## Afghanistan

3. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): If she will make a statement on her Department's work furthering the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan relating to schools and hospitals. [21884]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short):** In Afghanistan, we are working to ensure that in the short term UN agencies re-establish themselves quickly, and that schools are reopened as rapidly as possible. The World Food Programme is planning—and ready—to reinstate its feeding programmes in schools throughout the country. In a hungry country, that brings children to school quickly. The Red Cross is increasing the provision of hospital-based health care. It already has much provision in the region ready to be moved into the country. UNICEF and the World Health Organisation have been maintaining child vaccination programmes.

For the longer term, we are supporting work in the UN, the World Bank and the Asia Development bank to begin the reconstruction of Afghanistan. That will focus on developing Afghan Government capacity in health, education and all other sectors and it will start to rebuild the shattered economy. Details of our proposals for the recovery programme have been placed in the Library.

**Andrew Selous:** I am grateful for that response from the Secretary of State, especially given that education was denied to women during the Taliban period and that the provision of health care by women was also denied. As children have only one chance for a decent education, will the right hon. Lady please tell the House what measures the Government are taking to ensure that the children in the camps receive some form of education—given that they may be there for some time?

**Clare Short:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world: one in four children die before they reach the age of five. To get children into school improves their prospects as well as those of the economy. There will be an emergency phase of reopening schools throughout the country. Teachers are already coming back to work. Women teachers were not allowed to work, so in addition to the banning of girls, many boys were thrown out of school. The provision of food in schools will help to reopen them. There are also 4 million-plus people in refugee camps in Iran and Pakistan, so it is important that education provision should be improved there.

At present, the big move is in planning for the return home, as soon as possible, of the Afghan refugees who want to go back to their country. In the meantime, children in the refugee camps must be educated. We are working on that through UNHCR—the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

**Mr. Michael Jabez Foster** (Hastings and Rye): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the deployment of British

forces as part of the peacekeeping force in Afghanistan should materially assist in opening up aid corridors and distributing the humanitarian aid that we so much want to deliver?

**Clare Short:** There is a statement on the subject, so I must be careful what I say. The first phase of the plan for the international force is to get to Kabul so as to enable the interim Administration to go to Kabul. My hon. Friend knows that what was negotiated in Bonn was a transitional interim Administration, to be followed in six months by a Loya Jirga, which would be much more representative of all the people of Afghanistan, preparing them for elections and an elected Government. The first phase is to get the transitional authority back to Kabul so that Government institutions may be rebuilt, and forces are needed for that purpose. Beyond that, we shall see.

**Mrs. Caroline Spelman** (Meriden): I recently returned from Pakistan, where local Afghan aid workers impressed on me their very real fear that they will be expected to borrow so much money from the World Bank that Afghanistan will end up in a cycle of unpayable debt. Will the right hon. Lady consider promoting a trust fund consisting of the United Nations, the World Bank, non-governmental organisations and other partners as an alternative model for funding reconstruction?

**Clare Short:** No. I saw the reports of the hon. Lady's visit, and "well done" to her. The things that she called for were right. However, with great respect to her, the conditional funding from the World Bank will be available over 30 years, there will be no repayment for the first 10 years, and the loan is below commercial rates. It is lent at such a concessionary rate that it will be easily repayable, so it is one good instrument for promoting development. After all, economies grow, and we hope that the funding will be well used. However, that instrument can be used only when there are some institutions in place that can use resources reasonably well.

Humanitarian help must come straight through the UN humanitarian agencies and we are not in favour of a trust fund for that. In Kosovo and East Timor, trust funds were used that became very slow at disbursing. We shall therefore continue to fund the World Food Programme, UNHCR and so on, as now, directly into their budgets through a UN appeal. Later there will be a trust fund. It is in the process of being set up to help the United Nations Development Programme, which will co-ordinate the initial work to get institutions up and running. Trust funds are useful, but only if they are used for the right purpose. They are not useful to replace the enormous resources that can be brought in by the World Bank to promote long-term development.

**Mrs. Spelman:** The key is to use the new institution of the new Afghan Government. However, Afghan aid workers conveyed to me the importance in their eyes of a return to what they call the aid-for-work programme, which enabled them to get 200 km of road built in return for regular food supplies. Does the right hon. Lady agree that, come the spring, a return to that programme will be vital to the reconstruction of Afghanistan?

**Clare Short:** It will happen before the spring, I can assure the hon. Lady. This is food for work, as we call it—the World Food Programme's programmes. Before 11 September, the World Food Programme was the biggest provider of employment in Afghanistan. Just think of it—throughout this conflict, 6 million people were dependent daily on food trucked in by the UN. Now, as things calm down, in every community and village in the country groups will be called together—often led by women, because they tend to do things that are closest to the needs of the community—to decide what food-for-work programmes they would like, such as repairing roads or schools.

Throughout the country, the people want to roll forward and get food-for-work programmes moving. The drought and lack of planting means that for several years Afghanistan will depend on food brought in by the UN, and if we use those programmes to promote self-help and rebuilding, that will help the country. That process is already planned and beginning to take place.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): As my right hon. Friend knows, the Select Committee on International Development has just returned from a visit to Pakistan, where there was universal praise for the contribution that our Government have made, in Pakistan and in Afghanistan, to the humanitarian aid for the refugees, both inside and outside Afghanistan. One of the things that became very clear to me, when talking to the Pakistan Minister for Refugees, was that almost all the refugees wanted to return home as soon as they possibly could. I hope that the Department for International Development will do everything possible to enable them to have a decent repatriation package and to speed their return to their country.

**Clare Short:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue. The Government have made resources available, but as I have said before, my Department is respected throughout the world for its speed and capacity, and the country can be proud of the work that it does on behalf of the United Kingdom. I agree with her very much that the Afghan refugees, some of whom have been out of their country for a long time, desperately want to return home; they are not living in good conditions. The life of a refugee in a camp is a very miserable one—and yes, as soon as we can get conditions right in Afghanistan, assistance will be given to those people so that they can return home and rebuild their communities.

## Romania

4. **Mr. Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool, South): What plans her Department has for supporting the development of civil society and activities in the voluntary sector in Romania. [21885]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn):** Together with our partners—in particular, the European Community and the World Bank—we are supporting the development of civil society and the voluntary sector in Romania, both of which have an important part to play in working for change that will benefit the poor. Our activity includes

helping to establish a national network of citizens advice and information services and enabling non-governmental organisations to provide child and family support.

**Mr. Marsden:** In thanking my hon. Friend for that answer, may I say that it is particularly welcome given that Romania, of all the former east European regimes, has faced the most challenging problems in social policy since 1989? Will he and the Department in general liaise with their colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to ensure that the UK/Romania action plan, which was introduced earlier this year to prepare for enlargement, gives sufficient emphasis to social programmes, particularly those involving child care, the Roma and minorities? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I ask the House to come to order; we are still dealing with important questions.

**Hilary Benn:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I very much agree with the point that my hon. Friend makes about the need to take forward the agreed plan of action. Romania is one of the poorest countries in Europe. It has experienced growing poverty, and the recent report on its progress towards accession to the European Union has identified the need for increased capacity in government, particularly in public administration, and reform in the private sector. Romania has a terrible child protection legacy on which the Government are seeking to make real progress. We are supporting that work through our programme and through the EC; there is also a big problem of discrimination against the 3 million Roma, half of whom are illiterate. We need to ensure that the programmes that are being supported in that country address all those issues, so that Romania can work towards its EU accession, which we very strongly support.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): The Minister has rightly referred to the economic plight of Romania, whose economy is now more or less at a standstill. Does he agree that the United Kingdom has a lot to offer Romania, particularly with advice on how to stimulate its economy with private enterprise, with a view to acceding to the EU? However, does he think that the situation in Romania has been helped by the cut in aid, which the Government have reduced from £6.4 million to just £3.7 million this year?

**Hilary Benn:** Our programme bilaterally amounts to £6 million, but that is dwarfed by the EC programme, which is currently £390 million a year, of which our share is £76 million, so the hon. Gentleman has not quite got his figures right.

### Democratic Republic of Congo

5. **Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme): If she will make a statement on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and what steps her Department is taking to reduce conflict there. [21886]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short):** The Democratic Republic of Congo—formerly Zaire—continues to suffer desperate poverty owing to decades of misrule and more recent conflict, resulting from the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda. That has left the country divided into three parts. Peace is essential to begin to promote development.

The United Kingdom strongly supports full implementation of the Lusaka peace accords, which were negotiated in Africa and endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. It is my view that, with greater international effort, the Lusaka plan could bring peace to the DRC and the six neighbouring countries involved in the conflict. The DRC would then be able to qualify for debt relief and begin to use its rich mineral resources for the benefit of its 60 million people, currently living in desperate poverty.

**Paul Farrelly:** Is my right hon. Friend aware of the recent United Nations report which identified the people profiteering from the war in the Congo? It included on its list a Mr. John Bredenkamp, a UK-based arms supplier to Zimbabwe. Will she ensure that her Department, with the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry, makes every effort to halt the disgraceful activities of people such as Mr. Bredenkamp?

**Clare Short:** I am aware of the UN report, but I was not aware that a UK resident had been named in it. I undertake to make inquires and to write to my hon. Friend.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [21912] **Jane Griffiths** (Reading, East): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 19 December.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair):** This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

**Jane Griffiths:** My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will know that the Reading urban area has received an excellent local transport settlement of nearly £7 million and that it has also received £38 million for improvements to junction 11 on the M4. Does he agree that this is a wonderful Christmas present for the people of Reading and that it provides a contrast with the Scrooges in the Conservative party?

**The Prime Minister:** I agree—I think it is a wonderful Christmas present. The £37 million scheme for Reading will of course make a big difference in Reading. It is part of a programme which, for 2003, will mean £1.5 billion going to local road and transport schemes, and that will improve the transport system for all the places concerned.

**Mr. Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green): At the end of 2001, are there more people waiting to see an NHS consultant than there were in 1997?

**The Prime Minister:** The waiting lists are down by 100,000. It is correct that the numbers of people waiting

in the out-patient sector are up—that is true. However, overall, if we take in-patient and out-patient lists together, they are down.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** The fact is that there are now more people waiting to see a consultant than there were five years ago, which is not what the Prime Minister promised when he got into power. No one is going to believe a word that he says about waiting lists or anything else when the National Audit Office report today shows that the Government have put systematic pressure on doctors and hospital managers to fiddle the waiting list figures. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the NAO that that represents

"a major breach of public trust . . . inconsistent with the proper conduct of public business"?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course it is entirely unacceptable if the waiting list figures are being manipulated in any trust. However, it is important to put this matter in perspective. Over a period of four to five years, 6,000 people were misallocated on the lists and that compares with the figure of about 25 million for the overall number of operations done. The right hon. Gentleman says that the waiting list figures overall are up since we came to office, but that is wrong—they are down.

If we look at the out-patient lists, it is correct that, in the first two and half years of the Government, they rose, but they have subsequently been falling. What is more, if we look at those people waiting more than six months, the numbers are now down 70,000. Indeed, it is the case today that 70 per cent. of NHS patients get their operation within three months.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** No one is going to believe the right hon. Gentleman, because he referred to the NAO report only to say that there were a certain number of problems. The reality is that the NAO investigated nine hospitals and found that all nine had breached their rules. That is happening not only in the hospitals that the NAO investigated. I refer to a hospital that was not even investigated but that is already changing things. It says here:

"We are using a new way to make your appointment . . . You do not need to do anything for now, we will contact you in about 93 weeks time".

That is the reality; that is what is going on up and down the country with a lot of hospitals.

The report says that people are being offered appointments only when they have gone on holiday and that patients are offered appointments only when the consultant has gone on holiday—twisting—with waiting lists always being manipulated. Is not the reality that the Prime Minister is to blame for everything in the report and for the waiting lists that are all going up? It is his culture of deceit that has forced the health service to manipulate these figures.

**The Prime Minister:** First, on the NAO report, I should repeat the words of the original report that gave rise to the follow-up report today. It said at that point in time:

"The main problems we identified",

however, lead us to the idea

"that published numbers are likely to be overstated."

In other words, it is the case that in fact the waiting list figures that we have given are not affected by the report that the NAO published today. The overall waiting lists are, as I said, down by 100,000. When the right hon. Gentleman says that all waiting list figures are up, that is wrong. It is correct that some are up. Some, however, are not, and overall waiting list figures are down since we came to office.

However, we accept entirely that there is a very great deal more to do. As I have said to the right hon. Gentleman on many occasions, the only way we are going to treat more people in the health service is if we invest in nurses, doctors, beds and hospitals. The Labour party is committed to putting in that investment, free at the point of use. The right hon. Gentleman wants to charge people and take out that investment.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** The Prime Minister was elected in 1997 to cut—I repeat, to cut—waiting lists and to save the NHS. That was his pledge. He cannot weasel out of that now by saying some of it is good and some of it is not. Some £10 billion a year under this Government is wasted. That is a fact. Some £700 million is unspent because the system cannot cope—fact. Waiting lists are up and in-patient figures are down. That is another fact. The reality is that the Prime Minister can weasel as much as he likes, but after five years the whole country is on a waiting list, waiting for him to deliver.

**The Prime Minister:** Without going back over the waiting list figures again, I say this. The right hon. Gentleman is simply wrong in saying that the figures are up, because they are not; they are down by 100,000. It is correct, however, that we still have a very great deal more to do. That is precisely why we are committed to the record investment that we put into the NHS.

Before the general election, the Conservative health spokesman set out Conservative policy when he said:

"We are fully committed to a comprehensive National Health Service, free at the point of use and funded from taxation".

Yet when the right hon. Gentleman was asked just a couple of days ago whether people should be charged to see their GPs, he said:

"I think people would say 'I'm prepared to pay'".

So we both accept that we need more capacity—more doctors, nurses and beds in the health service. We are prepared to put that money into the NHS; the right hon. Gentleman is saying that people will have to pay. I believe that the country would prefer a national health service that is free at the point of use rather than with Tory charges.

Q2. [21913] **Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): Many people warmly remember the Prime Minister's commitment on 2 October to ensure that the world order to be built on the rubble of 11 September would be a fitting memorial to those who died in New York. We are three months on, and the war in Afghanistan is close to completion. At Christmas, many families will again have to come to grips with the loss of a loved one as a result of those attacks. Will my right hon. Friend give an undertaking today seriously to consider a suitable

multi-faith memorial to pay tribute to the devastating loss so bravely borne by so many families throughout the United Kingdom?

**The Prime Minister:** We would certainly consider an appropriate memorial, although obviously the events of 11 September have been commemorated in different ways around the world. It is right to point out that, as of tomorrow, it will be 100 days since 11 September. The war in Afghanistan has been prosecuted very successfully. The al-Qaeda terrorist network is effectively dismantled. The Taliban regime has gone. Humanitarian aid is going into Afghanistan. With the support of the international community, and with the support, I hope, of British troops in the international security force, we will be able to offer Afghanistan the security to reconstruct the country on a proper political basis, which involves all the groupings in the country, to turn Afghanistan from a failed state into a stable partner in the region. Whatever the appalling problems that arose after 11 September, we can be proud of the part that this country—especially our armed forces—has played since then. If we carry on doing that, we will bring the good that we wanted to see out of the evil.

**Mr. Charles Kennedy** (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I am sure that the whole House accords with the final sentiment that the Prime Minister uttered.

Returning to today's issue of the National Audit Office report into the waiting list scandal, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he is not satisfied with the position whereby a seriously ill national health service patient has their operation postponed so that the operation of someone in a less critical condition can proceed, simply to meet the institution of waiting list targets which his Government set?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course, that should not happen, which is precisely why, as the NAO report made clear, when the trust concerned discovered that that had happened it took immediate action. The right hon. Gentleman will know of the campaign by the Conservative party and others to say that everything in the national health service is bad and that no one gets proper treatment. It is important that we set that in context; yes, over a four to five-year period, 6,000 patients were wrongly allocated on the waiting list. But as I pointed out a moment ago, 25 million operations took place in that period. The vast bulk of those people were dealt with correctly.

**Mr. Kennedy:** In addition, most people looking at the story will consider it a scandal that some of the managers who either fiddled the figures or were downright incompetent have had big golden handshakes or, worse still, have been redeployed elsewhere in the national health service. Should they not be out on their ear? Is not the lesson that comes through all this the need for local effective management of the health service? Does the Prime Minister not need to rethink his policy of getting rid of community health councils for a start?

**The Prime Minister:** I really do not think that the right hon. Gentleman's latter point carries any weight at all. Of course, it is correct that those people who engaged in misallocating people to waiting lists should be disciplined, although it is important to read the detail of the report because some procedures were misapplied at a lower management level than senior management. It is important that when we look at the NHS today we do not say that, because that happened in a certain number of cases, it has happened in every case. It has not; the vast bulk of people in the NHS get proper treatment. The vast bulk of people—70 per cent. of them—are seen for their operations within three months.

As well as bad things happening in the NHS, there are excellent pieces of innovation, change and development. More nurses, more doctors and more hospital schemes are coming through. In time, no doubt, despite the examples of bad practice, good practice will prevail.

**Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): My right hon. Friend has already expressed his utter condemnation of the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament last week. Will he take the opportunity to reassure India and her neighbours that the terrorists who attacked the Parliament of the world's largest democracy on 13 December will be pursued by the international community with as much vigour and determination as the terrorists who attacked the world's most powerful democracy on 11 September, and that those who give them succour or support will be treated with the same resolve shown against the Taliban?

**The Prime Minister:** Many of those groups are linked to the extremists who have been operating out of Afghanistan. It is important that we take action at every level on their membership, how they acquire weapons, how they are financed and from where they operate. We express complete solidarity with the victims who were killed or wounded in that terrorist outrage.

Q3. [21914] **Miss Julie Kirkbride** (Bromsgrove): The Prime Minister and I have recently been blessed with healthy baby boys. I share his concerns for our children's privacy. He will be aware of his Government's vigorous campaign to inoculate all schoolchildren with the triple measles, mumps and rubella vaccination, and their equal determination to prevent parents who want to give their children the single vaccination from doing so. In those circumstances, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that his legitimate desire to protect the privacy of his child is very much at odds with legitimate public interest in the matter?

We want to know whether the Prime Minister practises what he preaches, so will he take the opportunity to let us know whether little Leo has had his MMR jab. In doing so, he can reassure those parents—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The question is too long.

**The Prime Minister:** I think I caught the general drift. I am afraid I will not enter into any public discussion about the health of my children, but the recommendations on MMR which the Government are following are supported by the World Health Organisation, the British Medical Association, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Royal College of Nursing and the Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association, so we fully support the present campaign.

Q4. [21915] **Mr. Colin Challen** (Morley and Rothwell): Is it not extraordinary that 53 years after the NHS was

founded, one of its founding principles—that it is free at the point of delivery—seems to be under attack from the Leader of the Opposition, only a week before Christmas? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask the Prime Minister a question about Government policy, not about Opposition policy.

**Mr. Challen:** Perhaps we should consider making it a constitutional right that people have that founding principle as one of their human rights—a health service free at the point of delivery, which the Opposition could never demolish.

**The Prime Minister:** I understand the anxiety of the Opposition to prevent my hon. Friend from getting his question out, but the Leader of the Opposition has made it clear that he is prepared to make people pay for basic access to health care. It is no use the right hon. Gentleman shaking his head. I know that a couple of days is a long time in the development of Opposition policy, but a couple of days ago he was asked specifically whether he would consider making people pay to see their GP, and he said he thought that people would be prepared to pay. The Opposition have opposed the extra investment that we are putting into the national health service. My hon. Friend is right. There is an important debate to be had. Either we have a national health service that is comprehensive and free at the point of use, or we have one that is dismantled and paid for by the patient, which is the position of the Conservative party.

Q5. [21916] **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): Does the Prime Minister accept that the reality in the NHS is represented by the cases of constituents of mine, such as young Lucy Westbrook and Steve Peters, who have had their operations cancelled or postponed, and not by the fantasy figures in his fiddled waiting lists?

**The Prime Minister:** The figures for the hon. Gentleman's constituency and area indicate that both in-patient and out-patient waiting lists are down. Of course, there are people who still do not get the treatment that they merit and deserve, but the vast majority of people in the hon. Gentleman's health authority do get the proper treatment. We know why the Conservative party wants to raise the cases of people not getting the proper treatment: in order to tell the country that the entire national health service is failing, so we can get rid of it. In contrast to the Conservative solution of getting people to pay, our solution is to put the investment into the NHS so that we deal with cases such as those of the hon. Gentleman's constituents—but let us never forget that in his area, the vast bulk of people are treated extremely well by the NHS.

**Mr. Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green): Will the Prime Minister say whether, as reported in *The Sun* today, he will sack the Transport Secretary early in the new year?

**The Prime Minister:** No.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** Does that not say everything about the Government's attitude to the public services and about the character of the Government? After all, the Transport Secretary said that Railtrack was bust when it was solvent; he said that he would save taxpayers' money, whereas he will cost them £6 billion more; he made passengers' lives a misery with extra delays throughout the country; and above all, he defended a spin doctor who called for bad news to be buried. Does the Prime Minister think that today, at the festive season, is a good day to bury his Transport Secretary?

**The Prime Minister:** As for the right hon. Gentleman's allegation that Railtrack was a solvent company, I must admit that I have been mystified in the past few days to hear that Railtrack was apparently not in financial difficulty at all, but was roaring along, fully profitable and very solvent, and did not need any public money at all. Let me read to him what the judge said in the administration case:

> "This is clearly a case where the making of a railway administration order is not only appropriate but absolutely essential".

That was the case for a very simple reason: the company had debts of £700 million that were going to rise to £1.7 billion. *[Interruption.]* If the Opposition dispute that, I ask why, as Railtrack was in court at the time, it did not dispute it. It did not do so because it is indisputable. The difference between us, as I have pointed out to the right hon. Gentleman many times before, is that he has got himself into the position of saying that he would take £1 billion of taxpayers' money to bail out the shareholders, while we would put that money into a better railway network. If he wants to get up and tell us that Railtrack was a solvent company, perhaps he will explain why it had those debts of £1.7 billion by next March and why the judge made that order.

**Hon. Members:** Come on!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I call Mr. Ken Purchase.

**Mr. Ken Purchase** (Wolverhampton, North-East): Would the Prime Minister care to comment on the determination of the United States Administration to increase tariffs against the import of steel? First, does he think that that will have a serious effect on the European steelmaking industry? Secondly, is not this a smack in the face for the developing countries that have been faced with American investment that has not always been helpful?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a fair point. It is important that we ensure that there is proper and fair trade in the world, and I very much hope that the United States will change its position on the issue, as it is unfair for European Union companies to be unable to get access to American markets. Of course that is one of the reasons why it is so important that we make progress not only on bilateral EU-US trade matters, but through the World Trade Organisation debates and consultations that are coming up shortly. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the issue. I know that it will concern many people working in the steel industry here, which is why we are making representations about it to the United States Administration.

Q6. [21917] **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): The energy review from the Cabinet Office has been widely

leaked but has not yet been published. When will the House get to see the review, or has it been doctored in favour of nuclear energy?

**The Prime Minister:** No, it has not. It may have been leaked, but I may say that it has not been leaked to me, so I cannot tell him what it contains at the present time. It is very sensible that we review our energy needs and it is important for us to do so over the coming years. I suggest that, before the hon. Gentleman castigates the report, he waits until it is published.

Q7. [21918] **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): Given that police numbers are rising, as is overall investment in police services, will my right hon. Friend help the Police Federation not to paint itself into a corner where it is seen as in favour of taking the money but not accepting the reform that should go hand in hand with the investment?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure that we will reach agreement on reform and it is important that we do so. The police do a fantastic job in this country, but I think that most people realise that we need greater flexibility in the way in which the police service works. On police numbers, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have had in the past year the largest recruitment for 20 years and, after years of falling police numbers under the Conservatives, the numbers are rising again. They will rise in the next couple of years to a record level. Of course, the most important difference between this Government and the Conservative Government is that under this Government crime has fallen by about 11 or 12 per cent. but under the Conservative Government it doubled.

**Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): Can the Prime Minister tell us what is the maximum time for which our troops will remain in Afghanistan?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will make a statement later. Our troops are not there on a long-term basis. We believe that they will be there for several months, but it is obviously important that they are there at the outset in order to ensure that the new provisional Government in Kabul can operate effectively. I say to Opposition Members that it would be unfortunate if they went to Kabul without the support of the whole House. I know that there has been some speculation that we would be sending thousands upon thousands of troops—we are not—or that they would be there for a very long time—they will not be. It is vital for us to be able to bolster the political agreement that has been reached with a security assistance force. Frankly, we are the country that is best placed to lead that force. There will be many other countries that will participate, however. I think that it is very much in the interests of this country that we increase the prospects of a stable future in Afghanistan.

Q8. [21919] **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): I congratulate the Prime Minister on the Government's effective response to the difficulties in the aerospace industry after the events of 11 September. Will he join me in affirming that the National Assembly for Wales and central Government are working well together to respond to the situation in GE Aircraft Engine Services in Nantgarw in south Wales?

**The Prime Minister:** We are working closely with the Assembly on that. We understand the problems that the airline and the aerospace industries face. People's jobs are at risk, and that is worrying. The situation is replicated around the world, but, with the right support and partnership, we will ensure that as many jobs as possible are safeguarded.

**Derek Conway** (Old Bexley and Sidcup): The Prime Minister has been glib with figures this afternoon. He now has another opportunity to prove how good he is. How much has been spent on consultants since Railtrack went into administration?

**The Prime Minister:** I do not know the precise figure. If the hon. Gentleman tables a question, I shall answer it. However, it is beyond doubt that the company was not capable of carrying on, with billions of pounds of taxpayers' money being put into it, when it could not provide a proper service for its passengers.

As I meant to say in answer to the Leader of the Opposition, I am prepared to take criticism from almost anyone about the railway industry, but from the people who are responsible for railway privatisation, a period of silence would be the best response.

Q9. [21920] **Mr. Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley): Like me, the Prime Minister would have welcomed the Hague convention on abductions. He received a letter from me some weeks ago about a constituent, Rebecca Turner, who has been forced back to Australia with her young child, Holly, aged four and a new child, five-month-old Jake, because she has been accused of kidnapping the baby. The judge in the case in this country said that he had no alternative but to send her back under the Hague convention. His comments on the convention were interesting, and I shall read them to the Prime Minister—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. It is an important matter, but the question is far too long.

**Mr. Campbell:** The judge described the Hague convention as "a highly laudable objective." However, is it right that a young family should be broken up and sent to Australia—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I call the Prime Minister.

**The Prime Minister:** It is correct that my hon. Friend has written to me on the subject. Of course, I am sorry about the difficulties that his constituent faces. Although I understand that it is a matter for the Australian courts, we are giving all the assistance that we can to Rebecca Turner through consular staff.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): As our constituents want trains that run on time, how long will Railtrack be in administration?

**The Prime Minister:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is a matter for the administrator. However, the longer

the administrator's work has gone on, the more financial difficulties he has uncovered. It is important to restructure the company properly to ensure that the money that goes into the railways improves the service for the passengers. I hope that he recognises that a company that lost that amount of money and was solely dependent on increased subsidies through taxpayers' money could not go on as it was; it has to be restructured. Today's announcement by the Strategic Rail Authority is a good first step towards putting the railways back in proper shape.

Q10. [21921] **Valerie Davey** (Bristol, West): The Government gained great respect from my constituents for the lead that they took internationally to ensure debt cancellation among the poorest countries, including Tanzania. Does my right hon. Friend support a current proposal which would increase Tanzania's debt: the sale by Britain of a military air traffic system costing £28 million?

**The Prime Minister:** We must follow the proper licence conditions throughout, and we shall do so. However, we have written off some £100 million or more of debt in Tanzania and, of course, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has been increasing dramatically the aid given to the poorest African countries. One of the things of which the Government are proudest is the fact that, over the past few years, after years of declining amounts going into aid and development under the Conservative party, we have substantially increased aid and development spending, and what is more increased it as a proportion of our national income.

## National Stadium

3.30 pm

**Mr. Tim Yeo** (South Suffolk)*(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the siting, purpose and funding of a national stadium.

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell):** I have today published the interim report of Patrick Carter's review of the English national stadium. His key recommendations are set out clearly in the report. They deal with the importance of the promoters presenting final proposals that represent fully committed funding, final design, cost and procurement details. Snould those proposals not be delivered within a reasonable time scale, Birmingham should be considered as the alternative. No commitments should be made by any party until such time as final agreements have been reached as regards funding and procurement. Finally, the Government must be satisfied that all aspects of the stadium's procurement meet Government standards of propriety and regularity.

Patrick Carter's report also recognises that the leadership of the project must rest with the Football Association—we agree—whose final decision it will be what stadium to build and where. Its preference, on the ground of greater return, is to go ahead with a modified version of the Foster design at Wembley. However, it has accepted that should that fail, strong proposals from Birmingham should be taken forward. It also accepts, as do the Government, that it remains a possible outcome that no national stadium will be developed.

As the FA has made clear, it does not believe that the project can move forward without Government support and facilitation, but I make it clear to the House that any further financial support is conditional, limited to covering non-stadium infrastructure costs and the Government's interest in protecting the £120 million of lottery money already invested.

There is much work to be done before there can be a final decision on a national stadium. Patrick Carter's report describes the many uncertainties that need to be resolved. Any Government support for infrastructure would not be committed until they were all dealt with. I must alert the House to issues relating to the proposed procurement at Wembley that need to be fully dealt with.

The House will be aware that I had intended to make an announcement about the national stadium on Monday. I shall explain the reasons for the delay. It came to my attention at the end of November that concerns had been expressed that Wembley National Stadium Ltd. had not adhered to best procurement practices or corporate governance arrangements in relation to the new Wembley stadium. I was told that those complaints involved no suggestion of fraud, but implied a lack of transparency in part of the process and a failure to deal properly with actual or potential conflicts of interest. I was told that an investigation of the complaints, commissioned for Wembley National Stadium Ltd., was under way.

On 13 December, I requested a progress report. I was given oral assurances that there was no impropriety, but that the chairman of WNSL would contact my permanent secretary the following day. Officials discussed the report in draft on Sunday 16 December with the FA, Wembley National Stadium Ltd. and its authors, and asked that it be finalised and made available to the Government for consideration before we made any decision on going forward with the national stadium project. A final version of the report was received yesterday. I have suggested to both the FA and WNSL that they should publish it. I have asked for it to be made available to the National Audit Office, and they have agreed. At present it is bound by legal privilege and confidentiality, but I can say that it confirms the existence of a number of serious concerns.

WNSL made a statement today outlining the report's principal conclusions.

It stated: "No evidence whatever had been found of any criminality or impropriety at any stage of the process, but the report was critical of the procurement process up to September 2000 and recommended specific steps to be taken by WNSL for close monitoring of the project. The review addressed issues relating to value for money, but found that there was a sustainable argument that best value today was likely to result from enabling WNSL to proceed through Multiplex to build a new national stadium. The report recommended that WNSL review aspects of corporate governance."

Patrick Carter alludes to those concerns in the covering letter accompanying the report, which I have published today.

I have told the FA and WNSL that should they wish to continue with the Multiplex contract, they must set in train an independent assessment of the value for money that it represents, and must ensure that corporate governance and procurement arrangements from now on represent best practice, before the Government will proceed with any further support for the project—financial, moral or otherwise.

Four points must now be addressed by the FA and WNSL. First, an independent value-for-money assessment of the proposed contracts with Multiplex must be commissioned, and conducted by an appropriate company with no previous or likely future involvement in the project. Secondly, at my request WNSL has ensured that papers relating to the matter are available to the Comptroller and Auditor General so that he can decide whether to look into the matter further. Thirdly, we seek confirmation that corporate governance changes will be made to produce a management structure capable of delivering a complex project within procedures acceptable to the public sector. Fourthly, we seek confirmation that financial support is adequate and fully committed, after all relevant factors have been taken into account in a process of due diligence.

Finally, let me refer briefly to athletics. Sport England and the FA will look at that during the next stage of discussions. I hope that the House understands why that next stage is so crucial. Sport England now believes that a different platform solution can be developed more cheaply, and without the disruption associated with the original proposals. Before any further decision is made, however, I will ensure that Sport England commissions a detailed technical evaluation of the proposals to make certain that they fully meet the technical criteria of the athletics governing body. It will also prepare a proper cost-benefit analysis comparing the new proposals with those of 1999.

In short—although I am afraid that I have spoken at some length—the Government will work with the FA to resolve these issues. The end result that we want is a

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national stadium, but those four fundamental points must be addressed first. Then we will have a national stadium of which we can be proud.

**Mr. Yeo:** Does the Secretary of State realise that the Government's handling of the national stadium issue has led to a series of disasters, caused directly by the dithering and blundering of successive Ministers?

Four years ago, the Government decided that there should be a national stadium at Wembley, with athletics. Two years ago, they decided that there should be a national stadium at Wembley, without athletics. When the Secretary of State took over six months ago, she could not decide whether there should be a national stadium at all, whether it should be at Wembley, or whether athletics should be part of it. Judging by her reply this afternoon, she is still dithering. Few who heard it will be reassured that she has any more grip on the issue than her predecessor.

How watertight does the Secretary of State expect the arrangements for the new national stadium at Wembley to be by 31 March next year? Will the contracts involving the Football Association, WNSL, International Management Group, Multiplex, Sport England and the Government be available for public inspection? Will planning permission have been granted?

As it has taken the Secretary of State more than three and a half months just to publish the Carter report on which her statement is apparently based, does she really believe that the complex negotiations under way and still to be concluded can be completed in the same time frame?

Does the right hon. Lady believe that Wembley will host athletics, as is now proposed? If not, when will the £20 million promised by her predecessor be repaid? Will she confirm that if by any chance Wembley stadium does not get built, all the money paid by Sport England will be repaid, and promptly? Will she also confirm that the plans that she has outlined require a further £20 million of public money to be spent, and will she explain precisely what that extra money will be spent on, or is it just another figure plucked out of thin air?

Will the right hon. Lady ensure that the report about the probity of the procurement process is published before a penny more of public money is spent? Will she confirm that in the past few days, her Department, without consultation, has intervened to cut out of the scheme altogether the £19 million rebuilding of Wembley Park tube station? Will she confirm that the cut-price alternative of tarting up the existing station means that the stadium could not be cleared of spectators within an hour, and disabled access would be greatly reduced?

Will the right hon. Lady explain the main features of the Wembley proposal that she considers superior to the excellent Birmingham bid? Is it the design of the stadium, accessibility to sports fans or value for money? In the House on 2 May this year, the Prime Minister gave an assurance about the Wembley project. He said:

"we must now sit down and work out a way through it so that we have a proper national stadium."—[*Official Report*, 2 May 2001; Vol. 367, c. 841.]

Does she agree that that assurance means that the Government have accepted responsibility for seeing this project through to its conclusion?

Will the right hon. Lady confirm that, after four and a half years of Labour Government, England is still without a national stadium, football is without a flagship ground, London has lost the world athletics championships, Britain has lost the chance to host the World cup, Birmingham and Coventry have been encouraged to spend money and time on bids that Ministers had no intention of taking seriously, and Britain's reputation in international sporting circles has never been lower?

**Tessa Jowell:** There is all the difference in the world between the rant of opposition, which is what we have just heard, and the serious business of government, which recognises that this is an enormous, expensive and complex project. We will give Government support to the project when, and only when, the issues that I raised in my statement have been properly addressed.

As recently as the end of October, the Football Association and Sport England made it absolutely clear that if the national football stadium at Wembley was not capable of hosting athletics, the £20 million would be returned. The precise terms of the lottery agreement require an athletics-capable stadium. I require additional work to establish whether the athletics capability meets the requirements of the athletics governing body. The Football Association has clearly shown its willingness to undertake that exercise.

The hon. Gentleman can rant, but we will get on and negotiate in the public interest, safeguarding the Government's position. However, we need to establish a clear dividing line, because ultimately the funding for, and the location of, the national stadium are football's responsibility. Once the outstanding matters have been settled, we will announce how to proceed.

**Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): Of course, from a constituency point of view, I welcome the announcement today by the FA and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but I wish to focus on two points. First, she was right to commission the Carter report, because it has exposed all the weaknesses of the financial arrangements into which the FA had entered. It will enable the project to be driven forward properly. Secondly, can she offer confirmation on the important issue of Wembley Park tube station and the commitment of London Underground? I trust that she will have words soon with the Metropolitan police so that she is sure that they are convinced that it will be possible to clear the stadium in a timely and effective manner, that proper crowd control will be possible and that there is no danger to the security of the public. Those are essential infrastructure elements on which the success of the stadium will ultimately rest.

**Tessa Jowell:** I thank my hon. Friend for his constructive approach today and throughout what have been difficult months for the project. He has a clear constituency interest, and I thank him for that. I take this opportunity to thank again Patrick Carter for his valuable work for the Government and the FA. The decision on infrastructure support for the project will clearly be part of the consideration in the next stage, as the project is taken forward. As of now, I must make it clear to the House that the number of matches and events that the FA would intend to hold at a new stadium would not exceed the number on the licence attaching to the planning consent, so regeneration or rebuilding to increase the

capacity of the tube station is therefore not a requirement. My hon. Friend also mentioned the wider issue of regeneration of the area around the stadium, which will be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to consider as the project moves forward.

**Nick Harvey** (North Devon): Does the Secretary of State think that it is right that £120 million that was given to the project for a multi-purpose stadium should remain available to the company if the stadium will be used only for football? Will not the athletics platform be a temporary structure put in place only for a specific games, and is she not shutting the door after the horse has bolted, given that we have lost the games? Will not it be ironic if, as football figures have suggested in the past few days, the new stadium opens in time for a cup final or charity shield in May or August 2005, exactly when the world athletics championships are due to take place? Given the popularity of England playing their matches around the country, does she agree that England fans from more distant areas should be assured of improved transport connections to Wembley before any such decision is made?

**Tessa Jowell:** On the final point, I accept that if the FA decides to proceed, subject to the conditions that I have set out this afternoon, the infrastructure support for the project must be adequate. It is a good example of why the Government need to facilitate the project, but that is different from it being a Government project. It will be Government supported and Government facilitated precisely so as to address those issues. The terms of the lottery agreement are also clear. The lottery money—the £120 million—was provided to acquire the site for a stadium that would include an athletics capability. I have already mentioned the recognition by the FA and Sport England that if it will not include that capability, £20 million should be returned. However, there is more work to be done on that.

Finally, I respectfully suggest that in this complex set of relationships, the hon. Gentleman needs to be clear about the differing responsibilities of the Government, the Football Association and Sport England.

**Mr. Gerald Kaufman** (Manchester, Gorton): This matter began with the previous Government and Sport England's totally unjustified decision to hand over £120 million. May I plead with my right hon. Friend to steer clear of what has become a grubby and dodgy project? The Football Association has shown itself to be greedy in holding on to £120 million of public money to which it has no conceivable right. It has also shown itself to be neither competent nor trustworthy. In addition, Sport England has recklessly handed over public money without any safeguards, and its appropriateness as the agency to deal with these matters needs to be considered. Will she assure the House that a firm, clear time limit will be set for the project, so that either it can go ahead or the £120 million can be returned in full?

Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that the Government will make it clear that not a penny of taxpayers' money will go into the project unless it goes forward within a reasonable time limit? Wembley was never a national stadium, and the FA should not bamboozle the Government into putting up our constituents' money to buy it a stadium.

**Tessa Jowell:** As usual, my right hon. Friend has expressed his views forcefully and unequivocally. I have three things to say in response.

First, I do not think that it is helpful to rake over the ashes of past decisions about Wembley, beyond the point that I made earlier about the Government's responsibility to safeguard the public investment that has been made already. Secondly, my right hon. Friend is right to say that the project cannot be let drift indefinitely and that firm and clear deadlines for agreements to be reached must be set. Finally, he is also right to say—as I made clear earlier—that Government support and the FA's decision to proceed should be conditional on the terms that I set out in my opening statement being met.

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield): The Secretary of State's statement at least left the door ajar for Birmingham's excellent bid, but does she accept that there will be huge disappointment that it has not been accepted outright? Does she appreciate that some 75 per cent. of football fans live north of Watford? Has she had a chance to study the report produced from a survey conducted by Sky, which shows that more than 70 per cent. of football fans do not want the stadium to be built at Wembley? Will she bear in mind that, to many people, this is a classic example of London-based decision makers making London-centric decisions that are not in the interests of the wider country?

**Tessa Jowell:** I entirely accept the disappointment felt by those who have promoted Birmingham's bid to build the national stadium there. Moreover, I take this opportunity to commend—as Patrick Carter does in his report—the quality of the bid that Birmingham submitted. However, as I hope I have made clear, the decision about where the stadium is to be built is for the Football Association to make. The Football Association has decided that its preference is to develop the site at Wembley because that is at present a better commercial proposition than Birmingham. It has made a commercial decision. I understand the disappointment that is felt and, of course, the voice of fans should be heard. I welcome the FA's confirmation that if the Wembley proposal does not proceed, Birmingham is the alternative.

**Mr. Dennis Turner** (Wolverhampton, South-East): I am pleased to hear the Secretary of State acknowledge that the Birmingham bid would give the FA the 21st century- class stadium that it requires. Many of us in the House and many thousands outside are extremely disappointed at the FA's decision, which we think is wretched. There is overwhelming support for the Birmingham bid from football fans, football clubs, the business community and the general public. Will my right hon. Friend explain why that has been ignored?

**Tessa Jowell:** My hon. Friend has been a tireless advocate of Birmingham as the host for the national stadium. I simply reiterate that, as I told the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), the decision on location is for the Football Association. It has taken that

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decision on commercial grounds, subject to the caveat that should Wembley fail, it will look to Birmingham as the alternative.

**Mr. Andrew MacKay** (Bracknell): Would the Secretary of State care to comment on the role of Mr. Ken Bates in this fiasco? Will she also satisfy the House that she believes that all public funds have been properly accounted for?

**Tessa Jowell:** No, I do not wish to comment on the internal affairs of WNSL. I have outlined the report's conclusions and the action that will be taken in the light of that report.

**Glenda Jackson** (Hampstead and Highgate): I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend that the decision on the financing and siting of a national stadium is the business of the FA. However, if the decision is taken to site it at Wembley, surely it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that the desperately needed regeneration of an area that was grossly neglected during the 18 years of Conservative Government is properly served by a truly integrated public transport system. Surely that means that Wembley Park requires more than just regeneration.

**Tessa Jowell:** Let me separate out two issues. First, I refer my hon. Friend to my earlier remarks on the necessary capacity of the tube to support the demand placed on it by spectators travelling to and from the stadium. Secondly, I entirely endorse her remarks about the blight in that part of London as a result of 18 years of neglect, indifference and failure to invest under the previous Government. One very important gain of a development such as this, whether it is in Birmingham or Wembley, is that the regeneration of the area means benefits for local people.

**Alistair Burt** (North-East Bedfordshire): Is the right hon. Lady not embarrassed about the fact that in the years since the Taylor report, clubs the length and breadth of the country from Livingstone to Blackburn to Arlesey in my constituency have developed wonderful stadiums without any of the fuss that she has been through? Is she not embarrassed about the fact that on being given the World cup to host, the French developed a superb stadium at the Stade de France to cater for their national needs? Why on earth were those plans not simply picked up and implemented?

Is the right hon. Lady not further embarrassed that the Government of a country that can produce the perfection of Michael Owen and David Beckham can make such a Horlicks of producing a national stadium in which to display their talents?

**Tessa Jowell:** I am not remotely embarrassed about gripping a difficult issue on which decisions will need careful handling so that we reach a conclusion that is in the interests of sport and spectators. The Stade de France was extremely expensive. We should consider the experience of the development of stadiums throughout the world. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman do that so that he might understand more fully than his question suggested the complexity and difficulty that face us. I want to make it clear that this is football's national stadium. It is the sport's project, for which it seeks help and support from the Government, and I have set out the conditions under which that will be forthcoming. Yes, there are those—members of the FA and fans—who take the view that no national stadium is necessary because England are doing better travelling around the country than they have done for many years.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall): The Secretary of State mentioned the lottery agreement. Is she aware that a substantial part of that dealt with the proposal that the national sports stadium should be suitable for the Olympic games? Has the FA—not the Government—consulted the British Olympic Association during the past six months about its views? Will she please take my advice, even though she may not want to do so? Having been fooled by the FA before, it is important that she ensures that the FA does not call the shots on this project.

**Tessa Jowell:** My hon. Friend should accept that the FA also recognises the importance of transparency and public confidence in the project as it moves forward. I hope that I have also made it clear that decisions about athletics and the capability of a proposed stadium to host sporting events other than football and rugby need to be assessed with the relevant governing bodies. They would obviously include the British Olympic Association, which is meeting Sport England and UK Sport to consider the feasibility and desirability of an Olympic bid. Those discussions will have a part in any future decision about the place of athletics at Wembley.

**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin** (West Derbyshire): Does the Secretary of State expect a national stadium to be built and if so, when?

**Tessa Jowell:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to what I have already said. I set out the position in some detail.

**Mr. Doug Henderson** (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Is not the concept of a national football stadium, as envisaged at Wembley, a relic of the past in an over-centralised Britain? Should not a Government with an intelligent regional policy tell the FA that it is time to use the excellent grounds in Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Newcastle and even Sunderland?

**Tessa Jowell:** There is extensive representation of interests outside London in the FA as a body. In the context of the broad regional and national spread of its membership, the association has reached the conclusion that it wants to proceed at Wembley. It is the FA's decision and, in that respect, a matter for the association.

**David Burnside** (South Antrim): Does the Secretary of State agree that there is a time in life and in politics to cut and run, and that it is time to cut and run from this national disaster associated with not only her own Government but the previous one? Why will she not consider taking ownership of the site around that other national disaster, the millennium dome, and making that the site for the national stadium? Why does she not enable Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, to be given Home Office authority to raise private sector funds to finance such a national stadium and maintain it in London—the

capital of England? I would rather have a national stadium in the capital of England, just as I would rather have one in Belfast than in my home town of Ballymoney.

**Tessa Jowell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his advice. I am certainly not cutting and running, so I reject that part of his proposal. In relation to the remainder of his remarks, I think that he makes his point, but it is not advice that I intend to pursue.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton): While the national stadium will be a very important issue in my constituency, the bigger issue is what will happen to the twin towers at Wembley. Before the last debacle, there was a prepared proposal on the table that the twin towers should come to Halton to front the new national rugby league museum in Widnes. There is no reason why that should not happen, if the decision is as we heard today. Will my right hon. Friend do all that she can to ensure that the twin towers come to Widnes in my constituency?

**Tessa Jowell:** I am sure that my hon. Friend recognises that matter needs to be addressed and settled between the two relevant authorities: the Rugby League and the FA.

**Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): The Secretary of State will understand that all members of the all-party sport and leisure group, of which I am one of the vice-chairmen, have been very concerned about the saga of disasters connected with this matter. She will also recognise that just about every commentator outside this place has ridiculed all the disasters since she and her team took over from a previous Secretary of State who was sacked after agreeing to mishandle £20 million of public money on a handshake in a private house—a scandal that was successfully exposed by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. Will the Secretary of State not recognise that, to paraphrase the words of a former Prime Minister, this has been a fiasco, wrapped in a shambles, surrounded by disaster, and that it is her fault?

**Tessa Jowell:** We have an Opposition in full rant this afternoon. I am not sure what that adds—it adds nothing to the necessary decisions and serious work in hand to deliver a national stadium.

**Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston): While I appreciate that the Secretary of State has the difficult task on her hands of bringing this matter to a successful conclusion, may I tell her that although those in Birmingham will appreciate the positive remarks in her opening statement, they will find it extremely difficult to understand what more they have to do to be given a chance to confirm their extremely good track record? We have built an international convention centre and an international exhibition centre. We have been able to deliver where other people have simply made empty promises, and to us what is happening seems like asphyxiation by procrastination.

**Tessa Jowell:** I give some advice to all my hon. Friends who have deployed their advocacy for Birmingham, and that is to lobby the FA because, as I have made absolutely clear, the Government hold a neutral position on the location of the stadium. The decision on the location of the stadium—*[Laughter.]* Again, we see the pointlessness of the Opposition, as they behave pathetically. The point is that the decision about the location of the national stadium is a matter for the Football Association.

**Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): Does the proposal have the required agreement of the Mayor of London, who may well have a final veto in the matter?

**Tessa Jowell:** The Mayor of London has certainly been engaged in preliminary discussion about the development of the stadium, but that is a matter for the Football Association. As the hon. Gentleman will see if he studies the fine detail of the Carter report, the London development agency has offered up to £20 million in the event that the stadium proceeds in London.

**Mr. Stephen McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): Given the number of qualifications in my right hon. Friend's statement, does she realise that, not just in Birmingham but throughout the country, people will be mystified as to how she and the faceless wonders at the FA can have any confidence in these proposals?

May I put two simple questions to my right hon. Friend? First, can she say categorically that this is an FA project and that the Government are not partners in it, as certain people in the FA are claiming? Secondly, what will she do if the investigations reported in Australia into the activities of Multiplex reveal further damning condemnations of the activities of that company?

**Tessa Jowell:** I thank my hon. Friend, but there are two Birmingham clubs in the FA—Birmingham City and Aston Villa—and they should be taking part in the debate in the FA, because it is a decision for the FA. I do not propose to comment on the newspaper reports to which he referred. I have set out very clearly the action that the FA proposes to take, and I would not add to that.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): I have listened carefully to the Secretary of State's answers, and I appreciate the great problems that she has inherited and what she is trying to do to sort them out, but does she agree that this is a national stadium and, therefore, that the Government should have more say than they have apparently had to date? I strongly support locating the stadium in Birmingham because of that city's location and infrastructure, particularly its transport infrastructure, but will she not accept that a lot more people should be involved than just the FA, given that it is a national stadium? Will she consider suggesting that the FA and others should consult Manchester city council and the others who have been involved in producing some wonderful facilities for the Commonwealth games in Manchester next year?

**Tessa Jowell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks, and I am glad that, unlike his colleagues, he recognises the complexity of this issue. I reiterate the points that I have made about the representations to be made to the FA about the stadium's location. He asks whether a national stadium is a decision for the Government, and the answer is no. In a democracy, not every decision that affects our nation is taken by the Government, and this decision on a national stadium is being taken by the FA, assisted and facilitated by the Government. He is right to draw attention

*[Tessa Jowell]*

to the preparations in Manchester for next year's Commonwealth games, which, I hope, will make people throughout the country feel proud and do an enormous amount for sporting morale here.

**Andy Burnham** (Leigh): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the problems with the Wembley project was the pressure created by false deadlines for events that had not been secured? Anyone would think that the Conservative party was blameless, but does she also agree that the commitments to stage the World cup, the Olympics and the world athletics championships were first given by the Conservative party when it chose Wembley as the site for the national stadium?

In endorsing the cautious approach that my right hon. Friend has announced today, I urge her to consider the wider issues raised by the Wembley saga. The truth is that the project has taken off in a way that it should never have gone—it was too extravagant, it was based on an experimental design and there was far too much commercial development. Will she consider the arm's length principle in the handling of sports funding? Will she also consider reviewing the outdated decision-making functions of some of our major governing bodies of sport?

**Tessa Jowell:** I thank my hon. Friend very much for his remarks. He is right that false deadlines can create more problems than they solve. I have made it very clear this afternoon that this project should proceed, but, as I told my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), it is important to establish a time frame to create discipline. I also agree very strongly with his point about the importance of protecting the public interest. I do not for a moment underestimate or undervalue the significance of the fact that £120 million of lottery funding has already gone into the putative Wembley project. That money was raised by the public for the causes that they hold dear, and we have a special responsibility to ensure that that money is properly safeguarded, which is the whole driving purpose of the approach that I have outlined to the House this afternoon.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Only a few hon. Members remain to be called. If they each ask one brief question, I shall be able to call every one of them.

**Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): When I and my constituents have had the chance to study Patrick Carter's report, are we likely to be convinced that my right hon. Friend's announcement is the logical outcome?

**Tessa Jowell:** Yes.

**Mr. Andy Reed** (Loughborough): Does not the business case for Wembley revolve around the fact that the FA already has £120 million of lottery money? Will the report into the feasibility of the stadium hosting athletics be carried out independently? It is obviously in the FA's interests to ensure that there is a favourable report that suggests that the stadium can host athletics, because that would mean that the FA could hold on to £20 million.

**Tessa Jowell:** First, the business case is certainly influenced by the fact that £120 million has already been spent on acquiring the Wembley site. Secondly, I hope that I have made it clear that the further work that needs to be done on the practical feasibility of holding athletics at Wembley involves a further investigation that will take time, but that needs to be carried out with the governing bodies of athletics. They will be the real judges of whether a potentially athletics-capable stadium can host athletics events.

**Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): For people not just in Birmingham but throughout the regions, today's decision by the FA will send out an appalling signal. They will regard the FA's decision as having—I must say this—sweet FA logic.

Given that Birmingham put forward a bid that was costed, that was ready to go and that had the support of the fans and the clubs, just how long will Wembley have to come up with something that is viable? It has not come up with anything viable so far. Although I appreciate what my right hon. Friend says about deadlines, if she is saying that there is a time frame, what will it be? In Birmingham, we are ready to go and want to get on with the job.

**Tessa Jowell:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on his efforts to maintain the case for Birmingham, but he must refer his remarks to the FA. In due course, the time scales for the decisions at the next stage and for the completion of the work that I have outlined will be published. However, the important point is that the project moves ahead with public confidence and with the confidence of those whose support is essential to securing it.

**Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): I am a Burnley supporter who has always supported the Wembley option, but will my right hon. Friend assure us that we will now see an end to the talking and that the stadium will be built? Can we be assured that the transport links will be brought up to the standard that we need and that there will not be too many seats for the snobs and executives—and more for the fans who support the game throughout the length and breadth of this country?

**Tessa Jowell:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has just insisted that I remind the House that the national stadium will not go to Burnley. I can inform my hon. Friend that the lottery agreement sets out terms and conditions in relation to the balance of seats that he describes, and the material fact that led the FA to conclude that Wembley was more commercially viable related to the level of premium seat income. However, such matters will be judged more closely over the next few months as final decisions are reached.

**Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that this is known as the national embarrassment stadium. She has inherited these problems and we all want them to be resolved, but I believe that Birmingham has a strong case and we should not rule it out or string along the people involved.

Rugby league has not been mentioned, but is my right hon. Friend aware that Wembley is the national home of rugby league as well as of football? As a Bolton Wanderers fan, I recall the white horse final when Bolton beat West Ham.

**Tessa Jowell:** I remind my hon. Friend that the project is complex, as I am sure he recognises. It has taken a very

long time to get to this stage. The first decisions were taken in 1995 and 1996. My job, and that of the Government, is to ensure that the final decisions represent the public interest and public value for money.

**Mr. Derek Wyatt** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): May I tease my right hon. Friend about athletics? It is unlikely that we will bid for the world athletics championships until at least 2011, and the next Olympics that we could bid for will be in 2016. The technology for an athletics system might be outdated by then. If we are serious about going for 2011 or even 2016, we have to put the necessary infrastructure in place now. There is no point in having a system for athletics unless we are serious about 2011 and 2016.

**Tessa Jowell:** That is precisely why the technical matters to which my hon. Friend refers need to be considered by those who know about the standards that athletics bodies require to host an athletics championship. That is part of the business to be completed, which I mentioned earlier.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): I am grateful to get in just before the final whistle. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the stadium is not needed and, as far as I can see from surveys of England fans, not wanted? Would it not be better to pledge no further public money to the project, which would have the merit of ensuring that England football fans get what they want and that the FA cup final finds a permanent home in the finest stadium in the United Kingdom, Cardiff's millennium stadium?

**Tessa Jowell:** Nice try. My hon. Friend's arguments should be referred not to the Government, but to the Football Association, which will decide whether there is a national stadium and where it should be located.

## International Force (Kabul)

4.22 pm

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon):** The recent Bonn agreement on the future governance of Afghanistan called for the deployment of an international force to Afghanistan to assist the new Afghan Interim Authority, which formally takes office on Saturday 22 December, with the provision of security and stability for Kabul.

Two days ago, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister confirmed that the United Kingdom was willing, in principle, to lead such a force. I can now confirm that the United Kingdom is formally prepared to take on the leadership of an international security assistance force for a limited period of three months. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has today written to the Secretary-General of the United Nations to inform him of our decision. That decision follows further discussions with the United States, the other nations that have indicated that they may be willing to contribute troops to the force, the United Nations and the designated leaders of the Interim Authority in Afghanistan.

A number of issues are still to be finalised. We have not yet settled every detail about the force, but it is right that I should inform the House about progress so far, in particular about the letter to the UN Secretary-General, and today is the last opportunity for me to bring this before the House before the Christmas recess.

As the Prime Minister emphasised, the situation in Afghanistan remains fragile. The international security assistance force is a vital part of the international community's efforts to assist the Afghan people in this early and difficult period of the reconstruction of their country. A deployment of this kind—involving troops, equipment and logistical support from several nations—is undoubtedly a complex undertaking. We have no illusions about Afghanistan. Deploying forces there inevitably involves an element of risk. It is a challenging, difficult and sometimes dangerous environment.

The force will be charged with assisting the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding area. The ultimate responsibility for security will remain with the Interim Authority. Tasks could, however, include liaison with, and providing advice and support to, the Interim Authority as well as the UN on security issues, together with scoping future requirements for help in establishing and training the new Afghan security forces.

The United Kingdom will provide the force commander and his headquarters. The force commander will be Major General John McColl, who is currently serving as the General Officer Commanding, 3(UK) Division, which is based at Bulford. General McColl, as the House will be aware, led last weekend's reconnaissance and liaison team to Kabul. The force headquarters will also be drawn from 3 Division, as will some of its main force and many of its essential support troops. Other elements will be drawn from the headquarters of 16 Air Assault Brigade, and key enablers and units that are maintained at very high readiness, including elements of 40 Commando Royal Marines and the 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment.

Indicative planning to date suggests that the United Kingdom's contribution will be in the region of 1,500 troops, although the actual figure will depend on the

*[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]*

contributions made by other nations. The force will be an international force. It is too soon to say exactly how many troops it will include, or the nations from which they will come, but it will number 3,000 to 5,000 and will include contributions from the armed forces of several nations.

Sixteen nations were represented at last Friday's conference for potential troop contributors, and 21 nations are represented at today's follow-on conference at the permanent joint headquarters in Northwood. We expect to establish the detailed force composition over the next few days. The United States has indicated that it fully supports the deployment of the force and will provide essential enabling support to deploy and sustain it, which is a vital and considerable task.

The House will wish to know the arrangements for command and control. The force will have a particular mission, distinct from Operation Enduring Freedom. If the United Kingdom's offer to be lead nation is accepted, the United Kingdom will exercise command. As I have said, General McColl will be the force commander. The force will work very closely with the United States, as set out in the letter from my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the United Nations Secretary-General, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

I should like to place on record our gratitude to the United States, which has led the global coalition's offensive operations against international terrorism with great success. Its generosity in finding the capacity to support the international security assistance force by providing enabling capabilities that no other country can match should be recognised and applauded. I should also like to take the opportunity to record our appreciation to all the nations who have indicated that they are willing to provide troops. The international security assistance force is a reflection of the strong international support for the reconstruction of Afghanistan and will go to Kabul with the backing of the wider international community. Work is under way in New York to draw up a United Nations Security Council resolution to authorise the deployment under chapter VII of the UN Charter. We anticipate that it will be agreed within the next few days.

The House will have a number of proper questions about issues that have yet to be resolved. We have not yet finalised all the details of the force; there are still major questions, both about its exact size and precise composition, including which nations will contribute. We expect to refine the answers to those questions over the coming days. We need to agree with the Afghan authorities the precise tasks that the force will undertake and the modalities of its deployment. Let me be clear: the international community is sending the force to assist the Afghans, not to interfere in their affairs. Discussions with designated members of the Interim Authority, including its Chairman, Defence, Interior and Foreign Ministers, indicate that they welcome our intention to lead the ISAF.

General McColl's reconnaissance and liaison team met leading designated members of the Interim Authority to discuss how the force could best assist the Afghans and how it should relate to the Interim Authority. Further discussions are required and General McColl will be returning to Kabul later this week. Those tasks will need to be encapsulated in a detailed military technical agreement, which we anticipate finalising with the Interim Authority as soon as possible after it is established. Once that agreement and the authorising UN Security Council resolution are in place, the international security assistance force will be able to deploy in full.

Needless to say, British forces deploying to Afghanistan will be properly equipped for the tasks that they will undertake and they will be provided with robust rules of engagement. The United Kingdom has been invited to take on lead nation status because we and others believe that our forces have the capability and experience required to undertake that operation. We have the ability to get a force in and up and running very quickly. It is therefore right that we take on that responsibility when so much depends on the early success of the political process that the force will support.

I am absolutely satisfied that the operation is within our capacity. Our commitment is limited in numbers—up to 1,500 troops—and duration, which will be up to three months. After three months, we will hand over lead nation status to one of our partners. There have already been indications that others may be willing to take this on. General McColl and his immediate team will return to Kabul later this week to continue detailed negotiations with the Afghan authorities on the terms of a detailed military technical agreement. They will also be present for the inauguration of the Interim Authority on 22 December. Troops from 40 Commando Royal Marines will be available to support General McColl and, if required, the Interim Authority. A company of Marines is being sent this week to bolster the existing presence at Bagram.

The deployment of the main elements of the ISAF will be dependent on the outcome of discussions on the military technical agreement and the complexity of the task. Given the circumstances, the main body will not begin to deploy before 28 December at the earliest. It will then be some weeks before a substantial force can be deployed into Afghanistan.

I am very conscious that our decision to lead this force will mean that some of our troops will not be able to spend Christmas with their families. Some of our troops have been at Bagram for some time. Separation from family and friends is never easy, least of all at this time of year. Our troops will, however, deploy to Afghanistan knowing that they will be carrying out a vital and a worthwhile task, contributing to restoring peace and stability to a country that has been torn apart by strife and international terrorism.

In offering to be the lead nation for the ISAF and to deploy British troops to Afghanistan, we are aware that we have taken on significant responsibilities. The war there is being won; we must now secure the peace. The United Kingdom is proud to be able to play an important role in this. I am confident that we will.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (North Essex): I am sure that the whole House is grateful to the Secretary of State for delivering the statement on the last day of term. I am grateful to him for receiving a copy of it well in advance of his making it.

We applaud the conclusions of the Bonn agreement to establish a broadly based administration in Kabul with international backing. We support the principle that an international security assistance force should be made available to help the new Government settle down. We have previously expressed our concerns about the British

element of this deployment. These are concerns that the Prime Minister has acknowledged are perfectly legitimate. However, we fully respect the decision that the Government have now taken, and we will give our troops every support for the job ahead.

I understand that there are many fundamental aspects of the deployment that have yet to be agreed. That underlines the need for clarity on these issues before the Secretary of State can finally agree to go ahead with the deployment. These aspects concern the nature of Afghan consent for the deployment of British troops, the level of US practical support for the British troops on this operation, the objectives of the British deployment, the funding of the deployment and the problems of overstretch.

On consent, British forces have been pursuing a fighting role in Afghanistan. That has made us many enemies as well as friends there. A former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Bramall, warned on Monday that

"as the realities of non-Muslim forces getting involved in internal domestic power struggles and squabbles sink in, their safety could become increasingly precarious."

The new Afghan Defence Minister continues to issue conflicting statements, so what comfort has the Secretary of State been given to reassure him that the British will be welcome guests of all the main factions in Afghanistan?

The rules of engagement must of course remain secret, but will they be agreed with the Afghans before deployment? The Prime Minister indicated that the stabilisation force will be deployed under a chapter VII UN mandate, as the Secretary of State has confirmed. Has that principle been accepted by the Afghans? Do we have armoured vehicles and munitions support to sustain a credible fighting force to carry out a chapter VII deployment?

Secondly, on US support, the Americans have made it clear that they do not feel that they are suited to this role. Is the Secretary of State confident that the US is fully committed to supporting and sustaining, and if necessary to protecting, multinational forces in Afghanistan? Another former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Inge, warned the Government on Monday:

"My biggest concern is that unless they have troops on the ground they will not concentrate or focus their minds in quite the same say."

Who else but the Americans can provide the heavy lift, mobility, air cover, surveillance and the necessary logistical support for any sustained military engagements, and the means of extraction in case of an emergency?

Will the United States have no command role at all? That is a surprise. Is the entire operation to be run from UK permanent joint headquarters? What experience does the PJHQ have in such a large multinational planning role?

Thirdly, on the objectives, Lord Inge remarked:

"The operational commitment has . . . 'mission creep' written all over it."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 630, c. 46-50.]

The present Chief of the Defence Staff has described how we could

"trap our hands in the mangle of Afghanistan".

I am grateful for the assurance given by the Secretary of State that the deployment is not intended to extend beyond three months. However, Bosnia was meant to be a short-term deployment, and years later we still have thousands of troops there. Sierra Leone was meant to be "over in a month", according to the then Foreign Secretary. Yesterday we learned in a written answer that British troops will be there beyond two years.

Fourthly, on the funding for the deployment, the most recently retired Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Guthrie, said:

"The defence programme was underfunded before 11th September. There is now a new commitment."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 630, c. 44.]

Last week, the Chief of the Defence Staff commented starkly:

"Something will have to give. . . we simply do not have the resources"—

a point unanimously reinforced by the Select Committee report that came out this week.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the £100 million allocated for the cost of Operation Veritas is less than his Department's underspend at the end of last year, which he was forced to surrender to the Treasury? When will he and the Prime Minister succeed in addressing the question of defence spending, which is running at £1 billion a year in real terms below the levels that they inherited five years ago, alongside considerably more deployed and more operational armed forces than they inherited?

On the wider campaign, the Government will continue to have our fullest support for their conduct of the campaign against international terrorism. To that end, I should be grateful if the Secretary of State would confirm that the UK Government remain ready and willing, as he previously indicated, to support the United States in further military action in other countries where terrorism is tolerated or sustained, if that proves necessary and where justified by the evidence. Will the Government continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with the United States for the long haul?

We will give British forces our fullest support in the operation. Our soldiers are the finest in the world and they enjoy our absolute confidence. Knowing the Parachute Regiment, which is based in my constituency, I believe that its members will be itching to get on with the job. We wish them and the Royal Marines every success. We wish a happy Christmas to them and their families, who will be particularly in our thoughts at this time.

**Mr. Hoon:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's general support, although sometimes he does "but" a little too much in the way he appears to qualify his support. It is a charitable season, so I shall assume the most charitable interpretation of his reservations and try to deal with his observations.

First, on the nature of Afghan consent, that will be dealt with in the military technical agreement. The hon. Gentleman will have read the terms of the Bonn agreement, under which the designated members of the Interim Authority signed up for precisely such a force, so they have already given consent. *[Interruption.]* I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's points in turn, if he will contain his impatience for a few seconds.

On the level of US support, that is set out clearly in the letter to which I referred, which has been placed in the Library for all right hon. and hon. Members to see. I am sure that a detailed study of that letter will repay his concern.

*[Mr. Hoon]*

With regard to overstretch, I made it clear in my statement that the deployment is limited in numbers and time as far as the United Kingdom is concerned. Obviously, any increase in our commitment has an impact on the level of activity of all our armed forces, whether they are deployed or remain in base. Nevertheless, I am confident that we can contain for this limited period the degree of impact on the armed forces to satisfactory levels.

On rules of engagement, the Interim Authority will certainly be consulted, but I want to repeat to the House that the rules will be robust. The situation in Afghanistan is not easy and I shall take personal responsibility for ensuring that the rules of engagement are sufficient to allow our forces to protect themselves as they properly should. The chapter VII United Nations Security Council resolution is agreed by the designated Interim Authority. Equipment is a matter that is being considered today and tomorrow in the force generation conference. Obviously, that is the job of those who are responsible for putting together the package of armed forces and equipment that is necessary for this sort of operation. There has been close consultation with the United States on its command role. Again, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the letter that has been placed in the Library.

In terms of objectives, the hon. Gentleman referred to a long list of possibilities. The one thing that I have learned as a Minister in a number of Departments is that there are always reasons for not doing something. It is always possible to find a long list of risks and problems, but the responsibility of Governments and Ministers is to take decisions to do things. I am confident that it is right that we should take on this particular responsibility.

On funding, I undertake to give the hon. Gentleman a brief about the way in which departmental funding works. I only wish that the Ministry of Defence had a real underspend on its budget. That would certainly make my life and those of my fellow Ministers a great deal easier. I promise that I shall explain to him precisely how the budget of the Ministry of Defence works.

As for the United States, we are certainly willing to support it and to stand shoulder to shoulder with it in its leadership of the international coalition. I have no hesitation in saying that.

**Mr. Paul Keetch** (Hereford): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for giving me advance notice of his statement.

The Liberal Democrats have sympathy for yet another commitment that will separate even more British service men and women from their families while the rest of this country enjoys the Christmas and new year holiday, but we understand the importance of post-conflict rebuilding of a civil society in Afghanistan. The promotion of the rule of law is key to that process, as we know from the Balkans experience. The fact that UK forces are especially experienced to undertake this sort of operation makes us proud of them. Indeed, the whole House should be proud of them.

May I ask the Secretary of State a few questions? He gave a time limit of three months. Can he tell the House whether any UK forces are being prepared in advance to replace the forces that are leaving in that three-month period, or can he give an absolute assurance that those forces will be replaced by forces of other nations? What about the many thousands of service men and women in the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy who have now been out in the Arabian sea for some months, including for Operation Saif Sareea? Will they be rolled over or relieved before Christmas?

On force protection, the right hon. Gentleman said that a letter concerning United States air cover had been placed in the Library, but are there any contingency plans for the UK to provide air cover RAF units to go out to Afghanistan to support the force on the ground? Finally, does he agree that the need for the UK to be in the lead again underlines the importance of establishing a proper EU military process and the need to get that up and running so that the burden can be shared. *[Laughter.]* The Conservatives laugh, but once again they criticise the Government for deploying forces and criticise a means by which they are trying, with support from the Liberal Democrats, to provide a solution.

Rebuilding Afghanistan is a key part of the campaign against terrorism and the debt that the west owes to the much-abused people of that sad country. The Liberal Democrats wish the Government and our forces well in that task.

**Mr. Hoon:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. Let me deal as well as I can with his specific questions. I cannot give him an absolute guarantee about the precise three-month time limit. Such operations do not work in that way. For example, in Macedonia, the majority of forces deployed by the United Kingdom were withdrawn after the 30-day time limit. Several remained on the operation, essentially to hand over their knowledge and expertise about circumstances on the ground. I anticipate a similar handover process for the lead elements in the operation that we are considering.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about forces at sea is similar. Those matters are properly tackled in the chain of command. I assure hon. Members that when commanding officers make their decisions, they take full account of the length of time that our armed forces spend on specific operations.

I specifically referred not to US air cover but to US support. However, the hon. Gentleman will find detailed reference to the support in the letter that was placed in the Library.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the United Kingdom being the lead nation. I do not agree with him about the development of a European Union military capability in the case that we are considering. The United Kingdom has received the request to be the lead nation because it is acknowledged that we have tremendous capability to do the job. We can get people into an operation quickly and organise an operation, especially one that is difficult and involves several elements from several different countries. Expertise, not simply the pursuit of dogma, is important.

**Mr. Bruce George** (Walsall, South): I can give my right hon. Friend some clues about how the defence budget works: he should look over the road and talk to people at the Treasury.

Why is the United States not prepared to do more at this stage than provide general support for the ground forces in Kabul? Will the large military presence of between 3,000 and 5,000 people, working alongside Afghan forces, operate only in Kabul or in any other cities?

**Mr. Hoon:** I do not accept my right hon. Friend's comments about the United States. For example, the Americans have stated their willingness to organise the airstrip at Bagram for the considerable deployment and resupply of the force. That is an enormous task. The airstrip is not only relatively dangerous because of the unexploded ordnance, but primitive and basic. The Americans' willingness to take on the responsibility of ensuring that a significant number of flights can get on and off the airstrip and that appropriate air traffic control exists, and of supporting people as they get in and out of Afghanistan, is an enormous contribution. When my right hon. Friend gives the matter a few moments thought, I am sure he will realise that.

It is important that my right hon. Friend does not underestimate the significance of United States involvement not only in Afghanistan but in other theatres. It has deployed many troops to tackle what continues to be the international community's primary concern: hunting down the remaining elements of al-Qaeda and ensuring that Afghanistan is never used again as a base for international terrorism. That is a great responsibility, of which the United States bears the lion's share.

**Sir John Stanley** (Tonbridge and Malling): Is the Secretary of State aware that there will be considerable concern that his statement contained no explicit reference to the way air protection cover will be provided for the international force? In his response to the Liberal Democrat spokesman, he appeared to dismiss the possibility. Will he clarify that fundamental point? Will the force be deployed with a clear agreement with the United States that it will provide air protection? Or will the international force be deployed without a formal agreement on air protection? If the latter is the case, the Government are proceeding with doubtful responsibility.

**Mr. Hoon:** I am a little puzzled by the right hon. Gentleman's emphasis on air protection, because although the ISAF is going into a dangerous environment on the ground—I am the first to concede that—there is no particular threat from the air in Afghanistan of which I am aware. On air protection, the right hon. Gentleman may be referring to a range of different ideas, but the truth is that extraction is the only issue that is particularly relevant. I am confident that we shall be able to secure the force's extraction when and if that becomes necessary. Again, we would not contemplate deploying a force if we were not confident that it could be deployed successfully to Afghanistan and sustain itself there for the time necessary.

**Tony Worthington** (Clydebank and Milngavie): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. If Conservative Members did not know that this day would come, they are very foolish indeed. We are in the most difficult phase of the Afghanistan situation—the reconstruction—and security is everything. Without it, the other good things cannot occur.

My right hon. Friend referred to training. Does he anticipate that, as in Sierra Leone, a major role for the international force will be equipping Afghanistan with its own army, which it does not have, and a police force, which is vital to the future and which it also does not have?

**Mr. Hoon:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his observations. The annexe to the Bonn agreement refers to the creation of an international security force and the importance of developing Afghanistan's security and armed forces. I anticipate that, in due course, the ISAF could begin to provide the necessary training and development of Afghanistan's armed forces, obviously so that they can protect themselves against further threats.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): This will clearly be a difficult mission. The Secretary of State says that he intends the force to be properly equipped—he used those words—and that discussions as to exactly how that will be achieved are still going on. It is essential that the force is properly equipped, so will he say whether other units of 16 Air Assault Brigade, in particular 7 Regiment Royal Horse Artillery based in Aldershot and 9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers, will be deployed? That would be helpful.

On resources, the Secretary of State significantly failed to answer my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on the £147 million underspend last year. The recently retired Chief of the Defence Staff has said in the other place that the armed services were underfunded before 11 September, but we have committed to a raft of new engagements. Where will the money come from? The Secretary of State cannot keep robbing Peter to pay Paul, and I understand that there is no money left for training. Where will the new money come from to fund all these expeditions?

**Mr. Hoon:** On the equipment, I repeat what I said earlier: there is a force generation conference under way whose purpose is to assess the various offers from other countries in terms of the capabilities required and to put together a force package to do the job. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's difficulty in the light of my statement—I would have much preferred to make it once the process is complete—but it is difficult to give precise answers to his detailed questions. However, having developed a concept, the forces offered will be applied to it, and I anticipate sufficient offers from sufficient countries to deal with any scenario required.

Equally, depending on those offers, we may need to look elsewhere for other forces that might be deployed to Afghanistan, but that is not in my mind at present. I have been told that there are more than enough offers of people and equipment to satisfy the likely requirements in Afghanistan.

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not satisfied by my answer on spending. He should know that, under this Government, the money available to defence has increased significantly. The real defence spending cuts were conducted by Governments supported consistently by him. He consistently entered the Lobby to support a Government who cut defence spending by more than

*[Mr. Hoon]*

20 per cent. and he must say why he did that, as he now comes to the House to complain when the defence budget is increasing.

**Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): Progress, both military and political, has been remarkable, and we should not allow it to lose momentum or to stall at this stage. My right hon. Friend said that we in the United Kingdom would lose our lead nation status in three months or so. Can he say what will happen then in terms of the commitment of UK forces? He said, for example, that there would be a role for those who would train a local police and military security force. Will we be involved in that from the start? If so, how many UK personnel are likely to be involved in a continuing commitment in Afghanistan?

**Mr. Hoon:** My right hon. Friend asked a fair question about what would happen at the end of the three months. I said in my statement that I anticipated a handover to another lead nation. There have been a number of indications of interest from our international partners, and I hope that following such a handover the process will continue in a still more benign environment. We envisage developments such as that mentioned by my right hon. Friend—the training and organisation of a future Afghan security force. I trust that my right hon. Friend will forgive me, however, if I say that it is a little early to anticipate those developments, although I would welcome them.

**Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): Will the Secretary of State now answer the questions asked by my hon. Friends the Members for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), and by the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George)—the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee—about resourcing? If it is really true, as the Secretary of State claims, that there was no underspend last year, at a time when our forces are so pitifully undermanned, the financial constraints must be even worse than the House thought. Can the right hon. Gentleman not understand why many Conservative Members, while strongly supporting our forces who are undertaking this dangerous and risky operation, are deeply concerned about the rapid worsening of overstretch?

**Mr. Hoon:** The hon. Gentleman, too, consistently supported a Government who consistently cut the defence budget. I do not recall his standing up at that time and whining in the way he is today—about a Government who have consistently increased defence expenditure. Unless he can sort out that dilemma, his comments cannot be taken seriously.

**Mr. Malcolm Savidge** (Aberdeen, North): Is it not true that consolidating military success in Afghanistan by helping to stabilise the country will improve international security, while engaging in reckless military adventures elsewhere, as advocated by some extreme right wingers on both sides of the Atlantic, could make the world much less safe?

**Mr. Hoon:** As I said in answer to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), there are always reasons for not making decisions and there are always reasons for making bad decisions. The exercise of judgment in Government is vital. I accept that different people would put their judgment in different places, but I am confident that the Government get it right.

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party fully support the international peacekeeping force.

The Secretary of State said that the rules of engagement would be robust. Can he confirm that the force will undertake Petersberg tasks? Will he also confirm that if an extension of military action beyond the boundaries of Afghanistan were likely, the approval of the international community would be sought before such action was taken?

**Mr. Hoon:** I do not want to be drawn down either of those routes, because the hon. Gentleman is confusing two separate issues. The tasks for the force will be set out both in chapter VII of the United Nations Security Council resolution and, in a more detailed way, in the military technical agreement reached with the Afghans—based, obviously, on the terms of the Bonn agreement. I do not think either of the hon. Gentleman's points is relevant to what will be essentially a security assistance task in Afghanistan, as defined in that fashion.

**Mr. Doug Henderson** (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I know that my right hon. Friend will have had advice from previous military chiefs of staff on the dangers of a peacekeeping force getting caught up in offensive action. I very much welcome the fact that the British lead of the peacekeeping force will be for three months. I realise that few nations could provide that lead at this stage.

Is there anything in the military technical agreement between the different factions that will constitute the Afghan Government about how they will build their own security forces—their military forces or their law and order capacity through a police force?

**Mr. Hoon:** My hon. Friend asks a good question about the security forces that will determine the safety and security of Afghanistan. In all honesty, I cannot give him a proper answer at this stage. The military technical agreement will be signed by the Interim Authority, so it will be signed on behalf of all the various factions that agreed the Bonn agreement.

I recognise that a key question for the future of Afghanistan is whether the various factions are prepared to work together to rebuild their country. Crucially, the future of any Afghan army, security forces or police force must be central to that. That is what the international community and the Afghans must work towards. I am given confidence by the Afghans' willingness to move so quickly towards an agreement at Bonn, and their apparent determination to see that agreement fulfilled in full. That is why I believe that it is right for the United Kingdom and the international community to play their part in this process.

**Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh): The Chief of the Defence Staff has said publicly that something will have to give to allow this operation to take place. From which budget will this operation be funded: the Defence budget,

the Foreign Office budget or the Government's contingency reserve? If something has to give to allow this operation to take place, what will that be?

**Mr. Hoon:** The funding for such operations comes from a number of different budgets. That is always the case. The Ministry of Defence will, as always, provide the salaries of those who are deployed, and it recognises that it is funded for that purpose. Other budgets, especially the contingency reserve, are routinely called on to support such operations. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the exact answer to his question that he desires, but it leads me to believe that Conservative Members need to spend some time studying how budgets for Departments operate.

**Joan Ruddock** (Lewisham, Deptford): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the international force will interface with a community in which the majority of women are deeply traumatised. Is he aware of the advice that the United Nations has given to Governments regarding special gender training of soldiers, which should be given to those who are entering into such post-conflict situations? Can he assure me that such training is being given? The Afghan women with whom I have contact, both in this country and in Afghanistan, welcome the international force and Britain's leadership of it.

**Mr. Hoon:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her observations, and I shall ensure that her suggestion is acted on.

**Mr. Gregory Barker** (Bexhill and Battle): Further to the question from the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, could the Secretary of State enlighten us as to the thinking of our American allies? They have declined to put ground troops into the peacekeeping force. Were they led to the inescapable truth that, in a theatre as complex and dangerous as Afghanistan, they can be either peacemaker or protagonist, but not both?

**Mr. Hoon:** I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is wrong about that. There will be United States forces on the ground. It is self-evident that there will need to be a US presence to operate an airstrip, as there is already in a number of operations inside Afghanistan. He is wrong to make that assertion. Given the tremendous contribution that the United States is already making with its offensive operations in and around Afghanistan, which require significant logistic support, he should not suggest that the US is not capable of involvement in the peacekeeping operation as well.

**Mr. George Howarth** (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): At the risk of being accused of advocating mission creep, may I ask my right hon. Friend to reflect on whether it might be appropriate, in view of the training role that he envisages, to provide UK police and Customs and Excise resources to Afghanistan, so that the interim authority and any new security forces will be properly trained to deal with the drug situation, especially the heroin trade, which originates mostly in Afghanistan?

**Mr. Hoon:** Again, consistent with an answer I gave earlier, I anticipate that a range of requirements across Government functions will be needed by the interim Administration in Afghanistan. I will certainly ensure that my hon. Friend's suggestions are passed on to the appropriate quarter.

**Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): I believe that Lord Guthrie said that the Ministry of Defence was underfunded before 11 September. Was he wrong?

**Mr. Hoon:** I have worked closely with the noble Lord and we have had regular exchanges on the nature of the defence budget. I do not speak for the noble Lord, but I do speak for the Government. In assessing the budget of all Departments it is necessary to take some very difficult decisions sometimes, but this Government have consistently increased the amount spent on defence. I know that the hon. Gentleman is a relatively recent arrival, so I cannot blame him for supporting previous Conservative Governments who cut the defence budget, but I assure him that they did.

**Rachel Squire** (Dunfermline, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the provision of an agreed United Nations international security and assistance force going to assist Afghanistan is a remarkable achievement, and one that not so long ago many of us would never have thought possible? Does he also agree that there are no armed forces better able or better trusted to lead it in its first, crucial stages than those of the United Kingdom? Does he further agree that it is contradictory of the official Opposition spokesman to express concerns about overstretch of our armed forces, but also to say that our armed forces should be willing and prepared to follow the US wherever it wants them to go?

**Mr. Hoon:** My hon. Friend makes several good points, on which I am sure Opposition Members will carefully and maturely reflect. I hope that both sides of the House agree that in the immediate aftermath of the first launch of the military operations, no one would have thought that before Christmas we would be talking about a peace support operation, given the considerable dangers and difficulties involved in the offensive operations. That is a remarkable tribute to the leadership of the US and the support that several nations, including the UK and its armed forces, have been able to give.

**Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): Could the Secretary of State clear up the confusion between his statement, in which he mentioned a three-month deployment, and the letter from the Foreign Secretary to the UN Secretary-General, which has just been placed in the Library, which says that the deployment will end

"no later than 30 April 2002."?

That is four months. Is it three months or four months, and why did he not mention the 30 April date?

**Mr. Hoon:** I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has had time for a close textual analysis of the letter and I am equally delighted that that is the only problem that he has been able to identify. The answer is straightforward and if he had listened carefully to what I said—perhaps he was too busy reading the letter—he would have noticed that I mentioned the difficulty of getting the force into Afghanistan and that the three months will run from the point at which the force is ready and doing its job.

**Mr. Peter Kilfoyle** (Liverpool, Walton): Anything done to ameliorate the Afghan tragedy is to be welcomed

*[Mr. Peter Kilfoyle]*

and, in that context, the Secretary of State's statement is welcome today. Given the comments made by Sir Michael Boyce, the Chief of the Defence Staff, to the Royal United Services Institute and given the intention of the US Administration to extend the present campaign to other countries in the mid-east and the horn of Africa, does he envisage British forces being further involved in similar situations in countries attacked by the US in pursuance of its anti-terrorist strategy, or does he rule that out?

**Mr. Hoon:** The US and British Governments have worked together extremely closely during these offensive operations. We have had detailed consultations at every level of Government and of the military, and I anticipate that that will continue. I am sure, therefore, that, in appropriate circumstances, the UK will want to support the US in its continuing operations against international terrorism.

**Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): I welcome the deployment, but I return to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley). Air cover is an important element of these operations, and when I was with the UN operation in Bosnia, the UN—and the IFOR and SFOR follow-up forces—all used it. In his reply, the Secretary of State said that air cover would not be available and that it was merely used for insertion and extraction purposes. Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify that point?

**Mr. Hoon:** I assure the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) that I did not suggest that air cover was not available or that it was not required. I said that I did not see any immediate threat from the air. There may be a need for air cover, but that will certainly depend on judgments made by the military. The force generation conference will obviously make a military judgment about the requirement for air cover. If air cover is judged to be necessary, the relevant assets will be made available.

**Roger Casale** (Wimbledon): I add my appreciation of the work of our armed services and intelligence services. They have performed remarkable work throughout the conflict. They have shown that they well deserve the confidence not just of the British people but of the whole international community.

Is it not the case, as many hon. Members have seen at first hand in Kosovo and the Balkans, that troops may need to be deployed for some time if urgent humanitarian relief is now to be delivered by the non-governmental organisations, the UN, the EU and many other national Governments and international organisations? That relief is needed urgently if Afghanistan is to be set on the road to sustainable development in the longer term.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is right to urge caution about what is a highly dangerous mission. Does he agree that there is no doubt that Britain is well qualified to lead its initial stages? Does he agree that, without such a mission, there is no chance of a better future for the men, women and children of Afghanistan?

**Mr. Hoon:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks, especially for those in connection with the armed forces, which will be deeply appreciated.

As for humanitarian relief, it is vital that there is a greater degree of security in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future. I know that NGOs are working around the clock to deliver aid, especially given the onset of some pretty brutal weather in Afghanistan. We have had a considerable number of offers from other nations in the international community regarding the deployment of troops. They are willing to play their part, but not all will do so in the early stages of the process. I look forward to being able to tell the House in future of the contributions that other nations will be able to make.

**Patrick Mercer** (Newark): I am full of admiration for the troops who are about to deploy, but will the Secretary of State say whether 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, and 40 Commando Royal Marines will be deploying at peace establishment or war establishment? In either event, which units have been stripped of manpower to make them deployable?

**Mr. Hoon:** As the hon. Gentleman probably knows better than I, those are matters for the military command chain. That is why such questions are left to the military leadership. Those officers provide advice to Ministers, who are ultimately responsible and accountable to this House.

**Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): The Secretary of State said that the mission for this force does not include the pursuit of al-Qaeda. However, it is possible that the pursuit elsewhere in Afghanistan might switch suddenly to the Kabul area. What preparations has the Secretary of State made to deal with that contingency?

**Mr. Hoon:** That is a fair question, and one that has been the subject of detailed discussions. It has been agreed with the US that there must be clear co-ordination on any deconfliction of operations involving American forces engaged in pursuing al-Qaeda and the peace support operation. I assure the hon. Gentleman, and the House, that absolute priority will be given to the pursuit of the remaining elements of al-Qaeda.

# Treason Felony, Act of Settlement and Parliamentary Oath

5.15 pm

**Mr. Kevin McNamara** (Hull, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend section 3 of the Treason Felony Act 1848 in order to establish that it is no longer an offence to express an opinion in favour of republicanism or advocating the abolition of the monarchy; to amend the Act of Settlement to provide that persons in communion with the Roman Catholic church are able to succeed to the Crown; to amend the law relating to the parliamentary oath; and for connected purposes.

As *The Guardian* said this morning, this is a modest measure. In July 2000, my noble Friend Lord Parekh presented a sadly neglected report from the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. He concluded that we are at a turning point in our history and can become inward looking or develop as

"a community of citizens and communities".

He called for politicians to show the courage of leadership.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has also called for leadership. He said that what Northern Ireland needs from its politicians, perhaps now more than ever before, is a common vision of a new inclusive society. A good starting point, he continued, would be a determination to tackle sectarianism. He described sectarianism as

"a virus at the heart of Northern Ireland".

Sectarianism taints every aspect of life that it touches.

The Bill would strike at discrimination and intolerance in our society. I am looking to assist the process of inclusion—my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's big tent. Some of the laws that I seek to amend are very old but that does not mean that they cease to have effect.

The Bill is about putting our own House in order and recognising where tradition may directly or indirectly exclude a section of the community. It is about recognising those aspects of our traditions that may inadvertently cause offence and those that are in conflict with our commitment to a multi-ethnic future.

Agreement to proceed with the Bill will have a dramatic effect. It will demonstrate the will of the House to modernise the constitution and all its workings. It will bring the foundations of our democracy into line with our obligations to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. It was a proud moment when this Parliament put into legislation the European convention on human rights.

The first part of my Bill concerns the Treason Felony Act 1848. At the end of the last millennium, *The Guardian* wished to publish a series of articles advocating a republican Government in the United Kingdom. It was, however, prevented from doing so because section 3 of the 1848 Act makes it a felony not only—in this case very properly—to levy war against Her Majesty but to

"compass, imagine, invent, devise or to deprive or depose"

her. Persons found guilty of such imaginings or of expressing their intention to abolish the monarchy, even by exclusively democratic and peaceful means, would be committing an offence punishable by life imprisonment.

Anyone who is familiar with article 10 of the European convention on human rights knows that under the terms of the convention:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authorities".

So the publishers and proprietors of *The Guardian* wrote to the then Attorney-General seeking permission to publish such articles. Failing that, they would seek a declaration in the High Court that section 3 of the Treason Felony Act 1848 should be interpreted in accordance with the Human Rights Act 1998 and, consequently, that existing law would not criminalise the author of a newspaper article advocating peaceful change to a republic.

On 8 December 2000, the then Attorney-General wrote:

"It is not for any Attorney-General to disapply an Act of Parliament; that is a matter for Parliament itself."

With this Bill, I intend to address the shortcomings of the 1848 Act; to make clear that it is no longer an offence to seek a change in the nature of government by democratic and peaceful means; and to give the House the opportunity to start disapplying.

The second part of the Bill would amend those aspects of sections 2 and 3 of the Act of Settlement 1701 dealing with succession to the throne, in order to remove discrimination against Roman Catholics. The Act is extremely offensive in that regard. It stipulates that

"those who profess the Popish religion"

can neither be monarchs nor marry into the royal family.

In December 1999, Members of the Scottish Parliament unanimously adopted the following motion:

"That the Parliament believes that the discrimination contained in the Act of Settlement has no place in our modern society, expresses its wish that those discriminatory aspects of the Act be repealed".—[*Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 16 December 1999; Vol. 3, c. 1636-37.]

However, the repeal of such legislation is a matter reserved for the United Kingdom Parliament, so we should address it.

I am not persuaded by those who say that to enshrine sectarianism in legislation is unimportant or by those who argue that such a move would require legislation in all the 15 Commonwealth countries that recognise the Queen as their head of state. It is important, and we can act without reference to those other kingdoms.

Article 9.2 of the European convention on human rights provides:

"Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

Our European partners in Luxembourg, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands all maintain a constitutional monarchy. None requires the restriction of access to the throne on the ground of religious belief.

The Prime Minister is on record on this issue. He shares my belief that the anti-Catholic aspects of the Act of Settlement are plainly discriminatory. I was happy to note that he promised to re-examine the issue during his second term. This is his second term and my Bill would permit the House to offer him the opportunity to conduct that re-examination.

*[Mr. Kevin McNamara]*

The final aspect of my Bill relates to amendment of the Oaths Act 1978. Such amendment would address from a different angle matters raised in the Chamber yesterday. It would remove the requirement that an elected Member of Parliament take the present Oath of loyalty to the monarch and would provide an alternative—a modern oath of affirmation. The Oath could take the form suggested by my right hon. Friend, the former Member for Chesterfield, Tony Benn:

"I do solemnly Declare and Affirm that I will, to the best of my ability, discharge the responsibilities required of me by virtue of my membership of the House of Commons and faithfully serve those whom I represent here."—[*Official Report*, 29 July 1998; Vol. 317, c. 379.]

Such an alternative—it would not be mandatory—would cover the point and would get rid of many of our current problems.

Since I last argued this matter, I have had the benefit of a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Buscarini and Others *v.* San Marino. In that case, three individuals elected to the Parliament of the Republic of San Marino challenged the requirement that they take the oath as prescribed by law. They submitted that the exercise of a fundamental political right such as holding parliamentary office should not be subject to publicly professing a particular faith—in breach of article 9 of the European convention.

The Government of San Marino maintained that the wording of the oath was not religious but

"historical and social in significance and based on tradition"

and that the form of words at issue had

"lost its original religious character".

The European judges stated that the freedom of thought, conscience and religion enshrined in article 9 constitutes one of the foundations of a "democratic society" within the meaning of the convention. The Court's comments regarding article 9 are important for us. It explained that

"it would be contradictory to make the exercise of a mandate intended to represent different views of society within Parliament subject to prior commitment to a particular set of beliefs"—

to the taking of a particular oath.

I believe that we can get rid of the indignity and absurdity that have characterised the taking of the Oath. We can return to a situation where the occasion is treated with solemnity, because people will return to a position where they are doing something voluntarily, not because it is insisted on or directed, and they can do it with a free conscience.

These three measures—the right to argue, without fear of punishment, for a republic or to replace the monarchy; the right to marry a Catholic or be a Catholic and still be able to be the head of state, and the right of the Oath—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal):** Order. Time is up.

5.25 pm

**Rev. Ian Paisley** (North Antrim): I oppose the motion. The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) is seeking to undermine the constitution, all through the dominion of what we call a ten-minute rule Bill. He has raised matters of deep constitutional meaning, which have a meaning for us all. Surely if we are going to review—and change—the constitution of this United Kingdom, that deserves more than a ten-minute Bill, because such a Bill has neither the time nor the capacity to deal with such issues.

I want to take up some immediate questions. The hon. Gentleman laid great emphasis on Europe, and on how Europe feels, and said that those in Europe look upon our constitution as bigoted and discriminatory. However, article 16 of the constitution of Spain underscores the special relationship of Spain with the Roman Catholic Church, and says that the only successors who may enter into the monarchic relationship in Spain must be successors of His Majesty Don Carlos. That house is of course a strictly Roman Catholic house, and those successors are strictly Roman Catholic.

In Belgium, which is also a Roman Catholic country, the king himself—not the law but the king—can decide who his successor should marry, and if the successor marries without the king's consent he cannot be king. The written constitution says that the rightful succession is through the descent of the Roman Catholic Saxe-Coburg dynasty.

In Sweden, which is also a member of the European Union, the king must always profess the pure Evangelical Lutheran faith as adopted and explained in the unaltered Constitution of Augsburg. According to the resolution of the Uppsala meeting in the year 1593, princes and princesses of the royal house must be brought up in the same faith and within the realm. Any member of the royal family not professing that faith will be excluded from all rights of succession.

Let us look at Denmark, which is also a member of the European Union. Part 2 of its constitution states that the king shall be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and according to section 4 of the constitution, the Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be the established Church of Denmark.

If one looks to the Netherlands, one finds in article 24 of the constitution that the succession to the throne is hereditary and limited to the legitimate descendants of King William I—not King William III, but King William I, Prince of Orange: a Protestant succession indeed.

So two Roman Catholic countries in the European Union say that they should have a Roman Catholic monarch, and the other countries that I have mentioned say that they should have a Protestant monarch.

The emphasis of the Bill of Rights of 1688 was not on religion, but on the security of this nation, and the Act is based on that security. Under the reigns of Bloody Mary and King James, this nation learned that it was not safe. That was the basis on which that Bill was drafted, and the Williamite revolution settlement is the basis for our constitutional position.

The Williamite revolution settlement has served this nation well in the past, and to say now that our hands should be put to the job of dismantling that settlement is strange, for we do not know what people want to put in its place. What will be put in the place of the Williamite revolution settlement?

I do not hear any agitation among nonconformists about the fact that the Queen is the supreme governor, or head,

of the Church of England. They do not say that that is a terrible thing and that they are slighted because the monarch cannot be a nonconformist. I do not hear that at all, and I tell the House that we should not put our hands to destroying something that has served this country well, and replace it with something that is the subject of debate in a courthouse in Europe.

Those in Europe seem to be saying, "Don't do as we do, do what we say you should do." Let them deal with those matters before they lecture the House and the United Kingdom and tell us that we are discriminatory and bigoted. That is a matter that they have to face up to, and they should do so realistically. The House would be well advised to say, "No. We cannot put our hands to such a proposal at the present time." However, if the Government are interested in this matter, as they have stated, it is their responsibility to propose such a Bill and to give proper time for its debate, argument and consideration.

*Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—*

*The House divided:* Ayes 170, Noes 32.

**Division No. 122]** **[5.32 pm**

**AYES**

Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Daisley, Paul
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Ewing, Annabelle
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
Gibson, Dr Ian
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
MacDougall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Mole, Chris
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
O'Hara, Edward
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Stevenson, George
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger–Ross, Richard

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Jeremy Corbyn and**
**Mr. Malcolm Savidge.**

**NOES**

Baron, John
Browning, Mrs Angela
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Conway, Derek
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Hoban, Mark
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Watkinson, Angela
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Rev. Ian Paisley and**
**Mr. Gerald Howarth.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Kevin McNamara, Ann Clwyd, Mr. Edward O'Hara, Paul Flynn, Mr. Malcolm Savidge, Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Alex Salmond, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Andrew Mackinlay, Kevin Brennan and John Austin.

TREASON FELONY, ACT OF SETTLEMENT AND PARLIAMENTARY OATH

Mr. Kevin McNamara accordingly presented a Bill to amend section 3 of the Treason Felony Act 1848 in order to establish that it is no longer an offence to express an opinion in favour of republicanism or advocating the abolition of the monarchy; to amend the Act of Settlement to provide that persons in communion with the Roman Catholic church are able to succeed to the Crown; to amend the law relating to the parliamentary oath; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 11 January, and to be printed [Bill 77].

## DEREGULATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(1)(a) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),*

DWELLING-HOUSES

That the draft Deregulation (Disposals of Dwelling-houses by Local Authorities) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 28th November, be approved.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

*Question agreed to.*

**Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Before we come to the next item of business, could you inquire whether it is possible to make available copies of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, under which the extradition regulations are to be made? As you will remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Act received Royal Assent in the early hours of Friday morning. We all understand the haste with which the last stages proceeded, but when inquiries were last made in the Vote Office, copies of the Act were not available. Is it possible and proper for Parliament to debate regulations when it is not possible to obtain copies of the Act under which they are to be made?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order, which is in fact a point for debate. Ministers who are present will have heard his comments.

**Simon Hughes:** With respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, that cannot be a point for debate. The regulation is to be made under the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act. The conditions of the relevant section of that Act were controversial; they have been debated and changed by Government amendment and by negotiation in the past couple of days. It is therefore very important that my colleagues have the final wording of what is permitted under that section, as opposed to what was in the original drafting. As a matter of principle, I think that we should have the Act. But if we cannot have it, it is proper that we should have its final section, which received Royal Assent last Friday.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I repeat what I said to the hon. Gentleman: there is nothing to stop the debate proceeding. That is the intention of the motion on the Order Paper.

## Extradition

5.47 pm

**The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley):** I beg to move,

That the draft European Union Extradition Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

In moving the 2001 regulations, I shall start by responding to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes). Obviously, it would be preferable for the hon. Gentleman to have a copy of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. As he knows, it includes an enabling provision, which we approved, to allow debate on the regulations. I know that he does not have the precise words of that provision, but is only an enabling measure and does not affect our ability to debate the regulations, of which I hope he has the full text.

**Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I have the full text. Will the Minister explain why he is introducing what he called the 2001 regulations, whereas the published regulations include the words "Regulations 2002"?

**Mr. Bradley:** I apologise for the error. I am sure that *Hansard* will correct it and make sure that the right regulations are in the text of our debate. Clearly the season of good will has not yet hit Liberal Democrat Members.

I am pleased to be able to introduce the regulations, both because they are intrinsically worth while, as I hope I shall be able to demonstrate, and because, as I have just pointed out, they are the first such regulations to be made under the provisions of section 111 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act, which received Royal Assent last week.

The regulations demonstrate the value of the enabling power that that section created. The changes that they make are desirable, but essentially quite minor. It would simply not be worth devoting the parliamentary time that would be required to enact primary legislation to give effect to their content; the previous Government were evidently of the same view, because they did not introduce primary legislation to make the required changes when they were in office.

Now, however, we have the opportunity to give effect to the 1995 and 1996 European Union conventions on extradition, which will bring our extradition arrangements more closely into line with those of most of our European partners.

Before describing in detail what the regulations do, I shall say a little about what they do not do. They do not give effect to the European arrest warrant, which is a subject that has attracted some comment in recent weeks. I therefore do not propose to deal with that. The necessary legislation to give effect to that instrument will be contained in an extradition Bill, which will be introduced early in the new year. There will be adequate opportunity

to debate that Bill, which will go much wider than Europe, and cover our extradition relations with the rest of the world.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): Does that mean that the Home Secretary cannot be extradited from the United Kingdom for xenophobia?

**Mr. Bradley:** I shall continue with the serious elements of the debate.

As I have said, the regulations are designed to give effect to two European conventions. These are formally known as the convention on simplified extradition procedures between member states of the European Union of 1995, and the convention relating to extradition between member states of the EU of 1996. The first was signed on 10 March 1995 and the second on 27 September 1996. The two conventions make a number of changes to speed up and simplify extradition between EU member states, and require amendments to the Extradition Act 1989.

Assuming that the regulations are agreed to, they will come into force 90 days after the date of the United Kingdom's notification of our ratification to the Secretary General of the Council of the EU under the provisions of the conventions, which we intend will happen immediately.

Currently, extradition between member states of the EU takes place on the basis of the European convention on extradition of 1957—the ECE. The two conventions amend the provisions of the ECE between EU states. Their provisions do not affect our extradition arrangements with the Republic of Ireland, as those are regulated not by the ECE but by reciprocal legislation.

We are bringing the regulations forward in advance of the extradition Bill, which will be introduced in the new year to meet the deadline for the ratification of the two conventions by all member states set by the special Justice and Home Affairs Council on 20 September as part of its response to the terrible events in the United States on 11 September.

The conventions are nothing new. Indeed, they were the impetus for the review of extradition law that began in 1997. That was ultimately to lead to the consultation paper published earlier this year entitled "The Law on Extradition: a Review", which contained nine specific recommendations regarding the two conventions, as well as a wide range of other proposed amendments. A summary of the responses received was placed in the Library, as well as on the Home Office website, on 24 October. In addition, the conventions were subject to, and cleared, the parliamentary scrutiny process while they were being negotiated.

The amendments to the Extradition Act 1989 are set out in schedule 9 to the draft regulations. They are limited to countries in respect of which the conventions are in force between them and the UK. The provisions of the conventions, and hence the amendments to the Extradition Act, apply only to requests made after the regulations come into force.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): I have been reading the regulations and schedule 9. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that under the proposed regulations, anyone indicted under the recently passed terrorist legislation could be extradited without having appeared in open court in the United Kingdom, or am I wrong about that?

**Mr. Bradley:** My understanding is that my hon. Friend is wrong on that point. However, I shall check. I hope that I shall be able to respond later. I do not want to mislead him. If he cannot remain in his place throughout the debate, I shall certainly write to him. It is important that we get these things right.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank my right hon. Friend. If the regulations applied to someone indicted under the legislation that we have so recently passed, could he or she be extradited without having gone through a legal process either here or in the extraditing country?

**Mr. Bradley:** The arrangements must come into force through the regulations. The process of extradition would go through the process of request. The issues that relate to the amendments would apply if they applied to that situation. They would not apply retrospectively. There would need to be a request from the requesting state, and a response from us as the requested state.

**Simon Hughes:** Perhaps it is appropriate to ask the Minister now if at some stage he will set out which other countries are involved. In theory, that could mean all the EU countries—but I gather that they are not yet all parties to the conventions. It would be helpful to have the current lists of the two sets of countries.

**Mr. Bradley:** I will provide that information during the debate. As I have said, the provisions of the 1989 Act will continue to apply, so extradition will be able to take place only after there has been a hearing in open court. These provisions do not affect that process.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Will my right hon. Friend give way again?

**Mr. Bradley:** I would like to make progress. I shall give way just once more.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** My right hon. Friend has been patient. He will understand, however, that there are genuine concerns.

If someone were arrested in this country as a deemed international terrorist, under an order made by the Home Secretary, is it right to say that they could not be extradited under the Act, but only after going through a process governed by earlier legislation, which would mean an open court rather than the closed sessions envisaged in the Act that the House has just passed?

**Mr. Bradley:** That is my understanding. If further clarification is needed, I shall write to my hon. Friend.

As I have said, the amendments to the Extradition Act are set out in schedule 9 to the draft regulations. They are limited to countries in respect of which the conventions are in force between them and the UK. The provisions of the conventions, and hence the amendments to the Extradition Act, apply only to requests made after the regulations come into force. I shall mention the countries later.

*[Mr. Bradley]*

It may be helpful if I set out in more detail the provisions of the two conventions and the amendments to the Extradition Act that the regulations will make. The 1995 convention sets out streamlined procedures for cases in which the fugitive and the requested state consent to extradition. When a person is arrested pursuant to an extradition request, they are to be informed of the possibility of consenting to their surrender under the simplified procedure. The convention sets out the conditions under which consent can be given. It must be expressed voluntarily and in full awareness of the consequences.

The convention sets out various deadlines on the stages of the case, the most notable of which is that the individual must be surrendered within 20 days of the requested state making its decision. Consent may not be revoked, and in consenting to extradition the fugitive is also renouncing specialty and re-extradition protection. The regulations make changes to sections 6, 9, 14 and 18 of the 1989 Act to implement those provisions.

The 1996 convention makes a number of amendments to the provisions of the ECE. Its main provisions are as follows: to reduce the extradition crime threshold from 12 months in both the requested and the requesting state, to 12 months in the requesting state and six months in the requested state; the abolition of the political offence exception; and a provision that a person who has been extradited may be proceeded against for an offence committed before surrender other than that upon which the request for extradition was based, without obtaining the consent of the requested member state where the offence is not punishable by imprisonment or any other form of detention or where the person will not be detained in connection with his trial, sentence or appeal. Finally, there is relaxation of authentication requirements, which is particularly important for us as it is widely recognised that the UK's authentication requirements are among the most onerous in Europe.

I promised that I would respond to the question about the countries that had not yet ratified the conventions. In the case of the 1995 convention, those are France, Belgium and Italy; in the case of the 1996 convention, France and Italy. They have all undertaken to ratify by 1 January 2002, and all other EU member states have ratified both conventions. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey.

The regulations make amendments to sections 2, 6, 18 and 26 of the Extradition Act 1989 to achieve the changes that I outlined. In addition, there are some provisions in the 1996 convention that we can implement without the need to amend the 1989 Act. The main ones include article 3, which relaxes the principle of dual criminality for the offence of conspiracy or criminal association to commit certain serious crimes, including terrorist offences. The regulations do not make any legislative changes in respect of this article, as the UK can already extradite in all the circumstances covered by the article.

Similarly, article 6 provides that extradition is not to be refused for offences related to taxes, duties, customs and exchange which correspond under the law of the requested member state to a similar offence. Extradition may not be refused on the grounds that the law of the requested member state does not impose the same type of taxes or duties or does not have the same type of provisions in connection with taxes, duties, customs and exchange. No changes to the Extradition Act 1989 are required to implement article 6.

Article 7 states that extradition shall not be refused on the ground that the person concerned is a national of the requested state. There are no legislative implications for the UK, as we do not currently refuse extradition on those grounds. However, it is an important provision for those of our European partners that have traditionally been reluctant to extradite their own nationals, such as Germany and Greece.

**Simon Hughes:** I accept the Minister's assurance that the regulations do not change the law in respect of the offences to which he referred, but it would be helpful if he could provide, in his winding-up speech or later, a definition of the categories of offences under article 3—terrorism, drug trafficking and other organised crime. Otherwise, where do people look for such a definition?

**Mr. Bradley:** I shall endeavour to provide a definition in the course of the debate, but if that is not possible, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and give as much detail as I can.

I hope that I have not been too technical. The Government believe that the changes are desirable. Although the changes proposed are hardly earth-shattering, they should help to simplify and speed up extradition between EU member states. The regulations will also enable the UK to honour an important international obligation and will contribute in yet another way to the fight against terrorism. I trust that they will be supported by the official Opposition—after all, the two conventions were agreed in 1995 and 1996 and signed by the UK in those years—and I hope that they will also be supported in all other parts of the House.

I remind the House that very recently, during the debates on the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, which received Royal Assent last week, it was accepted in both Houses that it was right for the conventions to be given effect under the enabling powers in that Act. On that basis, I commend the regulations to the House.

6.4 pm

**Mr. Humfrey Malins** (Woking): It may be for the convenience of the House if I speak briefly on the motion to approve the European Union Extradition Regulations 2002. I thank the Minister for the thoughtful way in which he introduced them. The official Opposition do not find them controversial and will not oppose them.

Crime is increasingly an international phenomenon. Criminals have no respect for territorial boundaries, and the freedom of movement that the single market gives to Europe's peoples and businesses unfortunately creates new opportunities for criminals to expand their illegal activities. That creates a serious challenge for our law enforcement agencies and our different criminal systems. Measures and actions taken by our Government and other EU Governments to increase co-operation between member states in speeding up the bringing of criminals to justice are to be welcomed by us all.

It is important to recognise that the EU is made up of a diverse group of nations with different legal traditions. Criminal law is, rightly, a matter for each member state

to decide for itself. Let us recognise that each member state may protect human rights in a different way. Let us also recognise in a debate such as this some practical difficulties, including language difficulties.

Liberty is, of course, the most important freedom. Any steps taken by any Government must be in accordance with that freedom. Each state must protect the rights of its citizens and of those resident within its borders. With that background, I shall say a little about each of the conventions with which are dealing—first, the convention on simplified extradition procedure, the 1995 convention.

Extradition law is complicated. My friends the district judges at Bow street magistrates court have mastered the subject, but few others have ever been able to do so. We know of the complex stages in extradition and of the potentially lengthy time scale involved, so it is refreshing to see the word "simplified" in the title. Under the measure, member states undertake to surrender to each other, under simplified procedures, persons sought for the purposes of extradition, subject to the consent of such persons and the agreement of the returning or the requested state.

May I raise one or two queries with the Minister? If he cannot deal with them during the debate, perhaps he could write to me. First, can he confirm that the person's consent will not be given only orally, but that it will be required to be confirmed by the person in writing?

Next, in article 5 of the 1995 convention, there is reference to the "competent authority" of the requested state. In article 7, there is reference to the "competent judicial authority" of the requested state. "Competent authority" for the UK is defined in schedule 2 of that convention as

"the Home Office, the Scottish Ministers, the Scottish Executive Justice Department, the Senior District Judge (Chief Magistrate) or another District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) and a sheriff of Lothian and Borders."

However, I do not see anywhere a definition of a competent judicial authority, which seems to be a different authority from a competent authority. I assume, and perhaps the Minister will confirm, that the competent judicial authority will be the senior district judge or another district judge, magistrates courts. Will the Minister also confirm that the person for whom extradition is sought will have a right not only to choose his or her counsel—I assume that there will be a free choice in that regard—but to claim legal aid, subject to the normal means test?

I should like to turn briefly to the 1996 convention. Like the 1995 convention, it allows the Government to retain their role in the extradition process and protects the concept of dual criminality, which is dealt with in article 2, and speciality, which is dealt with in article 10. It is worth pointing out that the 1996 convention has nothing to do with the proposed EU arrest warrant, about which we will have a great deal to say in the weeks and months ahead. I hope that we can take the festive mood of the House—at least, it seems festive at the moment—into the new year, but we will, of course, be considering the EU arrest warrant, and I suspect that the atmosphere may change a little—if not a lot—when we do.

I should like to raise with the Minister a couple of queries in relation to the 1996 convention and especially article 10. I referred to the protection of the concept of dual criminality and to the issue of speciality. I think that article 10 relates to a person who is to be dealt with by a court in the requesting country, perhaps for an offence that is separate and was not included, so to speak, in the initial proceedings. It states:

"A person who has been extradited may . . . be prosecuted or tried"

for that sort of offence when it is

"not punishable by deprivation of liberty."

We all understand that. It goes on to state that such a person may be prosecuted if the proceedings

"do not give rise to the application of a measure restricting his personal liberty".

We understand that also, but it seems possible that the person could be dealt with if the offence, which was not known about earlier, is met with a financial penalty, which is another method of punishment. Certainly, in this country—I believe that this also applies in other countries—if one is given a financial punishment, but cannot manage the payment, which could be very large, one suffers a custodial sentence in lieu. I hope that we are not facing the prospect of a sleight of hand in terms of the absence of protection for such a person. On the face of the regulations, that protection appears strong, but I hope that that strength is actual and that the Minister can comment on that point.

That is as much as I need to say about the regulations. I have not exactly given them a thundering welcome, but as the Minister said, the conventions are from 1995 and 1996, and the EU arrest warrant is not an issue for debate now. It is proper, therefore, that the Opposition should act responsibly and take no steps that would result in a vote against these sensible measures.

I see that I have been on my feet for nine minutes. An hon. Friend sitting not more than six feet away from me suggested earlier today that three minutes might be a suitable period in which to advance my arguments. He did not recognise, however, that I am a lawyer by background, and very few lawyers ever manage such brevity.

6.14 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): May I declare an interest, as I am not a lawyer—probably the only non-lawyer to speak in the debate?

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** I am not a lawyer.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I am in good company.

I shall be brief. I rise because I was slightly concerned by the fact that when the Minister introduced the regulations, he set them in the context of the current issues of terrorism and the legislation that the House enacted last week—in my view, regrettably—to bring into effect new anti-terrorist measures. It seems that there is a danger of confusing several issues. If I understood correctly what he said later and what the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) said in his speech, the regulations have their basis in the 1995 and 1996 conventions. While some terrorist offences may be covered in that regard, I would like it to be confirmed that the new legislation does not apply to the regulations.

It is important that we set the record straight on that, because in the legislation that we passed last week, we not only sought a derogation from the European convention on human rights in respect of part of its

*[Jeremy Corbyn]*

operation, but passed into law the ability of the Home Secretary to try somebody on the basis of private information and put them in prison. The measure ensured that such a person could appeal only to a private committee in which they would not see the evidence against them. The only right of appeal will be based on a point of law and dealt with through a judicial review process, where, again, the evidence would not be tested in court. I would find it horrific if legislation of such a standard was then used as a basis for extradition, so I would be grateful for the Minister's confirmation that I am wrong about that.

Will the Minister also confirm another point made by the hon. Member for Woking and give an assurance that legal aid will be available, providing that the defendant fulfils the normal criteria? It is important to ensure openness and justice, so legal aid is very important.

I make my final point having sat through days of hearings on the application of the Spanish courts to the English courts to extradite General Pinochet to Spain so that he could face charges there. It was a fascinating experience and the standard of legal argument was very high. A number of landmark judgments were made, not the least of which was the House of Lords ruling on the right to try people for offences committed elsewhere in the world. At the end of the day, however, the extradition hearings and debate did not add up to very much, because the Home Secretary has the final say in these matters and considerable discretion. In the case of General Pinochet, he used that discretion in respect of the rather curious wording "humanitarian grounds", under which it was decided that General Pinochet was not fit to stand trial. He was then allowed to return to Chile, where further legal action against him was contemplated and indeed attempted.

Will the Minister explain exactly what discretion the Home Secretary has? In relation to all the other contracting parties to the extradition arrangement, will the equivalent Home Secretary or Minister of the Interior again have the final say, or will the extradition proceedings with which we are dealing take away such discretion and allow compulsory removal of the accused person from this country, providing that the legal arguments stand up in court? In the whole Pinochet experience, it seemed to me that justice was not done in the end because of the powers of discretion that were available to the Home Secretary and to the equivalent Ministers of the Interior elsewhere. If extradition is to mean anything, it must be decided on legal grounds rather than on the basis of political discretion, which is what is available under current extradition arrangements.

6.18 pm

**Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): This is a bit of a challenge for all of us. The Minister, who took interventions, was good enough to keep his speech to 17 minutes, the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) took 10 minutes, and the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) five. I am, therefore, conscious that there is a challenge and that we nearly stand between this place and its holiday. We also face a challenge because the regulations are a serious matter and the final Adjournment debate is on spina bifida, which is also a serious matter. Only between the debates is the more festive element to which the hon. Member for Woking referred, in respect of why we should or should not go on holiday—something that we all hope to do when we break up at the end of this evening. In case I am accused of misrepresentation, I know that the House of Lords is sitting tomorrow and does not break up until then.

We are considering the last Home Office business of this calendar year and of this term. It is no coincidence that Question Time on the first day after the recess was followed by a statement from the Home Secretary about the consequences for this country of the events of 11 September. Several of us who are present are responsible for Home Office business in our parties, and I am conscious that a lot of legislative water has flowed under the bridge since our return. The motion is only a trailer for the next torrent. We hope that there will be a gap of a few weeks before it.

We are considering the first and least controversial of at least three substantial extradition matters. We shall subsequently discuss the European arrest warrant, which is controversial, and an extradition Bill, which is both technical and controversial.

The Government clearly stated to Opposition parties and Labour Members that the United Kingdom had an obligation to implement the two conventions by the end of the calendar year. Under an agreement with European Union member states, we said that we would enshrine them in law. As hon. Members have said, we signed them six and five years ago respectively, but we cannot ratify them until we have legislated. The Government therefore approached both main Opposition parties and asked whether we would be content to legislate by the method that we are considering.

The usual method is primary legislation. Like the hon. Member for Woking and Conservative Members, Liberal Democrat Members decided that it was important to honour our international obligations. We therefore accepted that the conventions could and should be two of only four matters that are implemented under the European third pillar arrangements, which cover justice and home affairs, through secondary legislation. We accepted that process to honour Britain's obligations to our partners, and because while the conventions are technical and complex, their substance is relatively uncontroversial.

The Liberal Democrats are happy for extradition to be made simpler and for the process to be improved without eating into individuals' rights. The record of the hon. Member for Islington, North on such matters is good and reliable. It is right to flag up the big issues on extradition procedure. We will debate them in the new year when the Bill is introduced.

It is reasonable to have speedier processes when people consent to extradition. That is the core of the 1995 convention. It is also reasonable to try to deal with some of the more complicated issues in the 1996 convention. I was grateful for the Minister's answer that the three other countries that have not yet ratified are, like us, obliged to do that by the end of the year. The conventions will therefore apply to France, Italy and Belgium, provided that they get their house in order, as well as to us and other EU countries by 31 December.

Let us consider the controversial issues. Under the conventions, individuals who are extradited for substantive, major matters can be tried for subsidiary, less important matters. That is valid, provided that they are genuinely minor and not other major offences.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Is it the hon. Gentleman's understanding that, under the proposed regulations, people who have been extradited from this country to another EU country cannot subsequently be charged with an offence other than that for which they were extradited?

**Simon Hughes:** That is not correct. I think that the arrangements provide that, for example, someone who was extradited for trafficking people or drugs could be charged with a subsidiary offence of cheque fraud or a crime for which the penalty falls short of imprisonment. Another example is a driving licence offence for which the penalty would be a fine. The technical answer is therefore no, but the offence must be subsidiary. We must protect the guarantee that people will be tried only for subsidiary matters. The hon. Member for Woking is more knowledgeable than me about such matters, but I believe that a subsidiary offence is defined as "non-imprisonable".

The conventions reduce the severity of the punishment for the offence for which one can be extradited. The Minister mentioned a six-month term of imprisonment. They also prevent people from arguing before British or EU authorities that their extradition is sought for a political offence. That is important. If we sign up to the conventions, we accept that there is no such thing as a political offence in the EU. That appears proper to me. I would not accept it in the case of other countries.

The conventions allow for a wider definition of terrorism and related offences than we would perhaps ordinarily wish. We have already permitted such a gateway through legislation. To be fair, the Opposition parties agreed to it, but the Government will use it for only seven months, until the end of next June. After that, they cannot try to implement other such measures without primary legislation, for obvious reasons. We wanted only immediate and specific anti-terrorist legislation to be made through secondary legislation. That is why I asked in an intervention whether at least definitions could be provided of the three broad heads: terrorism, trafficking and drug-related offences.

The conventions also technically allow dual criminality. They allow extradition for something that is not deemed to be a specific offence in the same terms in another country. However, that is subject to twin protections. First, the provision lasts for only seven months; the orders can be passed only in the seven-month period. Secondly, it is limited to the three general heads that I mentioned.

The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) mentioned controversial subjects such as xenophobia, environmental crime or crime that is related to information technology, which have nothing to do with terrorism. Their definition can be wider than that for specific offences. There will properly be much debate about whether dual criminality should apply to them and whether people could be extradited for such controversial matters that do not constitute crimes in the country from which they are being taken. We will revert to such matters.

We would normally wish to discuss the arrangements at greater length in Committee and deal with them through primary legislation. The House's acceptance, and especially that of Liberal Democrat Members, of the foreshortened process is the exception rather than the rule. We have accepted it because of two pressures. First, the previous Government contracted the obligation to implement the conventions by the end of the year, and it is important to honour our international obligations. Secondly, the events of 11 September mean that there is a desire to get maximum agreement throughout the EU about non-controversial matters.

This month, the press has reported on people's treatment and rights to, for example, legal aid, legal representation, translators, and on periods for which people can be held. Let us be honest: I am a pro-European, but I accept that different standards exist in countries throughout the EU, and I must stress that Greece is not always the worst offender. Delay occurs in other countries. It is proper to raise such matters in relation to extradition.

When we reconsider the law, we need to be satisfied that there are minimum European standards. If we are willing to sign up to conventions under which a properly constituted court in, for example, Italy, Portugal, Sweden or Denmark goes through the process to extradite a UK citizen, all EU countries need to be satisfied that no one will be detained for long without being brought to court, and that people have proper access to, for example, legal representation.

Those are the issues, but I have one last question for the Minister. I would be grateful if he would tell us now for the record, if that is possible, or later if it is not, whether the convention options that we have chosen, which appear in a complicated table, are in every case those chosen by the other countries. Derogation is possible under the convention—we can derogate from this or sign up to that—and various choices can be made, so it would be helpful to know how the EU countries are implementing the convention and which options they have chosen. I am happy for that information not to be conveyed across the Floor of the House; indeed, it may be safer and more accurate to provide it in other ways.

Twelve minutes—I am not doing too badly, and I am just about to sit down. This is important business and we on these Benches support it. We shall not divide the House and we are willing to co-operate, but we reserve the right to renew our questioning and challenging on the more substantive issues when they are debated in the new year. That is not the most festive note to end on, but I hope that, in difficult waters and on delicate matters, we have managed to do a good job and that we all believe that the processes that we are adopting are fair, just and respectful of people's rights, wherever they come from in the EU.

I further hope that, as far as extradition can ever be coupled with a festive greeting, those who exercise these powers do so fairly, if not festively, on all occasions. After completing our business, we should all wish each other a relatively festive time, even if it is not festive business in itself.

6.31 pm

**Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory** (Wells): I do not want unnecessarily to disturb the tranquillity of the House on the eve of the Christmas recess and I certainly approach

*[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]*

the matter from the perspective of a non-specialist—indeed, a non-lawyer. That makes two of us, as the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) claims to be a non-lawyer, and I believe him.

My interest has been aroused in recent weeks partly by the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. The Government, certainly initially, were far too dismissive of the opinion of those whom I respect, so a degree of vigilance is required when the criminal justice system and the liberties of our constituents are being discussed.

I am afraid that the Department's record on complying with the scrutiny needs of the House is poor and the matter of the European arrest warrant is little short of a disgrace. In the first debate on it, the Minister did not have the right documents; in the second, in a European Standing Committee, he was, to put it charitably, a little under-briefed. We have since received a clarifying letter on one matter, which was not accurately described.

For all those reasons, we are wise to pause, even though I understand that there have been discussions between the usual channels about how the matter should be dealt with. The normal position should be that criminal justice matters are considered during debates on primary legislation. I thought that we had established that during debates on the 2001 Act and that, following pressure from the Opposition and in another place, use of secondary legislation would be restricted to matters more directly related to the events of 11 September. Of course, the regulations considerably predate them and, as usual, deal with matters that go considerably beyond any imminent terrorist risk.

As the heart of the regulations appears to be the voluntary principle that the accused must assent to extradition, they are unlikely to apply to many suspects whom we hope will be apprehended following the air attacks in New York. I am therefore a little surprised that the matter is proceeding in this way, particularly as an extradition Bill is to come before the House next month. I understand that we have made at least a moral commitment to pass those matters into law by the end of the year, but, having waited so long and given that the appropriate vehicle is on the horizon, I should have preferred the matter to be argued out during consideration of primary legislation.

If we are concerned about the imminence of further terrorist activity, we ought to act more urgently on the complete mess that is the extradition system. I am still worried about the Soering case, which I understand represents a total block on our ability to extradite to a number of countries outside the European Union. I remind the House of the facts: a German national admitted to committing a murder in the United States, but could not be extradited from this country as the Strasbourg Court ruled that the state of Virginia would subject that individual to degrading or cruel treatment as the death penalty was on its statute book.

During debates on the 2001 Act, the Home Secretary was forced to introduce a wholly illiberal measure of indefinite detention without trial to bolt on to this terrible system a way out, so that we can at least detain some of the more dangerous suspects. The problem lies there rather than with passing in short order conventions dealing with extradition from one member state to another.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Is not the right hon. Gentleman concerned that UK law and the European convention on the death penalty will be undermined if extradition is allowed to American states that practise the death penalty? Indeed, the death penalty would be reintroduced by subterfuge.

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** No, I do not accept that interpretation. The Strasbourg Court is attempting to externalise our policies on the death penalty. That is a moral imperialism of which I disapprove. It is up to the United States to decide how it deals with criminals convicted under its legal system. I happen not to be in favour of the death penalty—that is my position for this country—but it is not right to use the European convention on human rights to impose a system outside the EU. That is a clumsy way to proceed, and it has led to the Home Secretary resorting to detention or internment as a way to deal with the problem. The suspects would be in this country, although they should be tried in other countries.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord):** Order. The right hon. Gentleman is straying wide of what is a technical motion.

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was seduced along that path by the blandishments of the hon. Member for Islington, North, who raised a valid point.

We are going for the wrong target and doing so rapidly when more urgent matters should be attended to. I have a number of specific questions about the regulations to put to the Minister. Will he say more about the apparent fact that individuals could be extradited for offences that are not crimes here? He may respond that the crimes in question must be connected with the suppression of terrorism,

"drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime or other acts of violence against the life, physical integrity or liberty of a person".

That is a quotation from the convention. The definition is fairly wide, however. I can imagine crimes in other member states coming under that general heading, and the possibility of extradition for offences that we do not recognise here.

Here is another question for the Minister. Could a person be extradited from this country for a crime committed here? Usually, we understand extradition to mean returning an individual to the state where that individual is alleged to have committed an offence—returning the individual to the jurisdiction of the state concerned. It seems to me, however, that in some cases the crime could have been committed here and the individual could be extradited for it. That certainly obtained according to the terms of the European arrest warrant, as first drafted, and it led to considerable questioning and concern in another place. I realise that we are not discussing the European arrest warrant now, but I would like the Minister to comment.

My third question is this: could someone be extradited for an offence for which they had already been tried in absentia in the requesting state? That too was raised in connection with the European arrest warrant, but again I would like the Minister to comment.

I understand that, by definition, the individual concerned must consent to the extradition, but may I ask the Minister a final question? Having given up the entitlement to specialty, could that person be put on trial on the receiving state for virtually any other crime? The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) understands that those other crimes would have to be subsidiary to the offence for which the person had been extradited, but that is a rather imprecise phrase, and I would like the Minister to say a little more.

I can imagine circumstances in which someone who had been extradited was put on trial for an almost entirely unrelated offence that, nevertheless, came under the general heading of drug trafficking, alleged terrorism or whatever. Will the Minister tell us whether there are any practical or even theoretical limits to the number of other crimes with which such people could be charged?

6.43 pm

**The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley):** As a non-lawyer, I listened with great interest to the speeches of lawyers and non-lawyers alike. Although few Members spoke, quality made up for the lack of quantity. I shall answer as many questions as I can, and write to those whose questions I cannot answer: I shall ensure that they are given full details as soon as possible.

The hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) raised a number of points. I confirm that consent for a person who has voluntarily agreed to extradition will be given in writing. As for the question of the competent judicial authority, the United Kingdom will make a reservation to the effect that consent under article 7 can be given to any of the competent authorities in accordance with article 15, and is not limited to a judicial authority. The competent authorities are therefore those listed by the hon. Gentleman. The question of legal aid was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) as well as the Opposition. Fugitives will be allowed legal aid in the normal way, and the normal rules of legal aid will apply.

Article 10 of the 1996 convention, which was mentioned in connection with fines, protects a person who has been extradited from being dealt with in regard to an offence committed prior to his surrender. Obviously, however, an offence committed after his surrender will be a matter for the requesting state.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North asked about ministerial discretion. There will be no change to those arrangements. We are not talking here about the Terrorism Act 2000; we are talking about the Extradition Act 1989, and amendments to that Act. The 1989 Act will apply in the normal way. When we produce a new extradition Bill, my hon. Friend may have further thoughts.

**Mr. Malins:** Could the Minister at some stage drop me a note, if he cannot reply now, about a little concern I have about penalties in lieu of fines? In this country we say, "Pay a fine or go to prison." That may be the case in other countries. It would be helpful to know whether the phrase I used, "sleight of hand", could be brought into operation somehow.

**Mr. Bradley:** I will reflect further, and give the hon. Gentleman further advice in writing.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I am grateful for what the Minister said about the right of discretion. Will he confirm that, under both the existing legislation and the regulations, the Home Secretary—through the Attorney-General—has the right to decide whether a case can proceed against someone in regard to an extradition request? Could the Home Office block the request in the initial stages?

**Mr. Bradley:** I can confirm that the arrangements under the 1989 Act will continue to apply until we make any changes in a Bill to be presented early in the new year.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) asked which options the United Kingdom had taken, and how the UK compared with other countries in that respect. The answer can be found in schedules 4 and 8 of the regulations, but I will write to the hon. Gentleman if he wants some more information.

I was slightly surprised when the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) protested about the fact that the regulations were not incorporated in primary legislation. It was his party—indeed, I think he was a member of the Government then—that signed up to the conventions. I do not know what representations he made then about primary legislation, but we, as the official Opposition, would have been happy to debate such legislation.

I feel that we are making progress—the provisions in the new Act allow us to do so—but the right hon. Gentleman will be glad to learn that the new Bill will provide an opportunity for a full debate on extradition. I am sure that he will participate with his usual assiduity.

**Mr. Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield): I do not want to make a meal of this, but the Minister seemed to suggest that the last Conservative Government might have intended to introduce these measures by means of statutory instrument rather than primary legislation. As I am sure he knows, until the passing of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill last week it would have been impossible to do that.

**Mr. Bradley:** Either the hon. Gentleman misunderstood, or I did not make myself clear. I was trying to say that the last Government had an opportunity to produce primary legislation, but for whatever reason—obviously, I was not privy to discussions on business management at the time—chose not to do so. We now have the opportunity to do so through secondary legislation and the new provision in the 2001 Act. We have taken that opportunity, because of the link with terrorism. It is right to do so, but I stress that there will be a debate on the primary legislation when a new Bill is introduced in the new year.

**Simon Hughes:** We all signed up to this provision coming in by this route, given the time constraints to

*[Simon Hughes]*

which we were subject. However, that does not mean that the Government should not have introduced it in the period since they came to office in 1997. I share the concerns of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve). The Conservative Government had a maximum of only two years left in office, whereas Labour has had four years in which to introduce primary legislation. I am not being over-critical, but it is always better to introduce such measures in primary legislation, and never better to do so in this way.

**Mr. Bradley:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. He always manages to find a way of criticising while protesting that he is not doing so. I shall not pursue the point. We are old adversaries on these matters.

The right hon. Member for Wells referred to the reform of the extradition process and the Soering judgment. The Government will be reforming extradition, and we shall introduce primary legislation in due course. These regulations are being debated today because of our commitment to ratify them by 1 January. I think that I have explained our position.

The right hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of crimes committed in the United Kingdom. The position of extraterritorial jurisdiction is not affected by the regulations. The Extradition Act 1989 remains the same, subject to the alterations to the sentencing threshold in section 2.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether there is a limit to what a person can be tried for once extradited. If a person consents to extradition and waives specialty protection, he could be tried for any offence once returned. However, if the person contests extradition, he will benefit from specialty protection, subject to the provisions of these conventions, which will allow other minor charges to be brought.

I hope that, in the time available, I have covered most of the questions that have been put by right hon. and hon. Members. If I have not picked up all the points or have not been able to answer them, I shall ensure that hon. Members receive the information that they have requested. That will be important in guiding us into the further debates on these matters in the new year.

From the comments that hon. Members have made, it is clear that I should enjoy my Christmas because 2002 may be a challenging time on these matters. I wish everyone a merry Christmas, and I hope that they return in 2002 with a spirit of good will as we continue to debate what are important matters, as hon. Members have recognised. I hope that we approve these regulations today.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the draft European Union Extradition Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

## Adjournment (Christmas)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*

That this House, at its rising on Wednesday 19th December, do adjourn until Tuesday 8th January.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

6.54 pm

**Mr. Tom Cox** (Tooting): I want to talk about Cyprus. I am the chairperson of the Commonwealth parliamentary all-party Cyprus group. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House, some of whom are present in the Chamber, belong to that all-party group.

The United Kingdom has a long association with Cyprus. We are one of the guarantor powers for the Republic of Cyprus, which is a member of the Commonwealth. Since the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, the island has been divided. More than 30 per cent. of northern Cyprus is occupied by the Turkish army, which led that invasion. Since 1974, there have been many debates and many questions in the House on the policy of the Government of the day towards working for an honourable settlement of the tragedy in Cyprus. We have always been told that the Government support an honourable settlement, and work on the basis of the resolutions on Cyprus that have been passed by the United Nations. Those statements are to be welcomed, but sadly they have achieved nothing over those many years. The division and occupation of Cyprus remain. Over that period, there have been many opportunities to work for a settlement, but regrettably none of them have succeeded.

I had a debate in the House some years ago on the future of Famagusta. It is now a deserted town, but prior to the invasion it was one of the most popular towns in the whole of the Cyprus. We were led to believe by Mr. Denktash, who speaks for the Turkish Cypriots of northern Cyprus, that Famagusta would be returned. Greek and Turkish Cypriots could have lived together, worked together and started to build a future that would have insured their rights and security. Sadly, as so often happens, Mr. Denktash refused to honour the commitment that he made.

Years and years have passed, and the occupation of a sizeable percentage of a Commonwealth country continues. We have had countless meetings and discussions with senior diplomats. Politicians have been to Cyprus and have met the President of the Republic and Mr. Denktash. Sadly, nothing has happened, despite many attempts to achieve a breakthrough.

Two major developments have now taken place in Cyprus that offer hope for a future for both communities on that island. First, there is a clear indication that the Republic of Cyprus will become a member of the European Union, possibly in 2004. Secondly, Mr. Denktash is now aware that he and his closest ally, Turkey, have achieved nothing since 1974. All the evidence shows that the economy in northern Cyprus is in a terrible condition, and that vast numbers of true Turkish Cypriots want a settlement and the whole of Cyprus to become a member of the European Union. I warmly welcome that.

The great strength of the all-party Cyprus group is that we have always clearly said that the rights and security of Turkish Cypriots are as important to us as the rights and security of Greek Cypriots. That has always been the cornerstone of the speeches that many hon. Members have made over many years.

Turning to the present, I believe that there is now an excellent opportunity for a progressive future to be developed on the island of Cyprus. I welcome the discussions that are now taking place between President Clerides and Mr. Denktash. Those talks will not be easy, but that will be a test of what both men are able to achieve. I am in no doubt as to the commitment of President Clerides to work with all his might and power for an honourable settlement.

If one considers, for example, the application of the Republic of Cyprus to become a member of the European Union, Mr. Denktash has had countless opportunities presented to him by President Clerides to join him in a joint Denktash-Clerides presentation for the whole of the island of Cyprus to be involved in the discussions of its application. However, as we know, Mr. Denktash has only one reply to those invitations: "Recognise northern Cyprus as an independent state or I am not interested in taking part in any discussions." The United Nations does not recognise an independent state of northern Cyprus, the EU most certainly does not, and neither does the Council of Europe. The only country that recognises that so-called state, in being only because of the Turkish army, is Turkey.

We have recently heard statements by the Turkish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister that if the Republic of Cyprus is allowed membership of the European Union, Turkey will consider annexing the whole of northern Cyprus. I tabled a written question on the issue earlier this year and I received a reply from my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, which said:

"The suggestion that Turkey might 'annex' north Cyprus, in the event of Cyprus joining the EU before a settlement, is not new. While it is difficult to predict what Turkey might do if a divided island were to join the EU, we believe that the 'annexation' of northern Cyprus would severely compromise Turkey's relations with the EU, and contravene her obligations under the Treaty of Guarantee. However, our aim continues to be a settlement before Cyprus joins the EU, though we stand by the Helsinki Council Conclusions that it is not a precondition for enlargement."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 401W.]

I hope that that statement is made clearly and often to Turkey. It should be told, "Annex northern Cyprus and you have no European future."

President Clerides made a speech at the United Nations in New York on 11 November, in which he said:

"I urge the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mr. Denktash, to join me in sharing the vision of a Cyprus too small to be divided but huge for the common prosperity of all its inhabitants. I urge him to look to the future and not to the past, listen to the increasingly desperate voices of our Turkish Cypriot compatriots and stop placing obstacles, at each turn, to the good offices of the Secretary-General for a solution to the Cyprus problem. It is noteworthy that the economic prospects for a post-settlement Cyprus are truly impressive. And this growth will be even greater for our Turkish Cypriot compatriots, who are currently suffering due to the dire political and economic situation in the occupied areas."

What clearer commitment could there be on the part of the President of the Republic of Cyprus that he wishes to work with Mr. Denktash for the benefit of all the people who live on the island of Cyprus? The next round of discussion that takes place between Mr. Clerides and Mr. Denktash will be in mid-January, and I hope that the talks will succeed. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will bear in mind the fact that those talks will be based on the resolutions that have been passed by the United Nations, because they will be the cornerstone to any settlement of the long-running tragedy of Cyprus.

I want those talks to succeed, but we expect Cyprus to become a member of the EU in 2004. I hope that Mr. Denktash will not attempt to say, "We are now in talks. Let us put off membership of the EU until the talks between Mr. Clerides and me have been concluded." Any attempt to make such an argument should be totally opposed, and I reiterate the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe that a settlement is not a precondition for entry to the EU by the Republic of Cyprus. The coming months will be vital to Cyprus. The opportunity is there for a settlement and I and many others want to see Cypriots, be they Greek or Turkish, living and working together and building a stable and prosperous future for their country that they and their families can all enjoy.

**Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order to point out that if all hon. Members took eight minutes for their contributions, everyone would have a chance to speak.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord):** How long Members speak for is entirely a matter for them, not for the Chair.

7.7 pm

**Mr. David Atkinson** (Bournemouth, East): Although the House has debated the events that followed 11 September, and in Afghanistan, on many occasions, including this afternoon, it should not rise before considering how to eliminate the causes of international terrorism, and how to deal with those responsible for it. The events of 11 September have put terrorism under greater scrutiny than ever before. Of course, it remains a regular experience on the streets of Israel and other countries including our own. Its most recent and greatest victim, the United States, is rightly determined to bring the perpetrators to justice. It also regards this as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to eliminate all such threats and sources of international terrorism for as long as it takes. But that will not be enough.

We also need to address those causes that inspire such a capacity for hatred to commit such acts, including suicide attacks. Those who were immediately responsible for planning and carrying out the hijacking over the United States came from mixed backgrounds. Some came from privileged and prosperous families, as has bin Laden himself who, according to Peter Bergen's book, "Holy War Inc: Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden", is primarily motivated by American policies in the middle east, above all its presence in Saudi Arabia. Many of bin Laden's supporters are merely interested in provoking a clash between the west and Islam, or are seeking an end to what they see as Israel's hegemony, supported by the United States, in the middle east.

Al-Qaeda recruits come from many countries, some of them impoverished, nearly all of them undemocratic. In response to the first problem, impoverishment—if one has nothing, one has nothing to lose—we must, of course, respond positively to Kofi Annan's appeal, repeated on receiving the Nobel peace prize a few weeks ago, for the UN to eliminate world poverty. We are regularly informed by the Chancellor of Exchequer and the Secretary of State for International Development about the poverty reduction strategy, which was recently discussed at the World Bank

*[Mr. David Atkinson]*

and International Monetary Fund meeting in Ottawa, which the United Kingdom supports and which aims to halve world poverty by the year 2015.

One of the reasons most frequently cited as justifying terrorism—although, of course, there can be no justification—is the denial of human and minority rights, which we rightly seek to address in insisting on good governance in our aid and development programmes. But there is more that can be done to promote human rights and democratic institutions, as President Clinton urged in his brilliant Dimbleby lecture at the weekend, to reduce the causes of terrorism.

A number of colleagues from the Assembly of the Council of Europe are present this evening. The House will know that the Council of Europe was established after the last war as the forum within which our continent's disputes could be resolved by peaceful means, instead of causing countries to go to war every generation. For more than 50 years, it has accumulated a wealth of experience among its 43 member states in democratic practices, the protection of rights and recognition of cultural diversity.

The Council's Political Affairs Committee is ably led by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), who wishes to be associated with my remarks. Next year, that Committee will come forward with a report on best practice on autonomies and confederations short of outright independence. We hope that this will contribute to resolving the remaining disputes in Europe such as Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia, Transdneistre, Chechnya, and perhaps even Kosovo and Cyprus.

This work could also be usefully applied elsewhere, such as Sri Lanka and Kashmir and other areas that are the sources of terrorism. In addition, we are promoting our democratic standards, which are the highest in the world, to our Arab neighbours in north Africa and to the five central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union through co-operation agreements, and by offering them observer status to our Assembly.

We are considering how we can assist the new African Union, which recently replaced the Organisation for African Unity as the pan-continental institution. It proposes to establish its own court of justice, monitoring procedures and an inter-parliamentary assembly. In 1998, we endorsed well researched and realistic proposals as to how the principal breeding grounds for terrorism in the middle east—the 49 Palestinian refugee camps—could be closed down after 53 years, in favour of permanent settlements. Those camps were the subject of my Adjournment debate on 29 April 1998, and I believe that they are just as relevant today.

I mention these initiatives for the record, because not all of them have been referred to in the House with regard to what is being done by Europe's pre-eminent institution, the Council of Europe, not least to combat the roots of international terrorism. Of course, to be fully effective, the initiatives require the acknowledgement and support of our Committee of Ministers—effectively, our Governments. They also require the resources that will be necessary. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary is listening, because the Council of Europe continues to experience zero real growth in its funding.

In conclusion, I want to refer to one particular aspect of the recommendations that the Council of Europe endorsed two weeks after 11 September. The recommendations concerned the threat to democracy posed by international terrorism, and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill was the rapporteur.

We regard the new International Criminal Court as the appropriate institution to consider terrorist acts. We have called on member states and the Committee of Ministers to give urgent consideration to amending and widening the Rome statute to allow the remit of the court to include acts of international terrorism.

Of course, we hope that the United States, following the events of 11 September, will now support, and not oppose, the establishment of the court. Unfortunately, next year, whereas the whole world will hear the evidence against Slobodan Milosevic at the UN war crimes tribunal at The Hague, the United States proposes to try the 11 September terrorists behind closed doors in a military court, in which not even the defendants will hear all the evidence against them before being sentenced to death.

I believe that the entire world will expect justice to be done—and to be seen to be done—towards those who were responsible for the events of 11 September. Just as it was right to try the Nazi leaders for their war crimes at an international court at Nuremberg, so should any future Osama bin Laden be tried for crimes against humanity in an international court, as we propose.

I am encouraged that the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers is studying this proposal, which I hope our Government will now actively pursue.

7.14 pm

**John Cryer** (Hornchurch): These pre-recess debates normally involve hon. Members raising constituency issues. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) once said that the day of the pre-Christmas Adjournment debates should be rechristened "Whingeing Gits Day". The fact that I happened to glance at the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) when I said that is purely coincidental.

I want to raise a number of constituency cases. The first involves the home energy efficiency scheme. My constituent Mrs. Goodchild is entitled to a hot water and heating boiler under the scheme. The catch is that she has been entitled to it for seven months but it has still not been fitted.

The boiler should have been fitted by Eaga Partnerships, a Government agency. I am worried that Eaga is completely unresponsive to the needs of my constituents. It is probably unresponsive to the needs of constituents of many other hon. Members. Eaga has refused to return Mrs. Goodchild's calls. It even refused to return the calls that I made in the first day or two after I took up the case. That is extraordinary.

I have been trying to get a pledge from Eaga that my constituent will have the boiler that she needs fitted by Christmas, but even that is not guaranteed. That is simply not good enough. The Government must monitor agencies and partnerships such as Eaga, and ensure that they do the work that they are commissioned to do. If they are not doing that work, some reorganisation might be required—or even the curtailment of contracts.

The second issue that I want to raise is the mis-selling of electricity and gas supplies by energy companies. To illustrate the problem, I shall read an extract from a letter

that I sent to Energy Watch on 20 March this year. The letter dealt with Powergen and one other company. I wrote that my constituent

"has never received anything in writing as far as he is concerned. He has never entered into any contract, verbal or otherwise, agreeing to transfer his supplies to Powergen. He was previously with British Gas and Eastern Electricity. Despite this, Powergen have taken over his supplies, and to cap it all it appears that Powergen now wish to take over his telephone supply as well."

My constituent had never signed anything or agreed to anything. He merely had a brief telephone call with Powergen and later discovered that his supplies had been switched. That seems to be happening on a widespread basis. Other hon. Members have told me that they have encountered similar cases.

I secured an apology from Powergen, which has since entered into a voluntary agreement across the industry. The agreement supposedly guarantees that people who are the victims of the practice will be switched back to their original suppliers. However, I do not think that this incident is a one-off, as Powergen tried to claim. Although the evidence is only sporadic, I think that this is happening on a widespread basis.

I am not a nationalist about the utilities any more than I am a nationalist about anything else, but Eastern Electricity, which supplies power to people in my constituency and the surrounding areas, was bought out some time ago by the Texas Corporation. Decisions are made thousands of miles away in that massive company's corporate boardroom. It is therefore hardly surprising that the corporation is not responsive to people in Hornchurch, Rainham or elsewhere.

When the utilities were publicly owned, we at least could put pressure on them. Ministers were responsible for the functioning of the utilities, and we could hold them to account. If it were up to me, I would take the utilities back into public ownership in a moment. Sadly, I am not the Chancellor—not yet, anyway.

Finally, many hon. Members have been concerned about the campaign being run by Mencap, and many of us will have received postcards from that organisation. The campaign deals with sexual offences against vulnerable adults with learning difficulties. I have corresponded extensively with the Havering branch of Mencap, and with the large number of constituents who have sent the postcards to me and to other hon. Members.

The law dealing with sexual offences against people with learning difficulties is way out of date. The Sexual Offences Act 1956 covers only those who are unable to give consent. In other words, it deals only with people who have very severe learning difficulties, not with those who have moderate or mild learning difficulties. It carries a maximum sentence of only two years, which is roughly the same as people get for burglary and robbery. That tariff should be raised considerably. The offence should carry a life sentence, like rape.

Mencap argues that the offence under the 1956 Act should be replaced with the offence of

"having sexual relations with a person with a severe learning disability who is unable to consent to that sexual activity".

That clearly applies to people with severe learning difficulties.

There should also be a test of capacity, and a definition of that capacity, of a person's ability to consent. That would cover people with moderate learning disabilities. The Law Commission recommended the following as a definition of lack of capacity, saying that the victim

"is unable by reason of mental disability to make a decision for himself or herself on the matter in question; or he or she is unable to communicate his or her decision on that matter because he or she is unconscious or for any other reason."

That would create a modern, concise and rational basis on which the law could be moved forward.

I know that the Government are consulting on these issues. They produced a document called "Setting the Boundaries: Reforming the Law on Sex Offences" in July last year. As far as I know, the consultation is still continuing. However, may I make a plea that it should be brought to a conclusion as quickly as possible so that we can introduce legislation? At present, many people with learning difficulties are in an extremely vulnerable position and do not have the full protection of the law.

7.22 pm

**Virginia Bottomley** (South-West Surrey): I appreciate being able to address the House before we adjourn for Christmas, because my constituents feel most strongly about a number of issues.

I live in a part of the country that will increasingly have to face private affluence amid public squalor. Since the Government have been in power, they have consistently made spending announcements and then demand—indeed, dictate—unrealistic outcomes from ever constrained resources. One example is the police. The recent settlement for the police meant that although formally they had an increase of 2.3 per cent., it was a 2.6 per cent. fall in real terms. The costs of police pay are going up by 3 per cent. and pensions by 18 per cent. To achieve that, they are given a 2.3 per cent. increase.

The costs in areas such as mine are high, and the police do not benefit from London weighting, so the Metropolitan police force acts as competition. In Surrey, the benefits of London weighting are not reflected in police pay packets, but the costs are still enormous. Constituencies such as mine, which contain rural areas as well as market towns, face additional burdens. For that reason, I co-chair the town and country finance issues group, an association of about 80 constituency Members of Parliament who try to advance their case.

The House will be surprised and shocked to learn that one of the steps that the Surrey police force has taken to attract and retain constables is to provide health care for them. Do any other police forces take the view that the NHS is in such an appalling state that the only way to retain and attract police officers is to provide private health cover?

I have repeatedly addressed the House about what has happened since the Government came to power to create far greater inequalities in health services than ever they inherited. At present, in my area, one person in nine waits for more than a year for in-patient treatment. In the Prime Minister's constituency, that figure is less than one in 100. Year on year, the Government have squeezed the funding in the south-east, quite inappropriately in the light of the appalling cost of living and the difficulty of attracting and retaining public service workers. The Government's response to public service workers is to name and shame.

Today has seen the publication of the National Audit Office report on hospital waiting lists. I know, perhaps as well as anybody in the House, that NHS managers are

*[Virginia Bottomley]*

dedicated public servants who believe in the ethos and values of the NHS. People rarely thank them. I took note of the references that the Prime Minister made to NHS managers in the 18 months before 1997, and in the year following his election. He only ever referred to them as bureaucrats, and in an insulting manner, until, as a result of a number of parliamentary questions, I am pleased to say that he modified his language.

The question that arises from today's report is why so many NHS managers feel so alienated from the leadership of the NHS and driven to such lengths that they will compromise the values that I know they hold. It is because of the political overload and the political imperatives forced on the health service, as in many other public services. Too little value is put on the people who work in the service, and there is too much spin, too many trivial initiatives and constant soundbites.

I would like the Government to take one practical step and admit that they were wrong, and that there should be an independent chief executive of the NHS. They should restore the role of the permanent secretary, who is accountable to Ministers, takes forward the Whitehall battles, sorts out visiting incoming Health Ministers and special advisers who abuse the conventions, and takes responsibility for honours. The permanent secretary could deal with all manner of Whitehall and Westminster matters and allow the chief executive to have the independence and credibility with NHS staff to take forward devolution of the service, instead of centralisation.

It would be hard to exaggerate the despair felt in the health service in my part of the world. The waiting times are appalling; the accident and emergency departments are groaning. Week by week, I receive letters to which the only reply I feel I can give is, "Can you go privately?" When I learned that Surrey police force had taken the decision to provide private health cover for its staff, that made me think that it knew what was happening. It cannot attract and retain staff otherwise; it does not have the confidence in the NHS that I would want it to have.

Before finishing, I shall provide two pieces of positive information. First and foremost, I am delighted that work on Farnham's community hospital has begun. Farnham, Milford and Haslemere were all under threat. A vigorous local campaign has seen them safeguarded. I pay particular tribute to Sir Ray Tindle, the proprietor of the *Farnham Herald* and other local newspapers for a constructive, energetic and determined contribution to the campaign. Again, the squeeze on social service and health funding in Surrey, along with the cost of living, has meant that nursing and residential homes have been closing, under huge pressure.

The Government must listen to Cheshire Homes, the biggest providers of independent care in the country, the Meath residential homes—another charitable foundation—and Methodist Homes for the Aged. They organise institutions and care for the frail and vulnerable and cannot cope with the insoluble formula with which they are presented. There are ever greater demands and requirements with regard to the standard of care, the criteria and the outcomes, with ever reduced means available. Nevertheless, I shall go round all those community hospitals within the next couple of days and speak with delight about their future, and about the real dedication and commitment of the staff.

I also appreciate the real commitment on the A3 at Hindhead. That is the only single carriageway on the A3 between London and Portsmouth, and contains the first traffic lights that a Scottish Minister would meet on the road between Scotland and Portsmouth, one of our busiest ports. That commitment will unlock the economic development of the south-east, the Portsmouth area and the Isle of Wight, and above all, it will safeguard an especially valuable and important piece of countryside.

In my area, there is real concern that unless the Government think again about our needs and are fairer to a part of the country where a massive amount of tax is raised for the Chancellor, there will be greater disillusion, and all-party commitment to our welfare state and our welfare services will be jeopardised. The local government settlement, while promising an increase of 2.3 per cent. to all, in fact came through as a real cut for my area. I am pleased that, after the outcry that resulted, the Secretary of State announced that he would maintain his commitment to a 2.3 per cent. increase, but I regret that the increase in local government spending next year will be 7.4 per cent.—not 2.3 per cent. The recycling requirements, the homelessness requirements and the many other burdens on, and expectations from, local government mean that once again, the ends are being demanded but the means are not being delivered.

The situation in south-west Surrey is extremely serious and I ask the Government, please, to listen to our concerns and ensure that—every so often—a Minister visits our area. I spent nine years of my life visiting Leeds, Sheffield, Darlington, Birmingham, Manchester, Halifax and Plymouth. Before I became a Minister I did not know the United Kingdom, but in nine years I spent lots of time visiting every part of the country—whether or not it was represented by a Member of Parliament of my persuasion.

The fact that the Government are highly partisan concerns me deeply. They do not take their responsibilities to the entire country as seriously as they should. When the outcomes—especially in health care—are as appalling as they are in Surrey, the Secretary of State should visit. It is now four and a half years since the Government came to power, but during that time, no senior Minister has visited south-west Surrey.

7.32 pm

**Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): As we approach the festive season, with twinkling lights on the Christmas tree, Christmas cards and present wrapping, I shall raise the seasonal issue of fireworks—specifically, their irresponsible and prolonged misuse.

At the end of October and the beginning of November, my local paper was inundated with hundreds of letters of complaint about the misuse of fireworks—as was I. As a result of those complaints, the *Grimsby Telegraph* launched a campaign for tougher laws on the sale of fireworks. The response was astonishing: more than 1,100 people backed the campaign, while only one person supported the status quo.

I have given the campaign my full backing because people endure months of misery caused by fireworks. I do not know what happens in the constituencies of other hon. Members, but it seems that in north-east Lincolnshire

the firework season starts at the beginning of August. That is when the noise begins. As soon as the back-to-school posters go up in Woolworths and other stores, the fireworks are set off.

That shows that the voluntary code of practice on the restriction of sales to three weeks before and one week after 5 November is not working. There is an increasing use of fireworks. Christmas is coming up, so we shall see lots of fireworks. We have them at birthdays, weddings, parties and the celebrations of many of our ethnic communities, such as Diwali and other festivals. Many more fireworks are being used, thus causing more disturbance to many people.

Although the voluntary code restricts the sale of fireworks to the period around 5 November, few people realise that fireworks can also go on sale at this time of year—from the beginning of December and into January. People in my constituency and elsewhere are dreading another outbreak of explosive mayhem at Christmas and the new year.

Many elderly people have been writing to me and to the local paper to complain about fireworks. A war veteran told me that the war was quieter than the months of October and November in Lincolnshire. I am not of a sensitive nature, but, boy, the noise is atrocious. I have received complaints from people who run care homes and residential homes for the elderly, and from mums with young children and babies. Every time there is an explosion the babies start crying again, so the mothers get more and more fractious as the children get more upset.

The noise affects people who are seriously ill or recovering from illness; it affects shift workers and people with pets. Some of the people who got in touch with me have guide dogs. We forget that guide dogs are particularly sensitive to noise, so fireworks can actually disrupt the way in which they work. That is a danger for people who are blind.

The problem is not only one of noise. Increased criminal damage is associated with the misuse of fireworks. Every year there are reports of phone boxes being damaged by fireworks. People play tricks by putting fireworks into car exhausts and letter boxes. Fireworks are thrown at pedestrians, drivers and cyclists. They are thrown at people's windows and doors. There is also cruelty to animals, including tying fireworks to family pets that happen to get in the way of the louts who misuse fireworks—as happens in my constituency. There is a culture of fear and we must tackle it.

I love organised displays and I certainly want them to continue, but it is time to toughen up the voluntary code. A few years ago, I was burgled in early November, and noise was a factor. The dogs next door normally bark when someone they do not know walks down the street, but because of the noise of the fireworks they were barking anyway. The police told me that there is an increase in burglary at that time of year because deterrents such as barking dogs are not as effective as usual. Incidentally, the cats climbed up my new drapes and shredded them, but that is not as important as the fact that people are burgled at a time of year when criminals can use noise to disguise their activities.

The firework safety regulations of 1997 state that sales should be restricted to people "apparently" over 18, but there is no requirement to show proof of age. Certain categories of firework can be sold to people as young as 16. Average 16-year-olds have many restrictions on their lives. They are not allowed to vote, to buy drinks in pubs—although we all know that plenty of them do—or to drive cars, and in England, they cannot get married without parental consent. Yet we allow them access to explosives. That is unacceptable.

Yes, there are penalties for selling fireworks to people under 18. There are also penalties for discharging and throwing fireworks in the street, but how many prosecutions are there for such offences every year? They are few and far between. The code is not working. We must toughen it up because loutish elements misuse fireworks, causing much disturbance and a culture of fear—especially among the groups that I mentioned.

Early in the new year, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) is to bring in a ten-minute Bill on the subject, so I am flagging up the matter now to give the Government ample time, before the Bill is introduced, to tighten up the regulations so that, I hope, 5 November in 2002 and subsequent years will not be as noisy as before, and people can enjoy a bit of peace and quiet.

7.40 pm

**Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): I would not be content for the House to rise for the Christmas recess without my taking the opportunity to raise again, very briefly, the future of the well known Royal Hospital Haslar. It is a local hospital in my constituency, but it is much more: it is the only military hospital in the United Kingdom. It is well known because I have raised this issue many times.

When defence medical services were in some difficulty, in 1998, a study group set up by the present Government reached the amazing conclusion that the way ahead for defence medical services was to close the only military hospital. The result, of course, has been catastrophic. The decision has turned the situation into a crisis and in four key faculties—anaesthetics, surgery, orthopaedic surgery and general medicine—defence medical services are now some 75 per cent. short of establishment. That is a grievous situation, both for defence medical services, because I believe that the armed forces are now restricted in their ability to deploy because of lack of defence medical services, and for the local community, which has lost its accident and emergency unit.

However, it is not all bad news, because we have had a vigorous campaign, widely supported in the area and by those in the armed forces. The good news is that we now have an accident treatment centre, which does not exactly replace the accident and emergency unit but is a helpful local facility. Moreover, reality has broken in: the Portsmouth Hospitals NHS trust and the health authority both now recognise that Haslar is a crucial and necessary part of the local health scene, and the latest strategic document produced by the national health service, jointly with the Ministry of Defence, called "A Strategic Vision", says that Haslar should continue until at least 2007, and that it should continue to provide a range of services to the armed forces and the civilian population.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) expressed surprise that the police force in Surrey was now using private medical facilities. She and others might be surprised to hear that the armed forces, which have their own military hospital at Haslar, are now required to use civilian medical

*[Mr. Peter Viggers]*

facilities as well, and a number of individuals have been treated by BUPA and other private medical systems. The problem is that although the immediate operation can be arranged through a private medical facility, if there are any complications, or if aftercare is required, the service man or woman must return to the service hospital at Haslar. In several cases, operations have been carried out in the private sector and the subsequent problems and complications have been handled in the public sector, back in the military hospital.

However, the situation is moving on. We are satisfied with "A Strategic Vision", and if only the words "until at least 2007" could be deleted and the word "indefinitely" substituted we would, I believe, be there.

First, a study group, composed of members of the Royal College of Physicians and others, is leaning towards the view that there needs to be more use of local hospitals. It believes that there is more scope for district diagnostic centres. There is a growing feeling in the medical profession that it is wrong to send all accident and emergency patients first to a district general hospital, from which it is quite often difficult to discharge them, and that it would be a better idea to admit patients first to a local hospital, after which, following proper stabilisation and diagnosis, they might be transferred to the district general hospital if necessary. If that study, which is due to be published before the end of the year, does indeed reveal that local district diagnostic centres should be used more extensively, attention will be drawn to the fact that precisely such facilities can be offered at Haslar, and throughout the rest of the country.

Secondly, there is growing awareness in the royal colleges that it is possible to have joint-centre working—that it is a good idea for trainee doctors at all levels to work partly within a district general hospital and partly within the local hospital community, linked with telemedicine, and that that provides a good range of experience for trainee doctors. Such joint-centre working would allow the Royal Hospital Haslar to work in conjunction with the Queen Alexandra hospital in Cosham.

Thirdly, I have written to the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Health and urged them to get their act together and have genuinely joined-up government. It is no good for the Ministry of Defence to announce the closure of Haslar without the Department of Health's taking a firm view on the future configuration of hospital services in the area. We now want a plan, jointly worked out by the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Health. We want that joint plan to give a future to the whole of the Haslar land area and the Haslar hospital within it, and to additional facilities that could be located in the Haslar complex.

That is the right way ahead. I firmly believe that we are winning. We are working to a plan that, in due course, will prove to be a better way ahead than the Centre for Defence Medicine, which has been located in Birmingham, and is causing some disappointment among those who work there. I believe that we are working our way forward and that the future will be good for Haslar and for the local community.

7.46 pm

**Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): I want to speak about the Government's treatment of strokes, but first I welcome the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, to the Front Bench and take the opportunity to place on the record my thanks to him and his team for what they have done in connection with the modernisation of the House. It is one of the most important things that the Government have done in the past year or so—although I would ask my hon. Friend, despite the self-discipline of hon. Members tonight, to consider a mandatory speech limit, to enable Members to plan with some certainty. Unfortunately, the other evening seven Labour Members fell off the end of the Speaker's list in the European debate. It is perfectly within our compass in the House to impose such a limit, to help hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The Government's treatment of strokes is obviously an extremely important issue, and I have several questions that I hope that my hon. Friend will put to the Secretary of State for Health on my behalf as a result of the debate. Every year, 100,000 people suffer their first stroke. It is the third biggest killer in the United Kingdom and the single largest cause of severe disability.

Stroke is a devastating condition, and most hon. Members will know a family member or friend who has experienced it. The effects of a stroke can vary enormously, and depend on which part of the brain is damaged and the extent of the damage. It is the commonest cause of neurological disability, the commonest cause of epilepsy in older people, the second most common cause of dementia and, not surprisingly, the commonest cause of depression. Those affected by strokes, whether patients, their families or their carers, know what it is like to experience the life-changing effects that strokes bring.

Expenditure on strokes is already considerable. The costs in national health service and social services expenditure in 1995–96 were calculated to be £2.3 billion. The incidence of strokes is projected to rise considerably as a result of demographic change. It therefore makes sense to ensure that resources are used in the most effective way to ensure the best possible outcomes for families and their carers. There could be huge savings to the health service, social care budgets and the national economy.

My first question to my hon. Friend would be: will he ensure that the Department of Health conducts a thorough review of the way in which funding for strokes is allocated and accounted for? Let us not allow this great wagon of public spending to roll on without conducting a proper review and adjusting to circumstances as they change.

The Government are to be congratulated on recognising the need for improvement in the care offered to stroke patients. Standards for stroke care were included in the national service framework for older people, which covers England and was published in March this year. It is commendable that by April 2004, all people who are thought to have had a stroke, regardless of their age, can expect to be treated appropriately by a specialist stroke service.

Of the 100,000 people who suffer new strokes each year, 10,000 will be under the age of 55. Although in the past, many older patients have been denied specialist

treatment because of their age, the same has been true of younger stroke patients. Their needs have often gone unmet because many have been unable to access stroke services, which are often designed for older patients. Much has still to be achieved to ensure that all those who have strokes receive the rehabilitation essential to give them the best chance of independent living by the Government's target date of April 2004. Will my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary ask the Secretary of State for Health to let me know what progress has been made to date to meet the milestones laid out in the national service framework for older people?

The Stroke Association has recently undertaken a survey of NHS trusts to establish the current position. It also asked about plans to set up stroke units in general hospitals that treat stroke patients, but which currently have no such provision. Of those acute trusts in England reporting no stroke unit in one or more of their general hospitals, just over half have plans in place to develop a unit by 2004. Even hospitals with a stroke unit do not always have the capacity to treat all their stroke patients. Will my hon. Friend ask the Secretary of State to let me know what assessment his Department has made of the current provision of stroke units?

The national service framework sets out service models for managing stroke patients in hospital. The specialist stroke team, led by a clinician with expertise in strokes, brings together nurses, therapists, clinical psychologists and other staff able to respond to individual needs. Members of those multi-disciplinary teams will have experience and knowledge of caring for stroke patients. It is vital for patients to have access to knowledgeable staff who can provide expert care and advice.

Clinical psychology is another area of unmet need, and the numbers of trained staff are insufficient to ensure that all those who need this service receive it. Recovery from stroke can continue for many years, which is recognised in the national service framework. It is therefore essential that those who have had a stroke have continuing access to rehabilitation services in the community. Will my hon. Friend therefore ask the Secretary of State to indicate what action is planned to train adequate numbers of therapy staff in each of the required specialties?

The national service framework for older people commits the Government to take action to prevent strokes. Action to reduce the risk of a person having a stroke in the first instance is urgently needed. It is a startling reality that the health gap that exists in our society results in some minority ethnic and social groups experiencing a much higher risk of stroke. I could give the details, but I shall simply ask my hon. Friend to let me know how the Government will tackle the differentials between social classes and ethnic backgrounds.

Blood pressure is another factor, as is smoking, yet although those factors are taken into account with heart disease and cancer, with strokes they are often not taken into account. Will my hon. Friend therefore discover whether the Secretary of State has a national campaign to make people aware that they are at risk if they smoke or have high blood pressure?

My final concern is that stroke research is very much underfunded; it lags way behind the amount spent on cancer and heart disease research. The Stroke Association funds what research it can, and committed about £2 million in the past financial year, but that sum is only 5 per cent. of what is available from the largest heart disease charity, and less than 2 per cent. of what is available from the two largest cancer charities. Recent research has confirmed the need for research into areas such as physical therapy for those affected by stroke. My final question is: will my hon. Friend ask the Secretary of State to list the stroke research currently undertaken by the Department of Health, and to re-examine the priority given to stroke research in recognition of the projected rising trend in the incidence of stroke?

My hon. Friend will be glad to hear that I do not expect him to answer all those questions this evening, but his general comments—and an undertaking that the Secretary of State for Health will drop me a line—will be well received not only by myself, but by the millions of our fellow citizens in the United Kingdom whose lives are often unnecessarily blighted by strokes.

7.54 pm

**Mr. John Horam** (Orpington): I agree with the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). I well remember that wonderful actress, Thora Hird, making a marvellous speech to the Stroke Association in the Members' Dining Room some years ago. Indeed, the House will be sad to learn that my predecessor, Ivor Stanbrook, whom some hon. Members will recall, has suffered a stroke that has left him speechless and paralysed down one side.

As the hon. Gentleman also said, hon. Members have exercised remarkable self-discipline this evening, which is unusual given that this is normally a season for a lack of restraint, but that self-discipline reflects well on all hon. Members. I shall continue that discipline and confine myself, despite many temptations, to one subject: policing in the outer London suburbs. Of course, the issue applies more generally, but I want to focus on Bromley, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) will want to be associated with my remarks.

The fact is that the residents of Bromley feel that they are suffering not a double whammy, but a triple whammy, because crime and antisocial behaviour are increasing and police resources are being cut, yet they are paying more in council tax and general taxation. Like many other boroughs, Bromley has a community safety partnership, which recently went through the audit procedure for the previous three years, culminating in July 2001. The audit is, therefore, up to date and shows that crime and disorder and the fear of crime are soaring, even in a leafy outer-London suburb such as Bromley.

Overall crime has increased by 9 per cent. on the previous three years. Vehicle crime has increased by 34 per cent., despite a target to cut it by 5 per cent. Robbery has risen by 35 per cent., despite another 5 per cent. target cut. The Parliamentary Secretary is looking for positive points this evening, so I gladly make one. Only residential burglary has decreased—by 5 per cent., but even in Bromley, the detection rate is only two thirds of the average. Some 52 per cent. of people felt under a medium threat of crime, and 10 per cent. felt highly threatened. Worst of all in many respects, the detection rate has fallen from 20 to 13 per cent. during those three years. So 87 per cent. of crimes go undetected, and a dire proportion of criminals are punished.

*[Mr. John Horam]*

Moreover, although I am anxious not to be excessively negative, I have to tell the Parliamentary Secretary that things have got worse since 11 September. For reasons that people understand, lots of police have been taken from areas such as Bromley to the centre of London. I entirely understand those reasons, but the result is that street crime in Bromley increased by 131 per cent. in October, and the residents are extremely concerned about the situation.

I have a high regard, as do most hon. Members, for the efforts of the local police. The chief superintendent in charge, Chief Superintendent Howlett, has been promoted and is undertaking a six-month strategic command course, and he obviously hopes to be promoted to assistant chief constable in another area. We are losing a good man, who has done a good job in Bromley, especially in putting more of the policemen at his command on the beat. The fact is that he cannot go on for ever getting a quart out of a pint pot, and I am concerned about the resources that he receives to do his job.

There are two aspects to the problem: first, the money given by the Government to London as a whole, which is the Government's responsibility; and, secondly, the allocations within London. In the previous Parliament, I was a critic of the previous Home Secretary, whom I never felt got a satisfactory deal out of the Chancellor of the Exchequer for policing, crime and law and order. As the House can confirm, the resources to fight crime decreased in real terms during the previous Parliament.

The current Home Secretary—I am trying to make another positive point—is, however, doing rather better than his predecessor in getting resources for the police, but even so the Parliamentary Secretary will be interested to know that the £22 million that the Home Secretary has recently said is being allocated for the extra costs of policing in London, following the events of 11 September and all that flows from them, is really a spit in the bucket. It has been consumed in the costs of extra policing that have already been incurred, so there is no extra element for what must be faced until the end of the financial year. In effect, we have had no increment.

Although I fully accept that this is not the responsibility of the Government, another problem is the allocation of the money within London. However, I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will make the Home Secretary and Home Office Ministers aware of what is happening in London as a result of the powers that are now in the hands of the Metropolitan police authority, which is responsible for the allocation of resources within the metropolitan area. The authority is chaired by Lord Harris of Haringey and, for the whole of this financial year, it has been reviewing the formula that settles what each individual borough receives. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) will be interested to learn that the chair of the review board is Lord Tope, a distinguished Liberal Democrat. I imagine that he has been the force behind the board's decisions.

In 1997, there were 464 police officers in Bromley, but the target figure or aspiration under Labour has been reduced to 458. The present figure is 437, but Lord Tope's review board has reduced it to 425, the lowest figure ever. The board has reduced the figure to 425 because that is how many police officers there were in the six months before the slight surge in recruitment—I make another positive point—that the Government have been able to announce in the last few days.

By comparison, Haringey—which is the biggest gainer—has gained 110 policemen. There is no rhyme or reason why Bromley should lose police officers while Haringey gains 110. Bromley has 63.5 crimes per police officer while Haringey has 63.2 crimes per officer. There is hardly any difference between the resources per crime in each of the two boroughs, but one borough will lose 12 officers from its already inadequate number while another borough will gain 110.

This package was voted through the Metropolitan police authority by the combined votes of the Liberal Democrats and Labour. It was, of course, opposed by the Conservatives led by Councillor Bob Neill, the Member for Bexley and Bromley in the Greater London Assembly and my representative. He is also leader of the Conservatives on the GLA and he is doing an excellent job in opposing such nonsense.

Needless to say, the precept set by the Metropolitan police authority for all Londoners will rise. It has risen twice in the past two years and it will, no doubt, rise again next year. We will face higher bills for fewer police and more crime and antisocial behaviour.

The Government must accept responsibility for the net effect on my constituency. The changes that they have made—the reorganisation of the police structure in London—have led, first, to a more complicated system with a Metropolitan police authority and a commissioner deciding how to allocate resources. Secondly, the system costs a lot more and, thirdly, we have fewer police and less police support to deal with crime. The incidence of crime and antisocial behaviour is therefore rising. That is wholly unsatisfactory. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will convey my strong feelings to the Home Office.

8.3 pm

**Ross Cranston** (Dudley, North): I want to hang my brief remarks on three pegs. The first is marked work in progress; the second lost opportunities; and the third institutional failure.

On work in progress, I wish to refer to the example of the public services and improving their delivery. It is part of a mantra that the price of additional money for public services is reform in service delivery. That is perfectly justifiable. The lesson from, at least, the 1960s is that just throwing money at social problems will not necessarily go any way to resolving them. Therefore, the Government are engaged in a set of necessary restructurings.

I want to spend a couple of minutes considering the restructuring of the police service, a matter that the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) has just raised. Effective policing—in particular, the effective policing of antisocial behaviour—is also high on my constituents' wish list. I have presented several petitions to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on the matter, and the first from Councillor Wilson in the Coseley area contained 3,000 signatures. Another 3,000 signatures appeared on other petitions collected by councillors in Gornal and Sedgley.

The first point to make about effective policing is the truism that it depends on community support. Indeed, we as a society bear much of the blame for the wider problem

of antisocial behaviour. There is a thin line between the promotion of laddish culture in the media, including the BBC, and yobbish behaviour. There is also the unscrupulous marketing of alcohol to young people by the drinks industry and the laxness in the sale of fireworks that my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) mentioned.

Since the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 came into force, local support for policing has been institutionalised in local partnerships. Dudley council has been able to obtain nine antisocial behaviour orders, and that is a considerable achievement. However, that is only the tip of the iceberg and that number could be squared.

The second point about effective policing is that we need more human resources. In other words, we need more police. The Government should be congratulated because police numbers are now at a six-year high, but there is a great deal more to be done. In the West Midlands force, the number has gone up but the increase is relatively low compared with that in other forces. Moreover, I have raised with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary the problem of the high attrition rate in the West Midlands force. Along with other hon. Members, I have pushed the barrow of more special constables. Indeed, I see no objection to others, such as neighbourhood and street wardens, contributing to the policing effort.

That leads me to a third point, which relates to my first theme on the reform of public services. Police forces cannot be exempted from the need to modernise. Those who take a contrary view have their heads in the sand. I cannot see my constituents continuing to tolerate a situation in which average sick leave for each officer in the West Midlands force is 13 days compared with eight days in other forces, such as Humberside and Northumbria. I cannot see my constituents continuing to tolerate a situation in which the average police officer spends only 17 per cent. of his or her time out on patrol. I cannot see my constituents continuing to tolerate a situation in which financial rewards are based on a series of archaic, historically won concessions rather than flowing to those shouldering the most difficult and demanding policing tasks.

I support the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary at police reform. The police need and deserve our support and I have great admiration for my local chief superintendent, Dennis Hodson, and his officers. However, I hope that the Police Federation will embrace the changes set out in the White Paper and so do service to those that it represents and to my constituents.

My second theme is lost opportunities. This Parliament had the opportunity to adopt an offence of inciting religious hatred, but that opportunity was lost because the Government were defeated in another place by an unholy alliance of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. I shall return to their respective roles shortly, but let me first rehearse the arguments for the creation of such an offence.

An offence of inciting religious hatred is overdue and the need has become particularly acute since 11 September when those of us with substantial minority ethnic communities in our constituencies have seen the British National party become more active and an increase in religious harassment, especially against Muslims. The legal problem arises because of the special application of the law of blasphemy to Christianity. It was accentuated by a decision of the House of Lords in 1983—the Mandla case—which held that Sikhs, and by analogy Jews, are protected as a racial group. They therefore fall under legislation such as the Race Relations Act 1976, but Muslims are not covered because they do not have a clear geographic origin or common descent. The upshot is that Muslims do not have the same level of protection as others in our community.

An offence of inciting religious hatred, parallel to the existing offence of inciting racial hatred, would have created a more level playing field in the legal sense. As we recognise religious freedom in the common law, and in light of the European convention on human rights, the corollary is that we have to take steps to protect those who exercise that freedom.

The Conservative opposition to the offence was based on the ground of free speech. It was the Conservatives' view that the offence would be too broad and its application uncertain. As such, they believed that it would catch robust criticism and satire, or even the declaration of one's own faith. I do not accept those arguments given that experience has demonstrated that the parallel offence of inciting racial hatred as set out in the Public Order Act 1986 is relatively rarely invoked. The threshold for prosecution is quite high. The offence is to produce threatening, abusive or insulting material with the intention of stirring up hatred, or such hatred being likely, not just reasonably foreseeable.

Moreover, there is a narrow construction, which the courts always adopt with criminal offences, and the additional hurdle of the Attorney-General's consent. Theoretically, restrictions on free speech are justified in the light of serious secondary effects. In the case of religious hate speech, those are fear, insecurity, psychological distress and, in some cases, physical danger and injury.

Be that as it may, the Conservatives took a principled stance against the offence, but not so the Liberal Democrats. They said that they were in favour of some sort of religious hatred offence, but not in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, and not yet. They know the realities of parliamentary time. They know that the Home Office, with all its Bills, has no chance of getting time for a Bill that covers all religious matters in the foreseeable future. Typically, instead of settling for second best, the upshot is that we have no offence of inciting religious hatred. Over the next couple of years, I shall remind my faith communities that they have the Liberal Democrats to thank for that lost opportunity.

On institutional failings, I shall focus on the House. The difficulty with parliamentary standards is that rational public discussion is almost impossible given the perception fostered in some parts of the media that we all somehow have our snouts in public and private troughs. In some ways, we do not help ourselves. Trivial complaints are still being raised with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, and I am looking directly at the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), for supposed party political advantage. If only hon. Members realised how corrosive that is to the standing of Parliament.

*[Ross Cranston]*

As Peter Riddell, that wise and immensely knowledgeable commentator on our affairs wrote—

**Mrs. Angela Browning** (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Ross Cranston:** The hon. Lady will be able to respond later, but I shall give way.

**Mrs. Browning:** I am really not clear about the hon. and learned Gentleman's reference to me.

**Ross Cranston:** The hon. Lady has raised several matters with the Parliamentary Commissioner.

**Mrs. Browning:** I have not made public anything that I have raised with the Parliamentary Commissioner. My understanding is that anything that one raises with her is confidential until she has examined it and made her views public.

**Ross Cranston:** I do not know about that. My comments relate to Labour Members too. There is a corrosive effect on the standing of Parliament if hon. Members raise trivial matters.

Peter Riddell wrote in *The Times* this morning:

"The dirty secret of British politics is that there is no dirty secret . . . The repeated rows over 'sleaze' are generally about failures to disclose defensible interests or donations."

There is no case for complacency; nor is there an argument for the status quo. I believe that we have the right machinery, but we need to reorientate it. Failure to declare or register an interest that is both negligent and trivial does not require the Parliamentary Commissioner to inquire. There is a need for judgment and proportionate action.

In my view, more attention needs to be given to behaviour. Declaration and registration of interests are only one aspect of that. Indeed, an MP's interests are irrelevant unless they influence or appear to influence behaviour. We need to revisit the code of behaviour and explore whether that should be fleshed out to give greater guidance to individual MPs. We also need to ensure that ethical behaviour is part of our culture.

The final aspect of institutional failure relates to our role in raising matters of public concern and in scrutinising the Executive. I welcome the changes that are proposed by the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office and the Leader of the House. I know that the Modernisation Committee will return to Select Committees in the new year. The Joint Committee on Human Rights played a valuable role, especially in relation to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill.

On scrutiny, the Parliamentary Secretary and the Leader of the House have proposed that all Bills be published and scrutinised in draft form. I support that. However, at some stage, we will have to tackle the Standing Committee system. The Committees may enable outside interests to canvass arguments, but they do not provide adequate scrutiny.

I am mindful of the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen); I am especially mindful of his height. In light of that, I shall resume my seat.

8.16 pm

**Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): I want to raise the important matter of the future of Droitwich Spa, one of the two major towns in my constituency. That town could have a happy Christmas and a prosperous 2002 if a number of things were to happen. They are at various stages of development—some worrying, some encouraging.

We need to ensure that the two historic canals that run through the town are reopened and that the town centre is revitalised in the light of the major town centre development by Waitrose. We also need to ensure the refurbishment of the historic lido and the reaffirmation of the town's brine heritage, through district council actions and, in particular, the English Heritage ancient monument status for Droitwich Spa, which is being discussed. Other matters are also relevant to the town centre, but those four impinge on national policy making.

Droitwich Spa has a proud heritage of salt production, dating back to Roman times. In the 19th century, it saw a massive expansion, with new hotels, a railway station and, of course, the famous brine spa baths themselves. Sadly, in more recent times, the town has drifted and the centre is looking especially fragile. I have worked with one of the leading councillors in the area, Councillor Pam Davey, to bring the traders together, with some success, but more needs to be done if the town is to re-establish its vibrancy, as I believe it can.

There has been a steady gain in population as a result of planning policies. Droitwich Spa has taken people from Birmingham and elsewhere in the west midlands, but sadly many of them are commuting to jobs elsewhere. A vision is needed to revitalise the town. That vision is on offer from Wychavon district council and the town council, and it has generated a possible £20 million of investment. That investment is at risk, however, if we do not get the support of Government agencies—especially some of those that report to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport—of the local community and of the private sector. My worry is that some local pressure groups are working with commercial vested interests to undermine local democracy in Droitwich Spa and the interests of the wider community.

Let me deal with the issues briefly and one by one. The reopening of the canals is the good news part of the story. I declare an unremunerated interest as vice-president of the Droitwich Spa canals trust. The local partners are working well together to achieve that important ambition. The project is identified by the Waterways Trust as one of the most viable canal reopenings in the country. The Droitwich Spa canals trust, British Waterways and the local authorities are working together effectively with other local partners.

There are encouraging signs. The heritage lottery fund and Advantage West Midlands may play their part in bringing about the necessary funding to secure the reopening of the canals. That will bring great benefits, not just to Droitwich Spa but to Worcestershire as a whole and, I believe, to Worcester city. I make one new year prediction: in 2002, we will see agreement on exactly how those canals should be reopened.

There are, however, contentious matters that affect the town, in particular the Waitrose town centre development. That does not sound like something to raise in the House of Commons, but I believe that it should be. The district council retail study by Chase and Partners identified the

need for a major boost to the town centre. The Waitrose development provides precisely that opportunity. Plans have been submitted. The very fine planning officer, Jack Hegarty, of Wychavon district council is considering those plans now.

The decision by the planning committee is due early in the new year. However, special interest groups in the town, apparently encouraged by Tesco, are mounting a vociferous and often unpleasant campaign against the proposal. The most dramatic step was to conduct a parish poll this August; that was forced on the town council, even though the planning matter was outside its competence. The poll proposed a specific site for a superstore in Kidderminster road in which Tesco has a commercial interest, having a charge on the land which is actually in administration.

That interest went undeclared in the parish poll. The people of Droitwich Spa were misled; they thought that they were participating in a poll on the merits of an issue, but in fact they were participating in a poll to further the commercial interests of a specific supermarket chain. Interests should be declared in parish polls, just as we in the House of Commons have to declare our interests in the Register of Members' Interests, which was published yesterday. The parish poll cost £4,685.25, which might not sound very much in the great scheme of things, but it is a lot of money to a town council like that of Droitwich Spa. It achieved a wonderful turnout of 11 per cent.

An expensive poll attracting an 11 per cent. turnout was pursued simply to further the commercial interests of one supermarket chain. No wonder that the leader of the district council wrote to Tesco suggesting that it write a cheque for the sum in question; he is right to do so. The poll raises three important policy concerns which, I know, are shared by Members for other constituencies. The Local Government Act 1972 needs to be amended, first, to require a declaration of interests in parish polls and, secondly, to increase the threshold of voters to trigger a poll; in Droitwich Spa just 10 voters are needed to trigger a poll of 23,000 electors which, clearly, is much too low. There is talk of another poll and another poll beyond that, which could bankrupt the town council. Thirdly, there is a need to limit questions to matters within the competence of the parish or town council administering the poll.

Tesco is getting over-mighty and is conspiring by accident or design to undermine democratically elected town and district councillors; it is going too far. Another site at Baxendale chemical works is available: it would be a good idea to develop that for retail use, possibly food retail use. Tesco should look at that—for all that I know, it may be—not at the Kidderminster road site, which is earmarked for housing, through a proper, democratic process and the local plan.

I shall be brief on the question of the lido. A huge public subsidy is needed to maintain a 1930s building which reflects the brine heritage of Droitwich Spa. Again, a group of protesters, for understandable emotional reasons, opposes the involvement of the private sector in a massive redevelopment of the facility which will bring a genuine tourism advantage to the whole town. The protesters' latest technique is to require spot-listing of the lido. That is a device to frustrate the development and may well scare off private sector investors. I plead with them to drop their spot-listing proposal and I urge the Government to resist any such application that comes before them.

Finally—this is what prompted me to speak in our debate—I turn to English Heritage's suggestion that the town centre should be listed as an ancient monument in its entirety, branded by English Heritage as "Droitwich Salt". That came as a bit of surprise to many of us, who did not know that it was making such a proposal. Apparently, it has been talking about it for some years; some people knew that, some did not. It could be a good idea as it might put Droitwich Spa back on the map, but English Heritage is not pursuing it as pragmatically as I would have hoped. It proposes to define the town centre with a bizarre line which seems to lack any historical or archaeological credibility and could threaten the Waitrose development, to which I have already referred.

I understand that English Heritage met the district council yesterday; there were constructive and encouraging signs that it engaged in a proper dialogue with the council. However, I plead with English Heritage and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, to whom this matter will come in due course, to be very flexible indeed. There are huge gains for Droitwich Spa if the listing is tackled sympathetically, but huge damage could be done to the town's viability if inflexibility is practised instead. Heritage must be a living matter, a notion that I believe the chairman of English Heritage fully endorses. I hope that that will be reflected in any recommendation from English Heritage in due course.

The four issues that I have raised are part of a complex matrix of issues that could revitalise Droitwich Spa. They could transform the town and put it back on the map. If we lose too many of those opportunities, the decline of the town is inevitable. The protesters should quietly withdraw their objections in the interests of the wider community; local government should stick to its guns and pursue its vision; and the Government and their agencies should support that vision—they have it in their power to do so.

8.24 pm

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): In the short time available, I wish to draw the attention of the House to three issues; two have national implications and one relates to my own constituency.

I very much agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) about fireworks. In the past few weeks, we will all have been contacted by numerous constituents about the problems that they have experienced with fireworks. Indeed, in common with my hon. Friend's local newspaper, our local newspaper—the Nottingham *Evening Post*—launched a campaign calling on the Government to review legislation on fireworks. Many of us in the House have had much correspondence and pressure from our constituents, and it is incumbent on the Government to examine how well the current legislation and regulations are working, reviewing them to ensure that in future some of the misery that many of our constituents have experienced is avoided as far as possible.

The issue is extremely serious. At some point, the Government will have to examine it to see what can be done. I appreciate that we can have as many regulations and reviews as we want, but at the end of the day we

*[Vernon Coaker]*

need regulations that can be enforced on the streets in an effective and practical way. Certainly, we cannot allow a situation to continue in which people feel terrorised for months on end—indeed, almost all year round. I therefore urge my hon. Friend the Minister to take up the issue.

Secondly, Nottingham City Transport has recently reviewed its bus services, and new services were introduced on 30 September. For many of my constituents, the review was a disaster because the buses have disappeared: services have been withdrawn or cut. The bus is often forgotten. We talk about grandiose schemes—huge motorways and railways and billions of pounds spent here and there—but in many of our communities, the bus and its effectiveness, which involves the question of whether it runs or not, are crucial.

Nottingham City Transport has reorganised its bus services to cut some of its losses: effectively, it is concentrating on what it calls profitable routes. I accept its argument that the service on those routes is fantastic, with new and frequent buses. However, for people on extreme edges of estates and in rural areas, it is difficult to reach those super-duper buses. Nottingham City Transport's changes mean that many of my constituents who are socially excluded have become even more socially excluded.

Many of these people have families, many are elderly and many find it difficult to make their voice heard. I suspect that the company will say that because the level of complaints has reduced, because the number of letters to the local newspaper has declined, because the number of letters sent to me about the matter has gone down and because the number of complaints that the company receives has declined, that means that the service has settled in, that the changes are working and that the initial furore was part of the process of change.

As I have said, many people find it difficult to make their voice heard and to make an impact on the system. As a result, they give up. They think that they have lost. They think that despite all their efforts, nothing further can be done. Far from being satisfied with changes, there is a sense of resignation.

It is important for Members to have a say in their Parliament on behalf of people who feel hard done by by a bus company that has put increase in profit and the dividend to shareholders above the needs of those who live in the communities that it used to serve. I take this opportunity to call on Nottingham City Transport to review the changes that have been made and to consider whether it is possible to reinstate some of the services that have been taken from some of my constituents. The company should undertake such a review because the outcome will be important to many of my constituents who live in the suburbs of Nottingham.

Thirdly, there is the enormous problem of antisocial behaviour. I believe that police resources are rising and that the numbers of police on our streets are increasing. However, there is a need for more officers, and I think that that is generally accepted. Those who talk to me are not necessarily afraid of some of the huge crimes that we tend to think about when talking about the police. They come to me because they are fed up with people throwing stones at their windows, with their cars being scratched, with people running down the street screaming late at night and with milk being stolen. There is intimidation on the street. There is loutish behaviour all the time.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to examine how effectively some of the legislation on antisocial behaviour that we have introduced is working and to examine how we can ensure that antisocial behaviour orders work. We must ensure that the legislation that bears on antisocial tenants is enforced. We must ascertain whether the parenting orders that we have introduced can be broadened so that they can be used before someone offends. At present, they can be used only when someone has offended, or when a parent is taken to court because a child is not attending school.

Far from there being only law and order problems or policing problems, there are social issues that bear on parental responsibilities for some young people. As a society, we should encourage the taking up of those responsibilities.

Many of the antisocial problems that we talk about involve young people. However, we should recognise them as people who demand services just as others do. Some of the facilities that are available to young people in many areas are not good enough, and we should do something about that. Young people should have a voice in the provision of services, and we should provide more services. Many of them simply want a place to go sometimes where they can feel safe and hang around with their friends.

8.34 pm

**Mr. Jonathan Sayeed** (Mid-Bedfordshire): I always find this pot-pourri of a debate interesting. There is such a variety of topics. My little rose petal of a contribution to this pot-pourri will relate solely to the disposal of refrigerators. The Government have got themselves into a considerable bind, and that involves the taxpayer. It was known that the problem would arise for about four to five months.

The reason for this situation became apparent only last Tuesday when the Minister for the Environment, in a reply to me during a debate on waste, admitted that we are in this bind because the Government did not understand the implications of an EU directive to which they had signed up. They did not realise that in disposing of refrigerators they had to deal with the chlorofluorocarbons in the gas and with the problems of the insulation material within refrigerators. There is no plant in the United Kingdom that can deal with that insulation.

In accordance with the Montreal protocol, the new EU directive on ozone-depleting substances requires the removal of all chlorofluorocarbons from refrigerators, and the directive will take effect in 12 days' time.

The Local Government Association has estimated that if there is one fridge per household and 21 million households in England, on the assumption that each fridge will be replaced every 10 years, 2.1 million fridges will be scrapped this year alone. The retailers think that the figure is higher—3 million fridges a year. Those figures ignore commercial and industrial refrigerators and air conditioning units.

It is expected that apart from those fly-tipped on verges and lay-bys, most fridges that cannot be collected by retailers will pass through the hands of local authorities.

The Government have explained that they want local authorities to dispose of those 2.1 million fridges in purpose-built plants, but there are no such plants in Britain. I am told that no sites have been approved or given planning permission, so how will the Government assist local authorities in disposing of that mass of waste? I believe that the regulations that will affect the plants are still in draft form. Clearly, no company will invest in such plants until they know what the final regulations are, so there is no possibility of moving forward to investment decisions or planning permission.

The Government have belatedly understood the implications of the EU directive to which they signed up. They have said that the insulating foam inside fridges must not be allowed to escape into the environment, and old fridges must be dealt with in one of three ways. First, the entire fridge may be disposed of in an incinerator, but that is expensive and it means that the metal element is unlikely to be recycled.

Secondly, it has been suggested that the fridges could be disposed of abroad, but that will not work. Because refrigerators contain CFCs, they are classified as hazardous waste, so the insurance premium and the shipping premium go up. It is therefore not economical to export them. The only practical way of exporting them is to get rid of the chlorofluorocarbons by de-gassing the fridges, but if they are to be exported to third-world countries, where they are very useful, there are no facilities there to re-gas them.

The third option is the Government's preferred one. They want to dispose of fridges in purpose-built reclamation facilities in the UK. It is undoubtedly the best option available, yet the Government have made no provision for this means of disposal. Although the Government say that we need three plants in the entire UK, manufacturers have told me that 10 plants will be needed, each with a throughput of 300,000 fridges a year.

In the meantime, because we have no plants the Government have given local authorities some £6 million to store fridges. However, that does not mean that the recycling problem will be dealt with. The fridges will just be taken to a dump and stored there. If people are elderly, poor or have no car, how can they get the fridge to a dump? The answer is that they have to pay someone to take the fridge, and that could cost £50.

The Government have produced a system that does not work. It also means that the fridges cannot be refurbished. Currently, one third of old fridges are refurbished and go to the poor or to third-world countries, so they are still valuable. That will not happen if they go to dumps. They cannot be re-used once they have been out in the open for a long time. We will simply have fridge mountains around the country, because we have no way of dealing with them.

The Government must explain what happens when the £6 million promised to local authorities runs out. Will it or subsequent sums be allocated to the environmental protective and cultural services block on which the local authorities depend? Will the £6 million and any further moneys be in addition to that money?

Clarification is also required about a statement made by the Minister for the Environment, who said:

"There is no need for householders to worry about disposing of their old fridge. If a retailer cannot be found who will take an old fridge away, local authorities will accept the fridge at the civil amenity site, free of charge."

Who will get it there?

I realise that I have only a minute left, so I shall be extremely brief. The fact is that the Government have got it wrong, and we are going to see throughout the country what are colloquially known as fridge mountains. In the next two months, about 800,000 fridges will be sold, so the same number will be dumped in one way or another. In the next year, in which there will be no recycling or disposal plant, some 3 million units will be dumped or stored. The Government say that they believe in the producer paying; frankly, they have produced the mess and I wish that they would pay to sort it out.

8.40 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): Last Sunday, I went to the Edith Cavell statue, just outside the church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields and just north of Trafalgar square. I joined a couple of hundred other people. For an hour, we took turns to read out the names of people—there were 1,100 in total—who have died in the past year in the conflict in Israel and Palestine. The poignant and moving thing about the names was the differences in the surnames and first names, and the huge range of ages of the people who died. In some ways, it was like reading from war memorials for the first world war, on which one sees the names of brother after brother who died on the western front. Many people joined in the rota. There were people from Palestine and Israel and from the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions, as well as people of no religion at all. They were united in calling for peace and hoping that, somehow, as we move into a time that is important for all religions—we have just come to the end of Ramadan, Hanukkah is around and Christmas is next week—we will see some genuine hope of peace coming to the middle east in the next year.

I must say, however, that the portents are not good. The demonstration was organised by Just Peace UK, which also has supporters and members in Israel, and members of Gush Shalom also attended. The petition that we passed around—I shall not read it all, but I want to refer to what it said—called on the British Government to call a halt to the Israeli Government's over-excessive violence and assassinations and the brutal siege of the Palestinian people that is breeding the horrific counter-horror of suicide bombings, which are universally condemned. It went on to describe the situation in the region.

Anyone who has visited Israel and Palestine will be aware that, as the Prime Minister has said, travelling from Israel into Gaza is like going from the first world to the third world. One sees the poverty, misery, distress and downright anger of ordinary Palestinian people about the way in which they have to live and in which they are treated. When an atrocity occurs in Israel, the Israeli authorities often make very little attempt to do anything about it judicially. There seems to be a policy of launching an immediate rocket attack on a supposed source of Hamas terrorists or on somebody else. The result is that villages, homes and lives are destroyed, and many people die. That breeds anger and hatred, and more support for the people who then carry out attacks in Israel.

When the Prime Minister of Israel or the President of the United States says that it is up to Chairman Arafat to capture such people, bring them to justice and have control over them, they forget that the Palestinian National Authority is not especially wealthy. Indeed, one

*[Jeremy Corbyn]*

could argue that it is often bankrupt. If Israeli armed forces systematically bomb its police posts and any form of transport that Chairman Arafat has, it is hard to understand how he or anyone else can exercise authority over what is happening in Palestine and Israel.

The wider question is how one brings about a peaceful solution. It is not wanting for lack of resolutions at the United Nations or of international recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people to exist in a twin-state strategy alongside Israel. There is no lack of political declarations around the world. However, they are not implemented and matters are not brought to a fruitful conclusion.

The British Government are an important part of the process, and I hope that they will do all that they can to put pressure on the United States to cease the apparently unending stream of military support for Israel and its blanket support for anything that Israel does. I hope that they will apply a great deal of pressure to ensure that the negotiations take place round the negotiating table, that a ceasefire occurs, and that, if both sides agree and wish it, some sort of United Nations policing operation is established. In 2002, I hope that we can look forward to the declaration of an independent Palestinian state, which will form the basis for long-term peace.

What is happening in the middle east is horrific and the implications are wide. No one of whom I know supports what al-Qaeda and bin Laden did on 11 September; no rational person could condone that organisation's activities. However, people are desperate for peace, recognition and self-determination. If the leadership of the Palestinian National Authority cannot provide that, people seek recognition and justification elsewhere. That is how organisations such as Hamas get their support.

I hope that after the bombing campaign in Afghanistan, there will be peace, some self-determination and genuine support for the clean-up operation in the wake of the use of depleted uranium, cluster bombs, daisy-cutters and all the other horrific accoutrements of modern warfare. I hope that there will be an examination of human rights abuses by the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, especially the killing of so many prisoners at Mazar-e-Sharif in the early part of the allied campaign against the Taliban.

I want a recognition that the fundamental injustice of the treatment of the Palestinian people and the need for an active peace process lie at the heart of much of the world's problems, especially in the context of the war on terrorism. There is a need to end the blanket support and approval of Israel's action and to promote an active peace process.

The continuation of the United States campaign against terrorism without legal justification, declarations of war, support for an international criminal court and judicial process will lead to a break-down of any international agreement or treaty. A bombing campaign in Somalia will probably succeed as nothing else in uniting many Somali people against the United States and the west. I hope that there will be a halt, a pause and a recognition of the need for the primacy of international law.

I am about to finish because I am getting strange signals from the Whips. I have received such signals for as long as I have been a Member of Parliament. On 30 January, the United Nations mandate for the MINURSO force expires. It currently helps to ensure that there is a ceasefire in the western Sahara. There was a war, but now there is a ceasefire and a thirst for peace and for self-determination. The United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council have ratified the principle of a referendum to facilitate that peace process, but if there is no referendum for the people of Sahrawi, so wrongly expelled after the Moroccan invasion in 1974, there will be no peace, the Moroccan occupation will continue and a guerrilla war and all the wider implications of that will be on the agenda.

The Government are seized of that fact, but I hope that they encourage the French Government to stop allowing the Elf Aquitane oil company to sign oil exploration certificates in the occupied territories in Morocco, which is totally illegal, totally wrong and very dangerous, and ensure that there is sufficient financial and practical support for the UN operation to enable the referendum to take place early next year. Those hundreds of thousands of people living in dusty, dry, inhospitable refugee camps in Algeria will be able to return home to the country from which they were so brutally expelled in the 1970s.

8.51 pm

**Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): Before the House adjourns for the Christmas recess, I must briefly raise several points. First, I entirely agree with the hon. Members for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) and for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on fireworks. I cannot recall receiving so many letters about fireworks and on firework night I thought that our house was under siege, as bombs seemed to be exploding everywhere.

Fireworks no longer produce pretty little stars and the noises that they make seem to have grown louder and louder—local residents were complaining about animals being frightened. I much prefer organised displays. We should not ban fireworks, but a ten-minute Bill on the subject is to be introduced next year and I ask the Government to consider how such products are manufactured and whether we can definitively control the period for which they can be displayed. I hope that a successful gunpowder plot does not result next year owing to the crazy decision we took last night.

My second point is about the wonderful Southend airport. Unfortunately, it has encountered a number of difficulties, so much so that an article about the airport appeared recently in *The Daily Telegraph*. To comply with new Civil Aviation Authority regulations, St. Laurence church, which is nearly 1,000 years old, must be shifted 150 yd. That is being seriously considered, but quite how an ancient church can be picked up and moved I do not know. Obviously, worshippers are extremely upset and those whose loved ones are buried by the church are outraged. Although I hope that the Minister recognises that the airport is worth supporting, will he pass that message to his colleagues so that this crazy scheme for an ancient church might be avoided?

My third point concerns cocklers in Leigh-on-Sea, who are in difficulty. Every year, there are problems in the Thames estuary with an algae called DSP. The cocklers advise me that a huge number of cockles would have to be eaten before a person became ill, but there seems to be no clarity and the cocklers of Leigh would be grateful if tests were carried out. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) had responsibility for such matters when she was a Minister.

My fourth point involves the huge difficulty in attracting and retaining teachers. Going round the schools recently, I encountered a number of mature teachers and one wrote to me recently:

"I needed the full student loan every year for four years totalling £6000. On completing the course I found that teachers salaries did not take into account my ten years previous experience in outside industry. The salary I received was not enough . . . I had to take out graduate loans in order to live and remain in the profession for which I had trained . . . hoping things would improve."

As a result of all that, following the pay increase the gross income of that teacher will be £7.75 over the limit allowed for deferment of student loan repayments. I wish I could go into more detail, but I can tell the Minister that this will apply to many other Members.

My fifth point concerns a reorganisation of benefits called the ONES. I recently visited a home for people with learning difficulties. I simply cannot believe that someone has come up with such a crackpot scheme. People in such homes are experiencing extreme mental-health problems, and it was always the case that the professionals would represent them in terms of benefits. That has all changed. The home that I visited was told "You now have to ring a help line". When that was done, nothing seemed to satisfy the gentleman at the other end of the line. It appears that these people now have to be interviewed individually. That is crazy, and I hope the Minister will look into it.

Finally, let me say that the best Christmas present for Southend would be the according of city status. I bet that when Her Majesty the Queen visited the town in 1998, she thought it extraordinary that it had not been declared a city. We have no cities in our wonderful county of Essex, although it is a huge area. I am sure that any Member visiting Southend would be given a warm welcome, and would support my entreaties to the Minister.

8.57 pm

**Dr. Rudi Vis** (Finchley and Golders Green): Because of the five-minute limit, I will read my speech quite fast. I do not require a response from the Minister; I want to save time.

I merely wish to praise an innovative undertaking in my constituency—a foyer scheme, known as the safe start foyer. Recently Maria Mulloy, development manager of the scheme, invited me to a six-months review lunch at the foyer. The scheme is managed at Handley grove, off Claremont road in Cricklewood. It was set up for the benefit of young vulnerable people who are homeless, unemployed or both, and was officially opened in May 2001 by the Minister for Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), and the then Irish ambassador, Mr. Edward Barrington.

I had already visited the foyer some months earlier, when I was able to discuss at length with young people what the scheme meant to them. They told me that their lives had changed entirely for the better once they came into contact with it. The foyer contains 24 flats with on-site support staff, providing key opportunities for disadvantaged young people who want to built a better future for themselves. Those whom I had the chance to meet were enormously positive.

The foyer is currently fully let, containing 24 young adults aged between 16 and 25 of whom 11 are working and 13 are in full-time education. They told me of their past, which was at times gruesome. They seemed eloquent, intelligent and worldly-wise, and I enjoyed our discussions. They told me about their skills assessments, the training, and the job-seeking support available on site for residents. They also showed me their flats, the training and meeting rooms, information-technology access and the cafe and offices.

The chief executive of the safe start foundation, Mahesh Singadia, and Tom Beisty, who chairs the foundation, told me how the scheme had come about. Councillor Alan Williams, leader of the London borough of Barnet, had discussed the building of the foyer with the Network housing association, which was building 113 affordable rented homes in the area. The safe start people were brought in to manage it, and Barnet college's principal, John Skitt, was enlisted to discuss learning opportunities. All four partners put money and effort into the scheme, and the Housing Corporation came up with the capital costs. The Bank of Ireland also played a positive role.

The scheme is quite expensive, and the high standard of accommodation and services suggest as much. Safe start will see hundreds of formerly vulnerable young adults leave its premises with a good future to look forward to, and that is worth every penny. I am sure that those young people will, for once, have a decent Christmas this year.

I shall end with season's greetings to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to all colleagues in the House.

9 pm

**Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): I shall keep my comments brief, as I am conscious that other hon. Members wish to speak. I want to raise two issues that are concerning my constituents. The first relates to toxic ash that has been dumped in one corner of my constituency, and the second to the concern about the shortage in police numbers across the constituency.

Following reports on "Newsnight" and in the local press that toxic ash had been dumped at Pitsea tip, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 6 July asking for how long and when that dumping was allowed to happen; why proper controls were not in place to ensure that it did not happen; who was responsible for ensuring that public safety was adhered to; whether there was any risk to human health; and what measures were being taken to ensure that that did not happen again.

Despite further letters on 18 October, numerous phone calls and written parliamentary questions dated 6 November, I have not received a substantive response. Would the Minister, as a gesture of festive co-operation if nothing else, please raise this matter with the Secretary of State and generate a response? It is a matter of great concern to a large number of my constituents.

The second issue relates to a real concern across the constituency about the shortage of beat and response officers. A number of recent cases strongly suggest that the police are overstretched. In Essex, crime has risen in recent years, whereas the number of police constables has fallen. As part of an overall strategy to get much tougher with the criminal, we should instigate a step change in policing levels across the country, and get as many as an extra 25,000 to 30,000 police officers on the beat over the medium term.

*[Mr. John Baron]*

The strength of feeling in Billericay and district is such that recently, in only two weeks, 5,500 constituents signed a petition calling for more police officers to be committed to the constituency. I presented that petition to the House of Commons on 10 December. I am aware that hardly any time has passed since then, but as I was previously unable to generate a response from another Department on the toxic ash incident, I ask the Minister to remind the Home Secretary that that petition sits on his desk, and I look forward to receiving his response early in the new year.

I shall leave the matter there. I should like to extend greetings and wish all hon. Members a good Christmas. I look forward to those two responses.

9.3 pm

**Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): There is a growing gap, as my constituents perceive it, between the Government's rhetoric and their experience of public services in Fareham. I shall kick off with the topic of health. I shall contrast two newspaper articles that appeared in successive weeks in one of my local papers.

The first was a Government press release trumpeting the allocation of £75,000 to the Queen Alexandra hospital in Cosham, which was to cut waiting lists overnight and reduce the delays that people face in the accident and emergency department. That £75,000 will produce three and a bit nurses to cope with the growing number of people going to A&E units.

The following week there was an announcement that the hospital trust that looks after the Queen Alexandra hospital had a deficit of £5.5 million, and had to lose 150 staff, including front-line medical staff. It is not surprising, therefore, that my constituents see a growing gap between what the Government talk about in this Chamber and the reality on the ground.

One of the problems that hospitals everywhere face is the crisis in accident and emergency units. Admissions to those units are growing, many of them elderly people who have been forced to remain at home because the nursing home beds to cope with them are not available. Those beds are not available because the standards imposed by the Government on nursing homes have led to the closure of many in my constituency. The Government have not compensated nursing home owners for the additional costs that that they have incurred. Not only are more elderly people staying at home, but when they reach hospital, more and more have to stay there because there are no homes for them to go to for a convalescence period. A crisis is building up in the health service in south-east Hampshire, as a consequence of the underfunding of the health service and the loss of front-line medical staff, as well as the lack of adequate care places for elderly people.

I wish to place on record my thanks to the teachers and head teachers in my constituency for their hard work and dedication over the past year. That hard work and dedication has masked a growing crisis in recruitment and retention of teachers in my constituency. I raised that topic twice earlier this month. One of the manifestations of the crisis in Fareham is that a local head teacher, David Wilmot, set up a stall in Sainsbury's to recruit more teachers from among passing customers. I thought that that was a tribute to his innovation and initiative, but it was also a sad indictment of the state of the teaching profession and the problems imposed on teachers by the Government through increased work load and more directives.

We cannot talk about the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention in isolation, because it has an effect on pupils. We have already heard Mike Tomlinson, the chief inspector of schools, explain this month that the stalling in the rate of improvement in literacy and numeracy at the age of 11 was partly caused by the turnover of teachers. My concern is that the improvement in exam standards over recent years will grind to a halt if teacher turnover increases and it is harder and harder to fill existing vacancies. The Government need to act promptly to avoid a crisis in education arising from the shortage of teachers.

The third issue I wish to raise is transport. The Government office for the south-east sent a letter to the chief executive of Hampshire county council. Its opening sentence reads:

> "The Government's vision for transport is for a modern, high-quality network that meets people's needs and offers more choice to individuals, families, communities and businesses."

I regret to say that the choice available to my constituents is which traffic jam to sit in. There are two major M27 junctions in my constituency—junction 9 to the west and junction 11, which takes traffic from my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). Both junctions are at maximum capacity at peak times because of the housing development that has taken place in my constituency in recent years. The Government plan more housing developments in the two boroughs. They have responded to the problem in part by providing funds for the south Hampshire rapid transit system. That will provide some relief, but only for people travelling from Fareham and Gosport to Portsmouth and back. It will do nothing for people travelling to Winchester, Southampton or Basingstoke, or for people who live in the west of the constituency who use junction 9. Further public transport investment is not the sole answer to the problem. We need more investment in roads, and soon.

At the moment, three surveys cover the M27—the south coast multi-modal survey, the M27 integrated transport survey and the Fareham and Gosport access study. We have had three studies, but what we need is action, not studies. The Government must provide additional funds to improve the M27, or to stop housing developments taking place in my constituency and neighbouring constituencies.

In this brief canter through the issues in my constituency, I must point out that I am concerned that the Government have not been open about the difficulties that they face in trying to solve the problems. They would gain much more respect if they were honest about their problems with hospitals, schools and roads. We need a proper debate to decide how best to solve those problems. If the Government are not open but continue to recite their litany of statistics, people will become more and more cynical about them. This is a Government who promise much but deliver little.

9.10 pm

**Dr. Andrew Murrison** (Westbury): I believe that I am the last Back Bencher to speak before Christmas. Brevity is a virtue, and I shall endeavour to be brief.

Christmas Adjournment debates are meant to be an opportunity to raise pressing constituency issues. The Government delivered a pretty rotten Christmas present to west Wiltshire last week. Two long-awaited road building and improvement schemes have been delayed, pending decisions on funding, as part of a cull of road projects across the south-west region.

I am pleased to be able to use this debate to highlight the disappointment felt by many of my west Wiltshire constituents with the Government's failure to commit funds to the construction of a bypass for Westbury and to urgent improvements on the A36 from Codford to Heytesbury. Westbury has awaited its bypass since the 1930s. Since then, through traffic has increased hugely—to the extent that air quality in the centre of an otherwise delightful market town is unacceptably poor by all recognised standards.

The A36 is notorious. It is known locally as "death valley", and rightly so. Indeed, one prominent local journalist turned to me in despair at the weekend and said, "I am just fed up with attending fatal traffic accidents along the A36." I myself recently attended a tragic accident on that road, in which a family of four was killed. Such an event certainly focuses the attention.

I regret to say that the Government's record on road building—indeed, on transport as a whole—is characterised by indecision. I suppose that in retrospect, my long-suffering constituents might have expected this outcome.

If the Government had a real alternative to road transport, we might not need our road improvements and I might not be standing here delivering this speech this evening, but they do not have an alternative. The Government's integrated transport policy seems to me to revolve around squeezing folk off the roads by making it sheer hell to drive. It simply is not working, particularly in rural areas where a car is no luxury.

The A3 Hindhead bypass is a textbook case of dither and delay, and one that will not give my constituents much cheer. The answer to a parliamentary question in May revealed that the Government did not intend to begin construction of the road—one of the most pressing schemes in the country—until at least 2008. The bypass was part of the roads programme of the previous Conservative Government, but Labour dithered for four years before enforcing another delaying order.

In addition, there is a hidden cost for those who live in the line of proposed roads. That cost is planning blight, and it causes huge misery. However, the dither and delay are not uniform. The Deputy Prime Minister's constituents got their improvements on the A1033 and the neighbouring A63. That was good news for those with Jaguars.

The self-styled party of constructive opposition, the Liberal Democratic party, is duplicitous. Across the country, road construction is certainly welcomed by many Liberal Democrats locally, usually with an eye to electoral advantage. However, before the election, the party's national message was very different indeed.

Thanks to the Government's house-building targets, we have seen concrete countryside all right, but not the transport infrastructure to support it. Given that this week's planning Green Paper is called, ominously, "Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change", we can expect things to get worse. May I press the Government to make up their mind about how they are going to resolve the urgent congestion and safety issues faced by motorists, pedestrians and residents in west Wiltshire, and in the south-west region as a whole? On a happier note, I also wish them a very happy Christmas.

9.14 pm

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): I am delighted to contribute to the debate. I confess to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) that I drove through Westbury on Saturday to see my mother, and was surprised to find that there was no relief road or bypass, so I am afraid that I contributed to the congestion. Perhaps if the hon. Gentleman had been in the House longer, he would know that dither and delay is not something that this Government can lay unique claim to. We in Cornwall suffered for many years because the previous Conservative Government dithered and delayed over essential improvements to the A30. Although I extend to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to all Members of the House a warm invitation to come to the warmest part of the United Kingdom—Cornwall—for Christmas, I ask you not to use the A30 during daylight hours, to avoid getting stuck in a traffic jam.

It probably says in "Erskine May" that Adjournment debates must always be opened by the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox). I have attended many of these debates, but never have I attended one in which the hon. Gentleman has not made a very serious point, and I admire his consistency. All too often, we deny and ignore the serious problems of Cyprus, a Commonwealth country. I was a Member of the House when the invasion took place in 1974, and it was a horrendous experience for a number of my constituents who were there.

A number of important threads have run through this evening's contributions, and I hope to refer briefly to some of them. I was struck by the way in which Members on both sides of the House dealt with international as well as local issues. It was interesting to hear the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) talk about the causes of terrorism, while later the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) referred, very properly, to the serious situation in the middle east. It is important at this time of year, when we approach a Christian festival, to remind ourselves that there are common roots for Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Far more unites us than divides us. It may be important for us to remind our constituents of that when we go back for our Christmas celebrations.

Most of this evening's contributions have been concerned with matters closer to home. The right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) is not in her place at the moment, but it is striking how the delivery of public services, to which she referred, has become the big issue of 2001. Although many thought that the general election would be fought on the euro, that was not the issue for the electorate. I find it interesting that Conservative Members who were Ministers just a few years ago seem now to have adopted a completely different attitude to the necessary level of investment in public services—so long as their constituency is at the front of the queue.

The right hon. Lady's references to public services were echoed by the hon. Members for Orpington (Mr. Horam) and for Billericay (Mr. Baron) and the hon.

*[Mr. Paul Tyler]*

and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston), particularly in relation to the police. I was a member of a police authority for many years before I came here—when I had a real job, in fact. I found that the police service was often ignored by London because it was thought that it could manage on its own and would always attract the support and resources that it required. We have learned the hard way over the past 20 years that that is not the case. The recruitment and retention of police officers is extremely important and requires greater attention. We are only just now pulling out of the funding trough of the 1980s and 1990s.

The right hon. Member for South-West Surrey has touching faith in the value of ministerial visits. Frankly, I could do without them—so long as they just send the cheque.

**Shona McIsaac:** They clog up the A30.

**Mr. Tyler:** The hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) has a great deal of support across the House for the concern that she has expressed on a number of occasions about the way in which fireworks are sold and used. We all know from constituency experience that the manufacture of fireworks has reached such pyrotechnic heights that putting them in the hands of amateurs, let alone children, is dangerous. I hope that her message, which was backed up by the hon. Members for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) and for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), and is now backed up by me, too, will be heard by Ministers. Something must be done—things cannot continue as they are.

The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who is not in his place at the moment, is also a regular. One day he will get up and tell us that the Royal Hospital Haslar is okay, and sit down again. We should all be so amazed that we would think that something had gone wrong with the normal conventions of the House.

There has been concern about the police in several constituencies for very many months—indeed, for many years. However, we should all appreciate the point made by the hon. Member for Orpington about the degree to which there is fear of crime. Perception is as important as reality in politics. Fear of crime is extremely important.

Although I cannot comment on the particular circumstances in the borough of Bromley to which the hon. Gentleman referred, I can assure him that we all recognise our responsibility to ensure that in addressing crime prevention, detection and clear-up, we also pay attention to the effect of crime on public perception all over the country. Fear of crime is a real problem among all age groups.

The hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North uncharacteristically attacked Members of the other House. He referred to the loss of an opportunity to deal with the blasphemy laws. The hon. and learned Gentleman was, until a few months ago, a Minister. As far as I am aware, he made no proposals then to deal with the unfortunate situation as regards blasphemy, but now he blames his colleagues. The victories in the House of Lords on that issue were achieved not merely by Cross-Benchers, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, but with the support of Labour peers, because it was felt that not enough preparation had gone into the clauses on blasphemy. They were inserted at the last minute and had nothing to do with the emergency situation dealt with by the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001.

Those provisions were rejected because they were not good enough. That is what this whole place is about—scrutiny of legislation. If the hon. and learned Gentleman, who is an experienced Member, does not recognise that the value of the other place is—and, under the proposals that he will no doubt support, will continue to be—that it acts as a revising Chamber, providing proper scrutiny of the law and preventing Ministers from bludgeoning their way through this building with Bills that are not properly prepared, he has lost his opportunity, and I am sad for him. I agree, however, with his concerns about partisan tit-for-tat and the parliamentary commissioner. That is a serious issue.

The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) raised some interesting issues that have more than local significance. Parish pump politics concern all of us. They are important; they are the basic building blocks of our whole democracy. For example, if the circumstances of the parish poll that he described were replicated all over the country, we should all feel that democracy was suffering—not only from the apparent distortion of that result by commercial interests but also by the fact that an issue could be triggered by a small but perhaps fanatical group. As a result, democratic representatives at every level of government, all the way up to this place, might be undermined. That is not merely a Droitwich Spa problem—it is genuinely national, as the House will realise.

I was especially struck by the contribution of the hon. Member for Gedling, because so many of our communities are dependent on diminishing bus services. Again I shall refer to my experience before I was elected to this place. I was an adviser to the then Bus and Coach Council when the Conservative Government were threatening the deregulation and privatisation of the whole control system for bus services. This country lost something during that process.

The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire was a colleague at that time, and will recall that we published a booklet called, "The country will miss the bus". The drawing on the front echoed Shell's advertisements about the loss of some of our natural species. The slogan was "Spot the dwindling—

**Mr. Luff:** "Spot the endangered species."

**Mr. Tyler:** Indeed. I am grateful to my hon. Friend—he is an hon. Friend in this context. However, the animals, birds and bees depicted on our booklet are likely to have survived—indeed, they have survived—but the little bus in the picture has gone. Country buses have disappeared. In my constituency there are hardly any regular bus services to the outlying areas. Regular users of buses—or those who would like to be—are not the most articulate members of our communities. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Gedling for acting as the voice of bus users in his area. It may be a long way from Nottingham to North Cornwall, but I believe that we have a community of interests in that respect.

The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) mentioned a very urgent issue. The so-called fridge mountain will affect every local authority in the country.

It has come like an express train out of a tunnel at us in a matter of days. Local authority members all over the country simply do not know what has hit them, and the Government stand indicted for having failed to recognise the significance of something that they signed up to, which they certainly are not resourcing sufficiently. In those circumstances, the Local Government Association is right to warn local authorities of what will happen, and we in turn have a responsibility to our constituents.

I have mentioned the hon. Member for Islington, North. He was right to remind us what the situation in the middle east could be over the next few days, rather than weeks.

Like a Christmas tree, the hon. Member for Southend, West always manages to have a number of baubles to show off to us in the Christmas Adjournment debate, and tonight was no exception. I was particularly struck by an issue that he took up about the retention and recruitment back into the profession of teachers. If the crisis that our schools are facing is to be relieved in any way, it will be by bringing back into the profession people who have left, perhaps to have a family. I hope that Ministers will listen carefully on that issue; I believe that the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) also mentioned it.

I have a foyer project in my constituency, as does the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis); indeed I have several, in small market towns. It is interesting to reflect that in those two contrasting constituencies there will be a great opportunity to provide a support system to help young people with accommodation, training and employment.

The hon. Member for Fareham referred back to the public services issue, and I shall wait with interest over the next few weeks, if not months, to see how the Conservative party funds the various local constituency pleas for more resources and builds them into a national programme.

As I have a minute or two in hand, I shall do what every other contributor to the debate has done—jump on my own hobby-horse. I have in many previous such debates referred to a serious problem that affects anyone who flies. I do not mean deep-vein thrombosis, although I have, in the past two or three years, mentioned that. I refer to a problem concerning the way in which organophosphate lubricants are used in some jet engines, and in certain conditions can be, as it were, inhaled into the aircraft cabin.

There now exists a very effective group that is providing information on the subject. It is called the Aviation Organophosphate Information Site, and was set up by flight crews. We already know the harm that acute exposure to organophosphates can cause. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) has had ministerial experience of the way in which OPs are used, or have been used over the years, in the sheep industry, where they have had a devastating effect. Acute exposure to OPs, which are very dangerous chemicals, can be devastating. However, in the aviation industry, where these lubricants can leach into the cabin through ineffective seals and cause toxic fumes, there can be chronic exposure over a matter of years.

If any hon. Members are not coming to Cornwall this Christmas but are thinking of travelling abroad, I suggest that they look very carefully at the aircraft in which they are flying. It is usually short-haul aircraft that are affected, so hon. Members who are flying long-haul will be all right, but short-haul aircraft, particularly those used in Australia, have been shown to have a particular problem.

The BAe 146, for example, has caused immense problems and very dangerous and risky circumstances for flight crews and passengers alike. I have drawn attention to a number of incidents that have taken place all over the world over the past two years. If I tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the BAe 146 is used by the Queen's Flight, you will appreciate how serious the problems could be if those chemicals are not properly controlled.

I recently tabled questions to Ministers to try to obtain some information about the international investigation of those incidents. In a parliamentary answer last week, the Government said that they

"are monitoring these developments closely and are prepared to commission specific work on organophosphates if this proves necessary."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 801W.]

My final words before I wish you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and all hon. Members a very happy Christmas, are that I hope that there will not be an incident that will force the Government to consider the problem at great speed; I hope that we can deal with it before a dangerous incident occurs.

9.30 pm

**Mrs. Angela Browning** (Tiverton and Honiton): I am pleased to take part in responding to the Christmas Adjournment debate. I think that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the Parliamentary Secretary, who will reply to the debate for the Government, are aware that my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) has some critical family matters to deal with this evening, so I am grateful to you for allowing me to fill the slot. I suppose that it is traditional at this time of year that we elderly aunties get trotted out and allowed to join in the family fun.

Having responded to such a debate before in a previous incarnation, I rather hoped that the Christmas Adjournment debate, of all end-of-term debates, would have a cheerful, seasonal feel to it, but there has not really been any "God rest ye merry gentlemen" about tonight's debate. We have heard from many hon. Members that crime is up, that the loutish behaviour on our streets is increasing, that those louts bomb this country's streets with incendiaries, that dogs are barking, that babies are yelling, that cats are pacing up curtains and that there will now be horrible mountains of unwanted refrigerators covered in toxic ash. That is what we face in the coming year—not a very cheerful picture. None the less, we have had a variety of contributions, with some common themes.

I should like to tell the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that, if there is such a terrible problem on the A30 in Cornwall, I urge all hon. Members who are travelling to the west country for their Christmas vacations to stop in God's own county of Devon before they get to Cornwall; they will be made most welcome there.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) is a regular contributor to these debates, as has been said. Yet again, using his vast experience from the chairmanship of all-party Cyprus group, he referred, in a very conciliatory tone, to the need to bring together the Turkish and Greek

*[Mrs. Angela Browning]*

sides in Cyprus. He looked to the future, which set us off with a constructive and topical theme for this evening's debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) touched on international terrorism, which, despite the festive season, is always on our minds. He considered the role of the Council of Europe and the case for an international criminal court, which was mentioned by other hon. Members. No doubt, we shall return to that subject, because international terrorism will clearly present the global community with many challenges, especially when the people involved are caught and brought to justice. He will use his membership of the Council of Europe to ensure that that debate stays at the forefront of our minds.

The hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) is another regular contributor to our end-of-term debates, and I thoroughly share his concern about Eaga. I have referred some terrible constituency cases from very elderly people to its chief executive. Regrettably, when warm homes week was recently celebrated at constituency level, taking part in a photo opportunity had been in my diary, but I felt so concerned about the experience of some of my constituents that I have said publicly that I will not take part in any photo opportunity until I am absolutely convinced that those elderly people are not still waiting for basic electrical work and plumbing to be properly completed to a proficient standard.

When we are satisfied that that work has been done, I will warmly welcome that initiative, as will the hon. Gentleman. That work has to be done to the right standard because those people will have great difficulty if the job is not done properly, and they will have to keep contacting Members of Parliament just to get their central heating systems to work. Clearly, that is his experience, and it is mine as well. Many Members appear to be nodding, and it is worrying to think that they share a common experience on this issue. The matter needs to be sorted out, because it is unacceptable that even Members of Parliament cannot obtain proper replies in good time.

The hon. Gentleman also touched on the issue of sexual offences against people with learning difficulties, which Mencap has placed at the forefront of our minds. I fully agree with him, but I am sorry that he was not at the Conservative party conference. He would probably have found that a strange experience, but the only fringe meeting at which I spoke was the one organised by Mencap on this subject. I share his concern.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) used her great experience as a former Secretary of State for Health to flag up regional disparities and the impact that they have on public services, such as health and the police force in her area. She provided great detail on how the people who work for such services or are recipients of them in areas such as Surrey are disadvantaged. She rightly said that the Government must be fair and that they have a responsibility to the whole country. Many of us think that it is an important issue and she used her great experience to make her points concisely. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will take them on board.

The hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) referred to the problems caused by fireworks. We have all received letters about them, but it is difficult to achieve a balance between people wanting to have genuine fun and people misusing fireworks so that they cause problems to the elderly, pet owners and others. I hope that we can have practical advice from the Government on the changes that they intend to introduce, because something needs to be done. The hon. Lady nods, and I hope that she accepts that I share her concern about the problem. We need to ensure that any proposals that the Government introduce are safe and fairly predictable. It is an offence to create disturbance at night whether through the use of fireworks or other means. Therefore, when people break the law and local authorities have sufficient evidence of that—that is part of the problem—they should be brought to account. Otherwise the word will get round and people will continue to break the law.

I have never seen the Royal Hospital Haslar or known anyone who has been in it. However, I know all about it, because of the work over many years of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). I remember seeing people outside the House with placards saying "Save the Royal Hospital Haslar" and my hon. Friend has raised the issue many times on the Floor of the House. Because of his efforts, he deserves to keep the hospital. I am not sure what will follow from the debate in the memorandum that the Parliamentary Secretary sends to his colleagues. I hope that it is not just a generalised round robin. In fact, I urge him to make clear in bold, large type the point about the deadline of 2007 for the Haslar hospital. As my hon. Friend has said, it justly deserves to have the word "indefinitely"—and not 2007—applied to it.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) touched briefly on modernisation, a subject on which he has gained quite a reputation in the House. He recommended that people speak for eight minutes and I timed his speech. He spoke for exactly eight minutes, which was first class. He takes the prize tonight for doing just that. I must say sorry to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), because I want him to think that he would win the prize.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North spoke with great knowledge and in great detail about the plight of people who suffer from strokes, the prevention that might be put in place to minimise their incidence and, in particular, about the need for specialist services. It has been promised that, by 2004, people who suffer a stroke will automatically be guaranteed specialist referrals and specialist treatment. We all know how much a difference the right follow-up treatment to help with mobility or speech problems can make to those who have had strokes. Such treatment is essential. He said that the two main risks were smoking and blood pressure. I do not smoke, but since the Government came to office in 1997 my blood pressure has been up. I hope that I am not at too much risk.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) spoke about policing, as many hon. Members did. In particular, he flagged up the fact that crime was soaring in what he described as the leafy suburbs of Bromley. We often rightly focus on crime in inner cities, but leafy suburbs and rural areas have their share of crime, and that needs to be taken seriously. He said that as taxpayers we have higher bills, fewer police and more crime. The Government have to address that.

The hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) talked about the reform of public services, antisocial behaviour, community policing and antisocial behaviour orders, which we would all like to see applied in greater numbers. Not even the statutory agencies are aware of the opportunity to use them. If they are to be successful, we must use them. It will be interesting to discover whether there is a wider take-up of that vehicle if we talk about it more.

The hon. and learned Gentleman also mentioned parliamentary standards. I have just realised why he referred to me in that context. I repeat to him—this is private between us—I have not made that information public.

**Ross Cranston:** I have no idea of the nature of the complaints that the hon. Lady raised with the Parliamentary Commissioner. Of course, they will not necessarily remain confidential because there might be a report. I was simply appealing to her as a leading member of the Conservative Front Bench. I make the same appeal to Labour Members. However, if I gave offence, I unreservedly withdraw my comments and apologise.

**Mrs. Browning:** The hon. and learned Gentleman is very gracious. I accept his apology and shall move quickly on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) mentioned parish polls in his constituency. It was rich of the hon. Member for North Cornwall to talk about distorting polls. If any party is the past master of distorting polls, it has got to be the Liberal Democrats. We could all learn a few tricks about distorted polls from them. My hon. Friend made a good point, however. We all appreciate that the consequences could be enormous if it takes just 10 voters to trigger a parish poll.

The hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) mentioned fireworks, the problem with buses in the Nottingham city area and antisocial behaviour, which has been a common theme of our debate.

I do not know whether you would rule me out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) as "petal", which is how he described himself. That is not how I have seen him in the past, but I think that he makes a rather nice petal.

My hon. Friend filled us with horror. I had not realised the scale of the imminent problem of second-hand and used fridges, both domestic and commercial. Apparently, there will not be a solution to that unless huge sums of money are spent, either by the Government or local authorities, or by the people who purchase the refrigeration units. Some 2.1 million fridges are replaced. I assume that is every year. There is nowhere for those fridges to go because the Government signed up to something and were not aware what it meant.

The problem is on such a scale that Ministers should stay behind during Christmas and sort it out. I represent a rural area and I am worried that every spare lay-by and ditch will, over the coming year, be filled with horrible old fridges, because people will dump them if there is nowhere to put them.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** They will be on the streets as well.

**Mrs. Browning:** Yes, and it will be awful for the environment.

I was coming to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn). I did not agree with everything he said, which will not surprise him.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I am relieved, actually.

**Mrs. Browning:** Now I shall really disappoint the hon. Gentleman for Christmas. He said that peace should be at the forefront of the situation involving the Israelis and the Palestinians. He stressed the importance of the negotiating table and the need for the United Kingdom and the Americans to use their influence to get people round it.

Back in 1993, I visited Tunis with an all-party delegation, and we had a meeting with Yasser Arafat. His headquarters were then in Tunis and we met just before he moved out. Clearly, he has to take the initiative in dealing with many of the problems with Hamas. However, I do not underestimate the difficulty that he faces in doing that. Like all extremist terrorist groups, Hamas is pretty out of control; that does not let Arafat off the hook but, having met and talked to him, I can see the difficulty of the task that he still faces. There has to be a coming together in a season when we focus on what is going on in the middle east. I was at a carol service on Saturday night and we all sang "O little town of Bethlehem". It was poignant to think of Jerusalem now; the hon. Gentleman was right to raise the matter and express his views in the way that he did.

I shall be quick now because I am a minute over my allotted time. To my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West, I say, "Stick with it, my friend." If I am ever in this position on the Front Bench again, I hope to give him a prize for raising many issues, for which the people of Southend, West will be grateful. The hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis) said that he did not want a response, but he did Finchley and Golders Green proud this evening. My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron) raised the serious problem of toxic ash. He is waiting for a response from the Home Secretary on a petition that he has lodged; I hope that the Minister will ensure that he gets one. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) spoke about his local Queen Alexandra hospital and, again, problems with public services and care places for the elderly. My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) spoke about the roads and problems including Government cutbacks in the road-building programme and the disarray of the integrated transport policy.

I am most grateful for the opportunity to join everyone again for this momentous occasion. I wish everybody a very happy Christmas and a peaceful 2002

9.47 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg):** I shall attempt to match my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis), who represents a neighbouring constituency for speed. I shall try to reply to the 20 contributions to our debate in the 12 minutes or so that remain before 10 o'clock.

First, I praise all Members for their self-discipline in keeping to a time limit on speeches. In three hours today, we have managed to hear 21 speeches, whereas in five hours in July we heard 22 speeches. I therefore

*[Mr. Stephen Twigg]*

congratulate Members on both sides of the House who participated in our debate. I welcome the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) back to a Front-Bench position. I believe that this is the first time that she has led for the Opposition since our exchanges in July.

**Mrs. Browning:** Since we said goodbye.

**Mr. Twigg:** Well, it was not goodbye—*[Interruption.]* It was au revoir, and I welcome her back. Our thoughts tonight will be with her colleague, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight). We look forward to seeing him back in the House in the new year.

Our debate has been wide ranging, extending from Droitwich Spa to the Western Sahara. There have been contributions on national and international issues, as well as important local issues. I shall do my best to respond to the points that were made, but apologise if I do not cover everything. I shall ensure that Members to whom I do not reply get responses in due course.

I join the warm praise for the opening, and customary, speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox). My constituency has more people hailing from the island of Cyprus than any other parliamentary constituency; I represent both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. I particularly welcome the fact that my hon. Friend's speech enables me to say something about Cyprus. Like him, I welcome the progress on the European Union accession talks. I, too, would prefer the whole of Cyprus to join the EU. However, it is vital that we reaffirm, as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe has done, the decision of the European Council at Helsinki that there should be no preconditions to the Republic of Cyprus joining the EU. I look forward to a day when we can once again see a united Cyprus with Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots living together side by side in peace, in the way they do in my constituency and in other parts of north London. Like my hon. Friend, I welcome the new discussions between President Clerides and Mr. Denktash, which I hope will bear fruit in the new year.

There were some thoughtful contributions on international issues. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), who I believe celebrates his 25th anniversary in the House next year, referred—I agree with him—to the brilliant Dimbleby lecture by former President Clinton of the United States. He raised several extremely important issues about Africa, the middle east and other parts of the world and the powers of the International Criminal Court, which I am pleased to undertake to draw to the attention of my colleagues, especially those in the Foreign Office.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) said that the debate had been described by one of our hon. Friends as whingeing gits' day. Perhaps that is not the case today. As I have said, we have had some thoughtful contributions. Like my hon. Friend and other hon. Members, I have experience of some of the difficulties of the Eaga Partnerships scheme. I have had a number of constituency cases, and clearly it is something that the Government should address.

As for the mis-selling by energy companies, I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy in the Department of Trade and Industry has recently written to all gas and electricity suppliers to express concern about the distress caused by instances of sales malpractice, and to demand that suppliers improve their performances. That is an important step, and I think that all Members will want to see progress made.

The right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) contrasted private affluence with public squalor. She rightly talked about the situation in her constituency. All of us want what is best for our constituency. However, in addressing the issue of inequalities in health, Labour Members at least might have a different view about the scale and nature of the challenge that we are facing from that of the right hon. Lady.

I note the recent budget allocations for the right hon. Lady's health authority, the West Surrey health authority. The figures before me show that in the last two years of the Conservative Government the real-terms increases were 0.5 per cent. and 1.4 per cent., whereas this year and next year those increases will be 6.3 per cent. and 6.9 per cent. I do not deny that there are many issues and challenges in the health service across the country, but we are seeing a real and sustained effort to get extra investment into the service.

A number of Members, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), mentioned fireworks. I think that all of us receive correspondence from constituents setting out the sort of concerns that have been expressed this evening. I shall ensure that these concerns are drawn to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for consumer affairs. Enforcement of fireworks regulations is the responsibility of local authority trading standards departments. However, my hon. Friend has recently sought feedback from those departments on levels of compliance and enforcement issues following this year's fireworks season.

I know that my neighbour and my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) raised the issue in a debate in Westminster Hall this year. I look forward to the ten-minute Bill that will be presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) in January.

The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) raised the case of the Royal hospital, Haslar, as he has done on a number of occasions. I congratulate him on his consistency in raising the issue and I pay tribute to his work. I understand—he said this—that the integration process between Haslar and the Portsmouth hospital trust is going well. I am sure that he will keep us informed of progress in the months and years ahead.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), who has now been out of purdah for six months and able to address the Chamber, has apologised for not being able to remain in his place for the closing speeches. I thank him for the tribute he paid to the progress that is being made on modernisation. I shall be very careful in responding to his suggestion that mandatory time limits be introduced for speeches. I know that that is a matter for Mr. Speaker and his deputies, but the debate tonight demonstrated that with self-discipline, we can enable all hon. Members who wish to take part in a debate to do so.

My hon. Friend made a number of important points relating to stroke care. I pay tribute to him and to the work of the Stroke Association. By coincidence, the Minister of

State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), who has responsibility in that sphere, is in the Chamber. I will ensure that Health Ministers are fully informed of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North and that he gets the replies that he sought.

The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), like me, represents an outer-London suburban constituency. I recognised some of the topics and challenges that he described in his contribution. I will pass on his kind words about my right hon. Friend the new Home Secretary, who I am sure will appreciate them, and I will ensure that the various matters mentioned by the hon. Gentleman are passed on.

Several hon. Members acknowledged the fact that police numbers are rising. We are witnessing a change nationwide, but there is still an enormous amount to do. All hon. Members are acutely aware of crime and the fear of crime. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) raised important issues relating to the police, antisocial behaviour and the Government's proposals for reform of the police service. I endorse his remarks about the lost opportunity to take action to deal with incitement to religious hatred. It is sad that that opportunity was lost. That has caused hurt in many parts of our country, particularly to Muslim communities. The House will have to return to the matter.

The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) focused on important issues concerning his constituency. The Government attach great importance to the country's built heritage. Today a new document entitled "The Historic Environment: a Force for our Future" was launched. It sets out how we intend to move forward. I am not aware of the detail of all the hon. Gentleman's specific suggestions, but I will draw his remarks on behalf of his constituency to the attention of appropriate colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) spoke about various topics, most importantly the future of buses. There has been an increase in bus services nationwide, but a huge amount needs to be done. I endorse my hon. Friend's observation that improving the bus network is a vital way of providing for greater social inclusion.

The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) spoke about the alleged fridge mountain. He will be aware that the Government have secured money through the new opportunities fund for a recycling programme. Constructive discussions are taking place between Government, retailers, other companies and contractors responsible for disposal to agree a revised timetable so that the directive can be implemented properly. As a result, I hope that we will not see the fridge mountains to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn), my former Member of Parliament when I lived in his constituency, highlighted the future of the middle east peace process. It is vital that we get the peace process back on track. We will achieve that only if there is a recognition of the right of Israel to live in true security, and a recognition that the Palestinians have the right to a viable state.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) is, in his inimitable way, a regular at pre-recess Adjournment debates. He raised a series of concerns, many relating to his constituency, including a bid for city status. I will do my best to ensure that he gets appropriate responses from the relevant Departments. My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green said that he did not require a reply. As I have only a minute left, he will not get one.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron) spoke about the Pitsea tip and about correspondence and parliamentary questions. I hope that he will not be disappointed if I say that I cannot explain why his letters regarding the Pitsea tip have not yet been answered, but I will draw his concerns to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and encourage him to write fully to the hon. Gentleman.

I am about to run out of time, so I end by wishing right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House a merry Christmas, a happy new year and a restful recess.

**Mr. Ivor Caplin** (Hove): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** I would like from the Chair to reciprocate the many good wishes that have been expressed in the course of the debate and to wish a happy Christmas to all hon. Members and the staff who serve us.

## PETITION

## Young Drivers

10 pm

**Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): In the early hours of the morning of 26 August this year, a fatal car accident happened on the A127 just outside Southend in which three young boys were killed. Mark Baker, aged 18, Glen Dineen, aged 18, and Gary Dineen, aged 16, were all killed. One of the parents feels very strongly that there should be a change in the law for those who have recently passed their driving test.

The petition states:

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Home Department to introduce legislative proposals to prohibit drivers aged between 17 and 21 from carrying passengers aged under 21 until a period of six months has elapsed from the date of passing their driving tests; and to institute a review of driver licensing with a view to introducing a graduated licensing system.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

*To lie upon the Table.*

# Spina Bifida

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

10.1 pm

**Mrs. Helen Clark** (Peterborough): I am very glad to have obtained this opportunity to speak on this long-running and important issue. I have to tell the House that it is not a festive topic. I must also say that the reason why I have sought this debate is that I am very unhappy about the long delay and Government inaction that I shall be forced to detail.

The headquarters of the Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus—ASBAH—is situated in my constituency. Since I was elected in 1997, I have sought to advance the case for the fortification of flour with folic acid, on which the association had already been campaigning for several years. In its view, the Government's delay is "inordinate" and the failures by the Department of Health even to reply to correspondence are "unprecedented".

Spina bifida is one of the most common congenital malformations. It occurs very early in pregnancy, at about four weeks, when the spine and brain are being formed. It is a fault in the development of the spine, which fails to close properly, and it often results in paralysis below the fault. A major secondary complication is hydrocephalus—excess fluid in the brain—which, if it is not treated properly, can cause brain damage. Neural tube defects, or NTD, affect about 1,000 pregnancies a year, and the numbers of births of severely handicapped children have mainly decreased because of terminations of pregnancy. At present, NTD affects about 0.13 live births out of every thousand. It is only abortion that prevents the number from being 10 times higher.

There is a direct relation to the intake by mothers of folates, of which I understand that folic acid is the most easily ingested. Poor diet certainly increases the risk and probably accounts for the higher incidence of NTD among poorer women—perhaps those who are socially excluded. Even with a good diet, however, it is virtually impossible to obtain sufficient quantities of naturally occurring folate. The average daily intake is 200 micrograms.

In 1991, an international study led by our own Medical Research Council found that if all pregnant women who had had a previous spina bifida pregnancy took four milligrams of folic acid a day from three months before conception to the end of the third week of pregnancy, the incidence of NTD could be reduced by 75 per cent. That finding was accepted by many authorities, including the then Government. A subsequent health campaign in 1996 increased knowledge among women about folic acid, with the result that 91 per cent. said that they had heard about it, compared with 9 per cent. before that. However, as we know, 35 to 50 per cent. of pregnancies are unplanned. A survey carried out in 1996 found that only one in 10 mothers took a supplement before conception, so that is not the answer either.

In 1996, the United States centre for disease control recognised that health education and tablets would never lead to a significant reduction in NTDs. The United States legislated to make fortification of flour and some other staple foods compulsory. Of course, the United Kingdom must make its own decisions, but our rates of NTD pregnancies are among the highest in the world. We also have precedents for additives such as calcium in flour and iodine in salt. They are accepted as a means of protecting health.

Representatives of ASBAH met Ministers from the previous Administration more than once. They were told that increased intake of folic acid should be a matter for the individual, not public action. The new Labour Government immediately and rightly put public health at the top of their agenda, and appointed a public health Minister. We have made great strides in recognising the link between social and geographical circumstances and health conditions, and in taking measures to tackle that.

In 1996, ASBAH met the Labour Opposition health spokesperson, who gave an undertaking that the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition—COMA—would investigate the fortification of flour with folic acid, should a Labour Government be elected. In September 1997, as the newly elected Member for Peterborough, I met Andrew Russell, executive director of ASBAH, Professor Nicholas Wald and a member of COMA for a briefing on the matter. I was impressed by the strength of the case in general, including the claim that no other single public health measure could prevent as many serious birth defects, and especially by arguments against concerns about the health of the rest of the population if fortification were introduced.

There were two such anxieties. First, folic acid might interfere with the diagnosis of vitamin B12 deficiency. Secondly, people with epilepsy would risk their condition becoming uncontrolled. The evidence showed that folic acid might improve the anaemia associated with B12 deficiency and thus mask its symptoms. However, it does not cause the deficiency, which can be diagnosed by means other than anaemia. Even higher amounts of folic acid than the target 0.4 milligrams would not affect existing epileptics.

Once a fortification policy had been implemented, newly diagnosed epileptics would be controlled on already supplemented flour. I accept that a more cautious position was subsequently adopted on the latter. However, in 1998, a study of 60 epileptic women who were given 0.8 milligrams in multivitamin supplements, found no side effects. That remains the case. When COMA reported in January 2000, it reached the same conclusion. However, I shall revert to that point shortly.

After my meeting with ASBAH, I sought and later obtained a meeting with the then public health Minister. That happened in November 1997, although the Minister was unavoidably absent and was represented by her parliamentary private secretary. Again, it was attended by Professor Wald, Andrew Russell, Professor Wiseman of the Department of Health and officials.

In the meantime, I had tabled the first of three cross-party early-day motions on the topic and, with Lord Ashley of Stoke, organised a reception in the House of Lords in December to publicise the issues. At the meeting, we were told that COMA was considering the subject and that

"in principle, there was no opposition to the fortification of flour, but the Government would be guided by medical and scientific evidence."

That is fair enough. ASBAH and I were encouraged that that was a change compared with the position of the Conservative Administration.

Professor Wald said that he would favour an amount of 0.4 milligrams a day but that less would be acceptable. Professor Wiseman mentioned some other possible benefits of folic acid supplements such as a possible protection against cardiovascular disease. He said that although the research was inconclusive, that should not be a barrier to fortification on the ground of preventing neural tube defects.

The reception in December gained an unexpected boost. In the weeks that immediately preceded it, Bianca, a central character in the popular soap "EastEnders", played by Patsy Palmer, discovered that she was expecting a spina bifida baby. With her partner, Ricky, she agonised about whether to have an abortion. In the end, she did. Patsy Palmer attended our reception.

At that point, we were very optimistic that a favourable Government decision would be taken, and taken soon. We were led to believe that COMA would report within a year or so and expected a subsequent Government decision. We had to wait another year. ASBAH was extremely disappointed, as it expected the Government to take "a more socially inclusive"—we always talk about that—"and responsible view" than their predecessors. ASBAH and I wrote separately to inquire about progress. We waited several months for a response. COMA reported in January 2000:

"On scientific, medical and public health grounds, the Committee concluded that universal folic acid fortification of flour at 240 micrograms per 100 grams in food products as consumed would have a significant effect in preventing NTD-affected conceptions and births without resulting in unacceptably high intakes in any group of the population."

It said later:

"The Committee has identified a level of fortification that would provide significant benefit in reducing the incidence of pregnancies affected by NTD without exposing any section of the population to risks."

That was good news. I tabled a second early-day motion that welcomed it, but it also called for the forthcoming consultation to be as brief as possible, given the long delays. A few weeks later, I asked a parliamentary question on how the consultation on the report's practical and legal implications would be conducted. I was told:

"A public consultation will be undertaken shortly inviting comments on the report's conclusions."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 2000; Vol. 343, c. 338W.]

Several weeks later, ASBAH received another letter stating the Government's intention to issue a consultation document shortly, which would inform future policy. Twelve weeks were to be allowed for responses.

On 24 May, I tabled a parliamentary question asking when the consultation document would be published. Again, I was told "shortly". On 25 July, in response to yet another parliamentary question, I learned that the document had been published and that the consultation was to run until 31 October 2000. I am sorry if this is becoming tedious, but it is essential to understand the frustration experienced by those of us who have been involved in the issue for a long time. I am afraid that I have not finished.

For the past year, ASBAH and I have been trying to obtain a response from the Department of Health to the results of the consultation. I shall not list all the dates and I certainly shall not identify the Ministers concerned, but I will say that three ASBAH letters went unanswered and that it was erroneously claimed in a letter to me that a reply had been sent. I wrote to the Secretary of State at the end of August, saying how disturbed and concerned I was by such delay and discourtesy and that I had to agree with chief executive Andrew Russell that the delay looked rather like a "substitute for decisiveness". Those are his words, not mine.

I also said that I was, as I remain, concerned about the monetary and human costs of the delay, including those of the many avoidable pregnancy terminations that occur each year due to neural tube defects. It is traumatic for a woman to have a termination. The Department of Health letter to ASBAH dated 19 November said that the majority of responses were in favour of fortification, but again raised the issue of B12 deficiency. The good news was that apparently crucial research on the prevalence of that condition had just been completed. Another issue related to the technical aspects of fortification and, apparently, the Food Standards Agency will engage in detailed discussions with industry representatives to see what might be feasible.

In my first meeting with ASBAH in June 1997, I was assured that there were no technical obstacles, but that the industry had naturally said that it required a directive from the Government before implementing fortification. I tabled a third early-day motion on 9 November to draw attention to some of the facts, noting that the Department's deadline for consultation responses had passed more than a year ago and urging an early announcement of its intentions.

I agreed with ASBAH that, if we had heard nothing by spring, we would go ahead with yet another function in the Commons, but that, hopefully, we would not need to do so. I still hope that that may be the case, or that the function will go ahead, but that we shall be celebrating and not endlessly calling for action. I was horrified, therefore, when very shortly afterwards an article appeared in the *British Medical Journal* calling for further delays on the ground of the masking effects of folic acid on B12 deficiency and yet more research.

As will be apparent from what I said earlier, the article is based on no new evidence. The reservations expressed by its authors, Professors Wharton and Booth, were dismissed by COMA two years ago. Worst of all, the call for field trials—a rather peculiar phrase in itself—is, I understand, a non-starter, as it would involve millions of participants. In any case, the experience of fortification in the United States already provides the necessary evidence. As I have said, flour fortification has been established there since 1998, with full public acceptance. It has involved minimal cost, and no hazards have emerged. We are talking about a population of a quarter of a billion, which strikes me as quite a large field sample on which to base any conclusions.

Surely enough is enough. We have the evidence; the precedents are there; the practical barriers can be surmounted. Please, please, at Christmas time, may I have an assurance that the Government will follow the recommendations of their own Committee—as they promised they would five years ago—and recommend the fortification of flour with the suggested and agreed amount very, very soon?

10.16 pm

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark) on raising this issue. I assure

*[Jacqui Smith]*

her that the Government take it very seriously, especially given that—as she pointed out—about 100 births are affected by neural tube defects each year, and spina bifida is the most common of those defects.

We have not been resting on our laurels since the consultation exercise; a significant amount of work has been done. I realise that my hon. Friend and others who have campaigned in favour of fortification would like to see faster progress—particularly organisations such as the Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus.

Let me record the Department's apology to ASBAH for the delays in answers to correspondence. Although those oversights are regrettable, I hope that I can reassure my hon. Friend that they were purely administrative, and not due to an unwillingness to communicate. No doubt it will be appreciated that the issue is complex, and that the universal fortification of any food—mainly bread, in this case—is a major public health issue that requires the fullest consultation and consideration.

As my hon. Friend said, during the 1960s it was suggested that the risk of a woman's bearing a child with a neural tube defect might be affected by her intake of the vitamin folate. In 1991, definitive evidence was established in a trial by the Medical Research Council which showed that supplementation with folic acid—the artificial form of the naturally occurring vitamin folate—significantly reduced the risk of NTDs in women who had already been through a pregnancy affected by NTD.

Following that, the then Government initially issued guidance about supplementation with 5 mg of folic acid to prevent the recurrence of NTDs. The guidance was then expanded to cover the prevention of first-time NTDs, with the recommendation that all women planning pregnancies should take 400 mg as a daily dietary supplement from the time when they began trying to conceive until the 12th week of pregnancy. They were also advised to consume folate-rich foods.

In 1995, the Health Education Authority began a nationally integrated campaign aimed at increasing the average daily intake of folate and folic acid. The key objectives were to increase awareness of the importance of additional folic acid before conception and 12 weeks into pregnancy in the general female population and in health professionals, to encourage fortification to increase the availability of fortified breads and breakfast cereals, and to make fortified products easily identifiable by promoting the use of a logo—the folic-acid flash—to highlight foods rich in folic acid.

As my hon. Friend suggested, the campaign achieved some success. Spontaneous, unprompted awareness among women increased from 9 per cent. in 1995 to 49 per cent. in 1998, and prompted awareness rose from 51 per cent. to 89 per cent. The percentage of women claiming to take folic acid when trying for a baby had also risen from 24 to 38 per cent.

As my hon. Friend said, although the campaign was generally successful, it had its limitations, as about half of all pregnancies in the United Kingdom are unplanned. Moreover, by the time that a woman knows that she is pregnant it may be too late for folic acid to be effective. Reaching those women remains a challenge. That is why there have been calls for food fortification.

The Department asked its advisory committee—the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy—to consider the dietary intakes and nutritional status of the population with regard to folic acid, with particular reference to its contribution to preventing disease, and to make recommendations.

The Government decided to consult on the recommendations in the report, as a number of other options were also outlined. Consultation took place between July and October 2000. Views were sought on whether universal fortification of bread or flour was desirable, whether any such fortification should be mandatory or voluntary, and the practicalities of fortification. That consultation also sought views on wider issues, such as the impact of the recommendations on consumers and consumer choice, food labelling and technical issues for the industry.

A summary of responses to the fortification consultation was posted on the Department of Health website in July 2001. There were 167 respondents to the consultation, including people from academia, consumer and expert groups, trade organisations and individual companies, health authorities, local government and individuals.

The consultation was complex, and the responses raised a number of issues. Although the majority of respondents—59 per cent.—were in favour of fortification, that was not overwhelming. The most common concerns expressed were about the potential risks of fortification, especially the risk of vitamin B12 deficiency among older adults. A significant number felt that sufficient information was still not available about the possible adverse effects.

Other concerns were about the possible restriction of consumer choice. Almost 80 per cent. of respondents felt that it was important to maintain an element of consumer choice. Another issue was how fortification would be managed, and 85 per cent. felt that there should be restrictions on the level of fortification or the types of foods fortified. Respondents from industry also stated that technical problems may be associated with any mandatory policy.

All those concerns demanded further exploration, and the Department and the Food Standards Agency commissioned relevant research and undertook further work to formulate firm policy options.

As with any public health policy, we need to balance benefits against risks. Although the benefits for women of child-bearing age are well established, it is clear that in the opinion of many the potential risks, particularly the risk of B12 deficiency in older people, are not. Therefore, the Government did not feel that it was right to make a decision without further work on this and other issues. I shall explain what we have done in the intervening period and the stage we are at now.

It is known that high levels of folic acid can make it difficult to diagnose vitamin B12 deficiency. Severe deficiency of vitamin B12 has two main effects: it can cause anaemia identical to that of folate deficiency; and, with prolonged deficiency, it can cause damage to the nerves and the spinal cord, leading to severe disability. The anaemia usually appears first, and thus allows early detection of vitamin B12 deficiency before any nerve damage occurs. Older adults are at greatest risk of B12 deficiency as they are less able to absorb the vitamin from foods. There is, therefore, concern that increased

fortification of foods with folic acid could increase the number of older people at risk of undetected B12 deficiency.

The level of fortification suggested by COMA, at 240 micrograms per 100 g, was designed to minimise the number of older people at risk of having high intakes of folic acid. COMA estimated that approximately 0.6 to 1 per cent. of older people could have intakes of folate high enough to mask B12 deficiency if all flour was fortified. However, information on the true prevalence of B12 deficiency was unknown at the time of the consultation, and it is only with that information that we can estimate how many individuals could be at risk of B12 deficiency. I am pleased to say that research on the prevalence of B12 deficiency and its diagnosis among adults over 65 years of age was commissioned by the Department and has now been completed. The work addressed the prevalence of vitamin B12 deficiency in older people, the most appropriate methods to diagnose it, and the feasibility of its routine identification in older people.

That research is awaiting publication and, as a result, I am unable to release exact details of the findings. However, the results are in line with COMA in as much as that fortification would increase the risk of B12 deficiency among a significant number of older adults. To make full sense of the findings on the prevalence of B12 deficiency, a cost-benefit analysis has been carried out by the Department of Health.

Preserving consumer choice was a significant issue for many people—almost 80 per cent. of respondents. Many responses suggested various options for certain types of bread which could remain unfortified. The Food Standards Agency therefore undertook some statistical modelling to look at consumption patterns and what effect those various options might have on folate intakes. The agency has also been addressing other issues of particular concern to consumers, such as the labelling of fortified foods.

Issues have also been raised on the technical aspects of fortification which need consideration. Many responses from industry pointed to the complexity of the technical processes. Folate added to flour is lost to some extent during processing. The amount lost is known to vary substantially between products and, as a result, it could be difficult to achieve a specified target amount in foods as consumed. Respondents from industry also highlighted problems around the fortification of wholemeal flour, to which no vitamins or minerals are generally added at present. To address those concerns, the Food Standards Agency has conducted detailed discussions with industry so as to ensure that any action proposed would be feasible.

In addition, the Food Standards Agency has assessed various legal aspects of fortification. Those include the public health justification under article 30 of the EC treaty; the terms of the notification under the treaty to the European Commission and member states; the use of powers under the Food Safety Act 1990 to control fortification levels; and issues under the Human Rights Act 1998, relating in particular to consumer choice.

The information gathered from that extra work has now been collated and is being considered. As my hon. Friend may know, that has been a UK-wide exercise carried out jointly between the Health Departments and the Food Standards Agency. Ministers from all the UK Health Departments will therefore need to consider the issue. As part of that, there will also be a formal recommendation from the Food Standards Agency board to Health Ministers. My hon. Friend may be reassured to learn that I understand that the Food Standards Agency board will discuss its possible recommendation at a meeting in the new year.

I hope that I have reassured Members, especially my hon. Friend, that we have been taking the issue seriously and have considered the issues in great depth. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that the issue is complex and it is important to make the right decision on a fortification that could have wide-ranging implications, both beneficial ones and ones that should provoke further consideration.

I remind Members that we continue to encourage women planning to become pregnant to increase their folate intake, including the use of supplements. We also support the folic acid flash scheme which helps consumers to identify foods that have been fortified with folic acid. I am pleased that we have had the opportunity this evening to address the issues, to allow the Government to lay out the action that has been taken and to reassure my hon. Friend that we take the issue very seriously.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Tuesday 8 January 2002*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### Middle East Peace Process

1. **Mr. James Clappison** (Hertsmere): What recent representations he has received concerning the middle east peace process. [22993]

2. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What recent discussions he has had with Palestinian leaders on the political situation in the middle east. [22994]

6. **Mr. Khalid Mahmood** (Birmingham, Perry Barr): What diplomatic measures the UK Government are taking to encourage the Israeli Government to return to the peace process. [22998]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw):** Her Majesty's Government are fully engaged with the United States and our European Union partners in trying to move the peace process forward. The recent reduction in violence in Israel and the occupied territories is encouraging, but this must be sustained. Both parties should take the opportunity to move towards the implementation of the Mitchell and Tenet plans and the early resumption of negotiations. The Palestinian Authority should bring terrorists to justice and dismantle the infrastructure of terrorist organisations. Israel should withdraw its military forces from area A, lift restrictions and closures and freeze all settlement activity in the occupied territories.

**Mr. Clappison:** What is the Foreign Secretary's response to the letter that he received from Shimon Peres about the call from Mr. Rafsanjani, one of Iran's leaders, for jihad operations against Israel to continue until Israel no longer existed? Given the vile propaganda that keeps coming out of Iran, the widespread suspicion that Iran had a hand in the attempted smuggling of 50 tonnes of rockets and other weapons aboard the Karin and the need for our struggle against international terrorism to be consistent, can the Foreign Secretary clarify where yesterday's Government announcement of a £28 million export credit guarantee for Iran fits into all of this?

**Mr. Straw:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the ingenuity of his question. We condemn those who believe that the state of Israel should not exist. Indeed, there will be an effective peace process only if the state of Israel recognises the right of the Palestinians to their own viable state. At the same time, not only the Palestinians but everyone else in the Arab and Islamic world, which includes the state of Iran, must recognise the right of Israel to live safely within secure borders. That is fundamental to our approach towards the peace process, the approach of the United States and that of the European Union.

As for the question about relations with Iran, about which I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to ask me, we believe that we can make these points better through dialogue with Iran rather than, as I think was implicit in his suggestion, by withdrawing diplomatic relations.

**Helen Jackson:** What possible justification was there for trying to prevent the leader of the Palestinians from attending the inter-faith Christmas mass at Bethlehem? What representations did the Government make to Israel about this? Is it not extremely dangerous, in the current situation, for anyone in the Israeli Government to present President Arafat as being the same as the terrorist organisations Hamas or Jihad?

**Mr. Straw:** We did not think that this restriction was justified. Our position is that closures should be lifted; that must apply to the leader of the Palestinian Authority, as it must to all residents within the occupied territories.

**Mr. Mahmood:** I wholly agree with my right hon. Friend in condemning all terrorism, but does he agree that the time has come for the debate to move forward and for people to start addressing these long-standing issues and the problems that have existed between the state of Israel and Palestine? Until we have a viable discussion on how to move matters forward, the issues that will extinguish the roots of terrorism will not be addressed. As one great statesman in this House once said, we need more jaw-jaw, not war-war.

**Mr. Straw:** Of course there has to be a political process towards a settlement of this long-standing conflict in the middle east, but a reduction in violence and terrorism is a pre-condition of any peace process. In that context, we greatly welcome the reduction of violence since President Arafat's speech on 16 December, in which he called for a halt to all military operations, especially suicide bombings. Since that date, just one Israeli has been killed and 15 Palestinians have died. That is a very significant reduction from the previous levels of violence.

We support the peace process and we support negotiations, but better efforts must also be made by both sides in the current context, particularly by the Palestinian Authority, to restrain the terrorist organisations based in the occupied territories from acting in Israel.

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I welcome the Secretary of State's even-handed approach to the problem. However, if we look at the Palestinian problem historically, does it not behove the Government to make extra efforts to ensure fair play for the Palestinian people? The issue has rightly been brought into focus because of the war on terrorism but many people outside this place believe that all the Palestinians get paid is lip service.

**Mr. Straw:** I fully understand the need for fairness towards the Palestinians. That is essentially and actively the approach adopted by Her Majesty's Government, not least in the context of the European Union, which is providing more aid to the Palestinian Authority, with our full support, than any other international donor. We are doing a great deal else to support the Palestinian Authority's legitimate activities and to relieve the humanitarian situation in the occupied territories. That is essential, as is a recognition by those who lead the Palestinian Authority and the rest of the Arab world of the right of Israel and Israelis to live in peace, with security.

**Mr. Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton): Does not the Foreign Secretary accept that the peace process requires Palestine Liberation Organisation cum Palestinian Authority structures that offer strong leadership and the ability to control their citizens and uphold an agreement? What recent assessment has the Foreign Secretary made of Yasser Arafat's position in the PLO? When the Prime Minister next visits Israel and the middle east, will he deign to take with him the Foreign Secretary or, indeed, any other Foreign Office Minister; or with foreign policy now being entirely conducted from Downing street, will he and his Foreign Office colleagues continue to be sidelined and ignored?

**Mr. Straw:** On the serious part of the hon. Gentleman's question, we will continue to do all that we can to work for a settlement inside the occupied territories. The hon. Gentleman asks me about the position of the leader of the Palestinian Authority. He is the elected leader, and we work on the basis—it is wise for any hon. Member to do so—that we should deal with him as that elected leader. That is exactly the point that we have urged on the Government of Israel.

**Ms Christine Russell** (City of Chester): Following the question asked by the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), may I ask my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary whether the Israeli authorities have furnished him with any evidence to show that the arms being carried by the cargo ship that was apprehended by the defence forces were destined for the Palestinian Authority, rather than another terrorist group in the middle east?

**Mr. Straw:** The Israeli Government have passed to the United States Administration and ourselves information that they claim to have received about the destination of that ship and those who were sailing on it. The position of the US State Department and the United Kingdom Government is that we continue to assess all the information that we have received about the origin of that ship and its destination, but we have yet to reach firm conclusions.

## Zimbabwe

3. **Mr. Michael Moore** (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): What recent discussions he has had with Commonwealth counterparts on Zimbabwe. [22995]

11. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): When he next expects to visit Zimbabwe to discuss the Abuja agreement with the Government; and if he will make a statement. [23003]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw):** Since the House last discussed Zimbabwe and despite the Abuja agreement of 6 September, political violence, including deaths, the occupation of property and the harassment of independent journalists, has continued. The situation overall in Zimbabwe constitutes a serious and persistent violation of the Commonwealth's political values and the rule of law, as enshrined in the 1991 Harare Commonwealth declaration. That is our view, and it was also the unanimous conclusion of the meeting of the Commonwealth ministerial action group, which was held in London on 20 December. At that meeting, CMAG decided, because of its deep concern about the conditions, to place Zimbabwe on its formal agenda and to review the situation at its next meeting on 30 January.

**Mr. Moore:** The Foreign Secretary is correct to say that, since the Abuja agreement and the Commonwealth ministerial meeting, intimidation, torture and violence against political opponents and the press have increased substantially. In those circumstances, will he tell us exactly what Mugabe has to do before the Commonwealth will introduce sanctions? Is he confident that the advice that he is giving to the Home Secretary will ensure that people from Zimbabwe who oppose the regime there will not be deported back to that country, where they face almost certain personal physical danger, or possibly death?

**Mr. Straw:** Let me deal with the hon. Gentleman's final specific point before I deal with the general situation. On the deportation of failed asylum seekers, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary exercises the same very great care as I did and officials in the Home Office did to ensure that, wherever humanly possible, no failed asylum seeker is deported—even though their claim for asylum has failed—if they are to be in danger when they are returned. That remains the position. In the case to which I think the hon. Gentleman refers, the asylum seeker had his application turned down by officials and by an independent judicial tribunal and leave to appeal was then refused by a further appeal tribunal. However, the matter is still being considered by my right hon. Friend.

The main issue that the hon. Gentleman raises is the position of the Commonwealth. He will know that it consists of 54 member states of which we are simply one. One of my key aims has been to ensure that the issue ceases to be a bilateral one and is made an issue of shared concern by the international community. However, as far as the position of the United Kingdom is concerned, if the situation in Zimbabwe continues to deteriorate, Britain will argue for Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in March.

**Mr. Bellingham:** The Foreign Secretary said that opposition politicians had been intimidated, and they have also been arrested on trumped-up charges. Is he aware that, today, President Mugabe presented a Bill to Parliament to ban foreign journalists and to ban

independent foreign observers from the country? All that is taking place while the economy of Zimbabwe is sinking to its knees. If the United States Congress can introduce measures against despots such as Mugabe and can freeze their bank accounts and prohibit their foreign travel, surely our Government can do the same. Surely the Government must now get off the fence and start to get tougher.

**Mr. Straw:** I think that the hon. Gentleman wrote that supplementary before he heard my remarks. On Zimbabwe, no one could accuse me of having been on the fence from the very moment I took this job or since. I was extremely anxious at the Abuja meetings on 6 September to ensure that the concern about Zimbabwe that had long been felt in this country and on both sides of the House was shared by other Commonwealth countries and particularly by African Commonwealth countries. The hon. Gentleman refers to the condition of the Zimbabwe economy. It is very serious and, in turn, it is seriously affecting the economies of other south African states.

The question of sanctions will come up before the European Union at the meeting of Foreign Ministers on 28 January. It will be before the meeting of the Commonwealth ministerial action group on 30 January, although decisions have to be made at the full Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting at the beginning of March.

On the United States, I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that the law that has been passed simply empowers the President to consult other members of the international community. No decisions to impose sanctions have yet been taken and are not likely to be taken in the short term by the United States Administration. However, we continue to keep the question of sanctions under very close review.

**Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): I recognise that my right hon. Friend has referred to issues of great concern and note that the presidential election is less than three months away. However, can anyone be sure that there will be a free and fair election for the President of Zimbabwe? If we cannot be sure, should we not have Commonwealth and other observers in place now to examine what is taking place there at this time?

**Mr. Straw:** No, we cannot be sure that there will be free and fair elections in Zimbabwe whenever they take place at some time in, what I imagine, will be the next two or three months. However, we can be sure that, if the elections are not free and fair, Zimbabwe will be in the clearest and most flagrant breach of declarations to which it signed up in, ironically, Harare in 1991, in Millbrook in New Zealand in 1995 and again when it recommitted itself to both those declarations on 6 September in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria.

**Mr. Derek Wyatt** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Have we done any research into whether President Mugabe has laundered money either through the City or through Switzerland?

**Mr. Straw:** I have seen no evidence to that effect.

**Mr. Michael Ancram** (Devizes): The people of Zimbabwe must have been mightily reassured last Friday to learn that, far from resenting the Prime Minister running his own foreign policy, the Foreign Secretary is enjoying

"ensuring that we are well developed in other areas of foreign policy, for example over Zimbabwe."

On the day that Mugabe and his henchmen are forcing through legislation destroying the freedom of the press, forbidding independent electoral scrutiny, cancelling the Abuja commitment to freedom of expression and at a time when intimidation is institutionalised, murder of opposition members is commonplace and the democratic process is being dismantled, could the Foreign Secretary tell us what on earth his well developed policy is actually achieving?

**Mr. Straw:** Again, someone wrote a supplementary question before hearing the answer.

I repeat that I have been trying to ensure that Zimbabwe, not Britain, is isolated for the terrible actions that President Mugabe and his henchmen are taking. That has received the approbation of many Conservative Back Benchers, as well as Labour Members. The right hon. Gentleman wants us to follow a policy that is the exact reverse, in which Britain is isolated and we play into Mugabe's hands so that he can parade himself as the anti-colonialist hero against the former colonialist power. That would be the worst possible approach, and it is of course the one that the right hon. Gentleman wishes to follow.

Our approach has been to internationalise the issue, while taking a firm lead within all the international forums in which we speak. That is why the General Affairs Council—the Foreign Affairs Council—of the European Union is in train to take firm action on this; why I called a meeting of Commonwealth Ministers for 20 December; and why I have spelled out to the House that if the situation in Zimbabwe continues to disintegrate we will argue for Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth.

**Mr. Ancram:** May I say that I listen carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman says, but all I hear is him talking about talks in the future, more promises and more talks after that? We want to hear about effective action. Does he remember stating on 6 September last year that the Abuja agreement would be regarded as a positive step forward and that he was pleased with it? Does he agree that in practice it has not added up to a row a beans and that the situation in Zimbabwe has deteriorated since then? Why has he proved so toothless and left it to the Americans to take the lead by imposing personal sanctions on Mugabe and his henchman, which have been welcomed by Morgan Tsvangirai? Regardless of what he said a minute ago, why are we not helping to bring pressure on Zimbabwe, but instead are busy deporting Zimbabweans, such as Gerald Muketiwa, back to Zimbabwe, where he is now the victim of Mugabe's violence, as we learned from *The Observer* on 30 December? When will he stop faffing about and start putting together an international coalition to bring real pressure to bear on Mugabe and his henchmen, or is he waiting for the Prime Minister to take that over from him as well?

**Mr. Straw:** The United States has done no more than bring the powers that are available to its Executive into

line with those that are already available inside the European Union. None of those powers has been implemented.

As for Abuja, I made it clear on the very evening that the statement was signed that it would be judged not by the words on the paper, but by whether action followed it, especially by the Government of Zimbabwe. It is a matter of record that action by President Mugabe has not followed the agreement. The crucial thing about the Abuja settlement is that it provides us with a template—a yardstick—against which to judge the action or inaction of the Government of Zimbabwe. The right hon. Gentleman talks about putting an international coalition together; that is exactly what I have done. I note that whenever he is asked what else he would do or what he would do differently, he has no answer.

## Afghanistan (Women)

4. **Mr. Bill Olner** (Nuneaton): What representations he has made to encourage equality of treatment for women in Afghanistan. [22996]

7. **Mrs. Joan Humble** (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): What representations he has made to the Government of Afghanistan to encourage equality of treatment for women. [22999]

10. **Jane Griffiths** (Reading, East): What steps he is taking to assist the participation of women in the future Government of Afghanistan. [23002]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw):** We are strongly committed to the equal treatment of women in Afghanistan. We are extremely pleased that the chairman of the Interim Authority, Dr. Karzai, pledged to uphold the rights of women at the authority's inauguration on 22 December, and that two senior members of that authority are highly distinguished Afghan women.

**Mr. Olner:** I thank the Minister for his encouraging reply. Does he agree that although the events of 11 September were an evil act of terrorism that we all abhor, the repression of women in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime is an equally evil act against human rights, especially against women? Will he ensure that the good work that we are doing with non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam will continue and will receive our full support long after the glare of publicity has gone? It is easy to do things now, but in several years' time there will still be a need to support the human rights of women in Afghanistan and surrounding areas. Will he assure me that we will do that?

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. He may be interested to know that the Prime Minister met a group of Afghan women during his visit to the region yesterday. We continually stress that this is a long-term project, and we cannot repeat the mistakes that the international community made with Afghanistan in the early 1990s, when we simply walked away from the problems. There have been encouraging signs such as women returning to education and work. As my hon. Friend rightly said, women suffered terribly under the Taliban, and we will of course ensure that we keep up the good work that we have been doing in that respect.

**Mrs. Humble:** I thank my hon. Friend for that very encouraging reply. I urge him to draw to the attention of the Afghan Government the recent Brussels proclamation by more than 30 Afghan women's organisations and NGOs, which not only urges Afghan women to be part of the peace process but calls for them to be allowed to work and to use their undoubted skills, experience and expertise to rebuild their economy and their country.

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We fully support the declaration. Women in Afghanistan are now going back to work and are being given access, which was denied them under the Taliban, to education and health care, which are perhaps two of the most important factors. As I said earlier, two women are leading members of the Interim Authority; indeed, one is a vice chair. We hope that when the transitional authority is established in June women will participate and that when free and fair elections are held in Afghanistan in two years—which will be a remarkable achievement—women will play their full part in that process too.

**Jane Griffiths:** My hon. Friend will be aware that literacy levels among women in Afghanistan are worrying low, possible as low as 4 per cent., as a result of the policies not only of the Taliban but of the Rabbani regime. What steps can be taken to promote literacy and education for women so that future generations of women will be able to play a full part in the life of the Afghan nation?

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We are playing a leading role in that, both through our new diplomatic representation in Kabul and through the good work, which has already been alluded to, being carried out by British and British-supported NGOs. My hon. Friend is right: the denial of education to women in Afghanistan will leave a terrible legacy for some time to come. We need to get girls back to school and to offer adult education to women so that they can play a full role in society that will be good for Afghanistan and for the international community.

**Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): I suspect that there is little difference between hon. Members on either side of the House about what the Minister has said, and I applaud the Government's position on the matter. However, when democratic elections take place in Afghanistan, as we all hope and trust they will, will the Government play their part, through the United Nations, in ensuring that women who are illiterate, who are in purdah or who wear the burqa have the opportunity to express their opinion freely?

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Yes. The nature of any Government in Afghanistan in two years' time is a matter for the Afghan people, but the hon. Gentleman will remember that in 1964 women in Afghanistan had the vote, and certainly to deprive them of it now would be an extremely retrograde step.

**Mr. Gary Streeter** (South-West Devon): When did the Minister last meet his counterpart in the Department for International Development to discuss the empowerment

of women in Afghanistan? Will he assure the House that he will work closely with the Department—that has not always happened in the past—to make sure that we are drawing on the wisdom and knowledge of NGOs, charities and DFID and are doing the right thing to empower women in Afghanistan, and not just what the Foreign Office thinks is the right thing?

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Foreign Office Ministers have been working extremely closely with Ministers from DFID. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has told me that he will have another such meeting with the Secretary of State for International Development tomorrow to discuss the very issues raised by the hon. Gentleman.

**Tony Baldry** (Banbury): Better education, health and employment opportunities for women in Afghanistan will be largely dependent on the international community committing substantial sums to the country's reconstruction. Is the Minister convinced that the international community, including the United States, has the determination to commit the sums necessary over the time necessary to ensure that there is decent reconstruction in Afghanistan?

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Yes, I am confident of that. All the statements made by our Prime Minister, President Bush and Secretary of State Powell have made it clear that the international community will not walk away from Afghanistan. There is huge job of work of reconstruction to be done. The evidence so far is good: when the UN has called for an international response in terms of donations from various countries, those donations have been forthcoming extremely quickly.

**Joan Ruddock** (Lewisham, Deptford): Does my hon. Friend agree with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which says that gender

"is central to our understanding of complex emergencies and the effectiveness of humanitarian action"?

Does he know that the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, which covers the major donor agencies, has found that two thirds of the evaluation reports on humanitarian action make no reference to gender? Will he ensure that as the international reconstruction money going to Afghanistan is spent, there is proper monitoring of gender?

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I assure my hon. Friend that the British Government are keen to ensure that the whole reconstruction effort in Afghanistan involves the sort of monitoring she suggests. The UN is also committed to that. I was sorry to hear the disappointing figure she quotes; if she will allow me, I shall look into it and write to her about it in more detail.

### Afghan Refugees

5. **Mr. Parmjit Dhanda** (Gloucester): What recent discussions he has had with the Government of Pakistan about the movement of Afghans across their border. [22997]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw):** The movement of Afghans across the border into Pakistan is one of the many issues relating to Afghanistan about which we are in constant touch with the Government of Pakistan. I discussed that with President Musharraf on 28 November, and over Christmas with Foreign Minister Sattar; the Prime Minister did so during his visit to Islamabad yesterday. We welcome President Musharraf's statement at the end of his meeting with the Prime Minister. The security of Pakistan's borders, east and west, is of crucial importance in the fight against terrorism.

**Mr. Dhanda:** The Government should be congratulated on the role that they have played in ensuring a new and representative Government in Afghanistan, but there is great uncertainty about the whereabouts of Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden. Will my hon. Friend tell the House what discussions he has had on securing the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, especially at a time of heightened tension in the area, when Pakistan might be considering redeploying some of its troops toward the border it shares with India?

**Mr. Straw:** Security of that border is extremely important, not least to efforts to prevent infiltration into Pakistan by al-Qaeda fighters from Afghanistan. In that context, I am glad to report to the House that yesterday, during his press conference with our Prime Minister, President Musharraf said that Pakistan remains conscious of its responsibilities on the western borders and of the importance of troops deployed there to seal the borders. He also expressed the hope that it would not become necessary to move those troops as a result of the conflict and pressure in Kashmir.

**Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): Will the Foreign Secretary tell the House roughly how many Afghans are currently refugees in Pakistan and whether there is an ordered policy for their return to their homeland? Does he accept that if too many were to return too quickly, they might find themselves in a worse position than their current one, which is grave, and that intelligence and the knowledge of many experts will be demanded to ensure that the great movement back is carried out in an ordered way during the reconstruction of Afghanistan?

**Mr. Straw:** The estimate taken before the end of the conflict—the hon. Gentleman appreciates that it was a rough one—was that about 2 million Afghans were to be found on the eastern border of Afghanistan adjacent to Pakistan, and between 1.5 and 2 million on the western border adjacent to Iran. Our understanding is that up to 5,000 Afghans are returning home every day. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern to ensure that such movements are organised properly, so far as is possible. That runs into the overwhelming case that the international community's commitment to Afghanistan should be long term and backed by funds. For that reason among many, we welcome Japan's call for a donors conference at the end of the month. It will be attended by senior Ministers from this country, the United States and many other major donor countries.

**Mr. Piara S. Khabra** (Ealing, Southall): What action is Pakistan taking against organisations known to be based in Pakistan that support terrorism across the border?

**Mr. Straw:** Since the outrageous assault on the Indian Parliament on 13 December, Pakistan has taken increasing action against terrorist organisations masquerading as freedom fighters that have been operating in the state of Pakistan and in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. President Musharraf has banned two of the worst organisations, Jaish e Muhammed and Lasjka e Toiba. He and his security forces have also arrested a number of people known to have been involved in terrorism across the border or within Pakistan. We welcome those steps, but we also look forward to further steps being taken by the Government of Pakistan fully to implement United Nations Security Council resolution 1373.

**Mr. Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton): In applauding President Musharraf's determination to crack down on terrorists and militants in his own country and prevent al-Qaeda terrorists from infiltrating that sensitive region, will the Foreign Secretary take the opportunity to give the House the Government's assessment of President Musharraf's ability to control elements of his own armed forces, specifically the Inter-Services Intelligence? What assessment has he made of any destabilisation in Pakistan that might result from large numbers of Afghan refugees who could do rather more than simply sit in refugee camps?

**Mr. Straw:** We welcome the action taken by President Musharraf so far and look forward to further firm action from him, the whole Government and the security forces of Pakistan. In our judgment, President Musharraf is very much in control of that Government, and the hon. Gentleman will know that he fired the previous director general of Pakistan's intelligence service because he was not satisfied with his loyalty. As for the infiltration of refugees by terrorists across the borders, that is one of many reasons why we are looking to the Government of Pakistan to maintain its garrison of troops and its patrolling of its western border with Afghanistan, as well as its eastern border with India.

## Laeken Summit

8. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): If he will make a statement on what was agreed at the Laeken summit with regard to the establishment of a convention to prepare for the next IGC. [23000]

**The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain):** I refer my hon. Friend to the statement on the Laeken European Council made by the Prime Minister on 17 December.

**Mr. David:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. Given the need to reconnect the European Union with its citizens, does he agree that national Parliaments have a crucial role to play in the forthcoming convention?

**Peter Hain:** Yes, I do. That is why representatives from our Parliament will attend the convention. The encouraging thing from Laeken was the recognition, probably for the first time, by the European Council that member states' powers should be not be further encroached on. On the contrary: there should be an examination which could lead

"to restoring tasks to the Member States and to assigning new missions to the Union",

or to the extension of existing powers. In other words, the European Union recognised that the process of centralisation had to be reconsidered and reversed as a result of British influence there. However, our Parliament should certainly have its voice heard at the convention.

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): In view of that, will the Minister give the House an unequivocal, unconditional, unambiguous guarantee that the parliamentary representatives will be chosen by Members of Parliament, not by members of the Executive?

**Peter Hain:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter, on which we have received representations from the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Leader of the Opposition. Consultations are taking place and we are sympathetic to the views expressed to us.

**Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, within two to three years, there will be a written constitution for this country? It will be drafted in Brussels as a result of the Laeken summit. Early drafts of that constitution are already being penned by Valery Giscard d'Estaing. Does he share the feeling that it is very important that our British representatives be appointed quickly to the constitutional convention? Will he also make a point of consulting the Speaker and any other necessary authorities so that the two representatives of the British Parliament are seen to represent all parties in this House and carry the full weight of the British Parliament as well as the British Government?

**Peter Hain:** I well understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. We are anxious that the representatives to the convention should represent the House. There will be consultations, as there already have been. We are listening very carefully to representations made to us from the House.

**Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): With his newly acquired Euro-enthusiasm, will the Minister tell us whether this convention will be likely to discuss the new proposal for an elected Euro-president? What particular powers would the new president of Europe have, and where precisely will his base be located? [HON. MEMBERS: "Southend."] Will he have a palace in one country or separate palaces in each member state?

**Peter Hain:** I think that the election of a president of the European Union, especially, as is proposed by some, by the citizens of the European Union, is frankly a barmy idea. It will be opposed by the British Government and any such suggestion that is made through the convention will not fly at the intergovernmental conference. I ask hon. Members to remember that the convention does not

bind the intergovernmental conference that will probably occur early in 2004. We will have a say there and, if necessary, we will exercise a veto there.

**Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): My right hon. Friend rightly implied that the representatives of Parliament should be seen not as placemen or placewomen, but as proper representatives. He went on to say that there had already been consultations. With whom have those consultations been held and in what circumstances?

**Peter Hain:** My right hon. Friend has, as he well knows, written to us.

**Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): He has not had a reply.

**Peter Hain:** I know, but Christmas has intervened and we are considering the issues. No game is being played here. We are anxious that the very strong views that have been represented by my right hon. Friend and others should be taken into account. Can I say too—

**Hon. Members:** Answer!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Hon. Members should let the Minister answer in his own way.

**Peter Hain:** I am grateful, Mr. Speaker. Consultations occurred when a convention was held some years ago on the charter of rights. In addition, we have had representations that we are taking very seriously indeed.

**Mr. Michael Ancram** (Devizes): The Minister's definition of consultations does not bode well for the consultations that are to take place at the convention. Does he agree that, if the convention is to have any value, it must encompass and consider more than one model of the future structure of Europe? Would it not be unthinkable for such a convention not to include proposals for a flexible Europe of nation states—proposals that reflect the views of the vast majority of the British people and the position of the Opposition?

While it should finally be a matter for the House to decide who the representatives are, will the Minister press the Prime Minister to respond positively to the written offer made by the Leader of the Opposition on 19 December for my party to play a full and constructive part in the convention, promoting those positive views to which I have referred—*[Laughter.]* I listen very carefully to the laughter and note whence it comes. Or will the convention be just another stitch-up to drive forward the European superstate regardless of the genuine views of the peoples of Europe?

**Peter Hain:** I thought that the right hon. Gentleman started very well. He began constructively and I hoped that he would continue in that vein. The answer is yes: the Leader of the Opposition will, of course, be fully responded to and his representations will be listened to. We will not always respond negatively to the Leader of the Opposition, although, frankly, that is very tempting. On the serious point that he made about the superstate, it is very interesting that we ensured with virtually unanimous support the insertion in the Laeken declaration of, for the first time, a rejection of the idea of a superstate by the European Council. The declaration states that what the citizens of Europe expect is

"more results, better responses to practical issues and not a European superstate or European institutions inveigling their way into every nook and cranny of life."

It is exactly that model of the European Union—based on intergovernmentalism, supporting its citizens and reflecting their practical daily-life wishes—for which we are pressing. We are confident that it can be secured at the intergovernmental conference, not least because Britain under this Government is a leading European power, not a marginal power as it was under the previous, Conservative Government.

**Andrew Mackinlay:** May I take the Minister back to his statement that there had been consultation with the Leader of the Opposition? Apart from the cosy choreography that goes on between those on the two Front Benches, who else has been consulted about the arrangements for appointing Parliament's representatives to the convention? What is to be done, given that there are alternate members? Will my right hon. Friend make it abundantly clear to the people here and to the Sunday press, which has got it all wrong, that while the rubrics for choosing these people may be a matter for the Leader of the House, the question of who should represent this Parliament—as distinct from the Government's representatives—is for this House to decide, not those on the Government Front Bench?

**Peter Hain:** My hon. Friend is a good and fiery democrat and he is right to keep pressing that issue. His voice will be listened to—*[Interruption.]* It is being listened to and it has been in the past minute by my good self. His colleague, my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, has put a series of strong points to us on behalf of that Committee, as has the Leader of the Opposition, and those representations are being considered.

**Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): While we are on the subject of constitutions and conventions in Europe, is it not premature of the European Union to be pressing ahead for a new IGC and, presumably, a new treaty when the last one has not even been ratified, by virtue of the negative vote of the Irish people democratically expressed? Or will it be a case in future of pressing ahead regardless?

**Peter Hain:** The answer to that question is no. There is an important initiative here. For the first time, the European Union has agreed to set up a convention and consult the people of Europe about the future. That is welcome and I would have thought that it ought to be welcome to the hon. Gentleman and all Opposition Members, as it is welcome to the Labour party. There is an enormously worrying and growing gap between the institutions and the people of the EU. It is the task of the next IGC, which will not take place for at least two years, to try to close that gap and to ensure that the leaders of the EU follow the wishes of its citizens.

## Iraq (Weapons Inspection)

9. **Jim Knight** (South Dorset): What recent discussions he has had with the US Government on the *(a)* proliferation and *(b)* international inspection of chemical, biological and radiological weapons, with particular reference to Iraq. [23001]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane):** We frequently discuss issues relating to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction with the United States Administration. The United Kingdom and the US are committed to securing full Iraqi compliance with its United Nations disarmament obligations.

**Jim Knight:** I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that we must make every effort internationally to prevent the proliferation of those weapons? Would he agree, therefore, with Graham Pearson, former director of Porton Down, the chemical and biological weapons establishment, when he said last autumn that

"the US should urgently reconsider its rejection . . . of the protocol to strengthen the biological weapons convention"?

Should that reconsideration be a prerequisite to the US taking any action against Iraq because of its activities in that area?

**Mr. MacShane:** We regret the failure of the United States to ratify the latest protocol. We are looking forward to working with the US through to the next meeting on the convention in November to arrive at a satisfactory international agreement. The events of recent weeks and months have shown that we need the strongest national security arrangements in that area and the strongest international verification procedures.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell** (North-East Fife): On Iraq and foreign policy in general, is it not something of a hostage to fortune to use terms such as a "pivotal role for Britain", which may come back to haunt those who use them—rather like talking of a foreign policy with an "ethical dimension"? Will it not be a clear indication of the United Kingdom's influence over the United States if we continue successfully to discourage the Bush Administration from precipitate military action against Iraq unless there is incontrovertible evidence of Iraqi involvement in terrorism, or alternatively, if it becomes abundantly clear that the policy of deterrence and containment successfully followed since December 1998, when the United Nations inspectors were withdrawn, has ceased to be effective?

**Mr. MacShane:** As the Prime Minister and the Government have made clear, there is no evidence linking Iraq with the events of 11 September. The fight against terrorism will have to take on board all who support terrorism, all who continue to defy the international rule of law, and all who refuse to obey UN resolutions on this issue. We cannot speculate on any further action that may be necessary, but until Iraq complies with its United Nations and international legal obligations, it remains a menace to the region and to the world.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): On these legal obligations, would it not at least be prudent to talk to Hans von Sponeck and Dennis Halliday—senior officials at the United Nations who resigned their posts on matters of principle to do with Baghdad—before getting involved in the precipitate and disastrous folly of attacking Iraq?

**Mr. MacShane:** The requirement that the international community, through the United Nations, has placed on Saddam Hussein is to comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions. Different positions have been taken by different UN officials on this over the years, but I cannot believe that any Member of the House has any doubt that Saddam Hussein remains in violation of international law and of his obligations under United Nations Security Council resolutions.

**Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): On 5 December, the Foreign Secretary told the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs:

"We are very concerned about Iraq's development of these weapons and believe action must be taken."

What action does the Minister believe will work?

**Mr. MacShane:** That is why we have strengthened resolution 1284, and why Britain has taken the lead in ensuring that sanctions do not harm the Iraqi people directly. It is also why our pilots fly over parts of north and south Iraq to ensure that the Iraqi regime cannot attack its own people. The action of this Government and other democratic Governments around the world is very clear indeed.

**Mr. Peter Kilfoyle** (Liverpool, Walton): Is it not ironic that while we discuss with the United States Administration the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, that Administration seem hell bent on delaying, inhibiting or destroying every international agreement and convention that underpins that non-proliferation? Is it not true that the present Administration of the United States, and the right-wing ideologues who control them, do not give a tinker's cuss about international co-operation or international opinion when it comes to these issues, unless they meet their own immediate political objectives?

**Mr. MacShane:** It is no secret in the House that Her Majesty's Government do not share the approach of the United States when it comes to strengthening international conventions and agreements to reduce proliferation, but the dialogue must continue. We welcome the fact that, although it was not possible to reach a conclusion at the fifth review conference on the biological and toxin weapon convention in Geneva last year, we are engaged in a dialogue to achieve that final agreement. Events in the United States—not least the anthrax scare—have reinforced public opinion in America as to the importance of national and international agreements in this important field.

**Mr. David Chidgey** (Eastleigh): On the question of the reintroduction of international inspections in Iraq, the

Minister must be aware that the Iraqi regime has made it clear that it is adamantly opposed to that reintroduction. In those circumstances, will he tell us under what conditions he would support and condone the use of force to reintroduce those inspections, as advocated in some quarters of the American Administration?

**Mr. MacShane:** The decision has to be clear: either we believe in international law, which requires forms of enforcement, or we do not. I think that the House, the country, and all parties quite clearly do. Speculation at the Dispatch Box about further pressure on Saddam Hussein is pointless. It is important that every Member of this House give him no comfort, and make it quite clear that compliance with the international rule of law and with United Nations Security Council resolution 1284 is indispensable if we are to see peace and security in the region.

## Russia/North Atlantic Council

12. **Mr. Robert N. Wareing** (Liverpool, West Derby): What discussions he has had with his Russian counterpart in respect of the proposal to establish a Russia/North Atlantic Council; and if he will make a statement. [23004]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw):** The Foreign Secretary met Foreign Minister Ivanov at the NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting on 6-7 December. NATO and Russian Foreign Ministers agreed to work towards a new council bringing together NATO member states and Russia to identify and pursue opportunities for joint action.

**Mr. Wareing:** I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, but how will a Russia/NATO council differ from the Russia/NATO permanent consultative council in powers, functions and composition? Is it not essential that Russia be involved in determining policies to tackle drug trafficking and terrorism, and problems that may arise in parts of Europe such as the Balkans? Would it not be disastrous for the spirit of co-operation that has been created between our two countries if NATO ever took action contrary to the interests of Russia?

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I am not sure that I agree with my hon. Friend's last point, but I share his welcome for the new relationship that the west, and NATO in particular, is enjoying with Russia, especially since 11 September. He asks what the difference with the new set-up is. The difference is considerable in the quality and depth of our co-operation with Russia in respect of tackling many issues that he has raised and more—counter-terrorism, drug trafficking, international crime and security.

**David Burnside** (South Antrim): The Foreign Secretary has recognised the deep connection between drug trafficking and international terrorism, so does he share my concern about the report in *The Times* today that Sinn Fein-IRA's involvement in Colombia amounted not to three or four representatives, but to 24? Will he speak to the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman is out of order. Mr. Lloyd.

**Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): My hon. Friend recognises that the modern threats to our society—drug trafficking of different kinds and trafficking in people—are central to the problems that also affect Russia, so the opportunity exists to forge a new security relationship with Russia—but may I add a word of caution? Are the Government prepared to take the lead in ensuring that we understand the huge diversity of opinion in modern Russia? We must allay the legitimate fears of a nation that has considered itself, rightly or wrongly, under threat from NATO for the past 50 years. We must move NATO on if we want to move Russia on.

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend. Russian public opinion in many respects still lags behind the forward-looking and progressive approach adopted by President Putin. We shall work hard to allay the fears and concerns that some ordinary Russians and, indeed, some Russian politicians may still have about NATO's role, but there can be no Russian veto over NATO action or its expansion, which we hope will go ahead later this year.

## Israel

13. **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): What efforts he is making to help to ensure that Israel implements international law on the obligations of occupying powers and the provisions of UN resolutions 242 and 338. [23007]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw):** The Government have repeatedly called on Israel to respect international law, including the fourth Geneva convention. High contracting parties to the convention met in Geneva on 5 December and called on the parties in the region to ensure the protection of the civilian population, and on Israel to refrain from violations of the convention. The Government continue to work towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the middle east on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

**Richard Burden:** I thank my hon. Friend for reaffirming UN resolutions 242 and 338, which, as he knows and among other things, call for Israel's withdrawal from the west bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem. Does he agree that it is ironic that while Israel stays in an area in which it has no right to be, a Palestinian from another part of the west bank is liable to be arrested if he or she sets foot in east Jerusalem? That happened to Dr. Mustafa Barghouti of the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees just last week—he was arrested and his knee caps broken by Israeli troops. Italian MEP Luisa Morgantini was also thrown to the ground.

Will my hon. Friend join me in looking into what happened to Dr. Barghouti and call on Israel to refrain from such breaches of human rights?

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I will certainly look into the case that my hon. Friend has raised. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear earlier, the British Government deplore the Israeli policy of closures, although it must be said that during the last few days, as we have enjoyed—relatively speaking—the quietest period since the beginning of the latest intifada, the closures have eased somewhat. Israel is entitled to its security, however. It should withdraw its troops from area A, but its total withdrawal from the occupied territories must be part of an overall peace settlement in the region, which I think all Members support.

# Control of Fireworks

3.30 pm

**Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision with respect to the sale and use of fireworks; and for connected purposes.

I am by no means the first Member to seek to introduce legislation such as this. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan), for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy), for Motherwell and Wishaw (Mr. Roy) and for Lincoln (Gillian Merron). I pay particular tribute to my hon. and good Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty). We share a constituency border, and in our campaign against the abuse of fireworks we have always shared a common cause.

I also pay tribute to the campaigning work done over many years by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). He is proof that it is possible for Members in all parts of the House to join in support of sensible and much-needed social change, whatever other political differences they may have.

Let me also apologise to the 36 Members whom my office welcomed as sponsors of the Bill when they telephoned, before the Public Bill Office explained that there was a limit of 12. I am sure that they will find ways of expressing their support on another occasion.

A little over two years ago, on 8 December 1999, I had the good fortune to secure an Adjournment debate on the subject of fireworks. That good fortune appears to have rubbed off on the Minister who replied, for she is now Secretary of State for the entire Department—the Department of Trade and Industry, that is. I trust that my right hon. Friend will not consider me unduly pedantic if I seek today to remind her officials of some of the undertakings and opinions that she gave on that occasion.

First, let me set out the reasons why I consider my Bill to be necessary. It may surprise Members to learn that the law allows a private individual to take delivery of 20 tonnes of fireworks—indeed, of any quantity, unlimited—and to store them for up to 14 days, with no obligation to notify a competent authority and with no official record being required. Nor is the firework company under any obligation to ensure that the person taking delivery is competent to handle such an enormous amount of explosives. There is no licence and no registration; there is only a rather loose insistence that the fireworks be kept in a safe and suitable place.

The Explosives Act 1875, which permits this monstrous state of affairs, does not define what a safe and suitable place might be, but if it did the definition would now almost certainly be obsolete. Firework technology has moved on somewhat in the 137 years since the Act received Royal Assent. We are subject to inadequate and archaic legislation that leaves the public at substantial risk.

When I raised the issue with the Secretary of State, as she now is, in 1999, she reassured me by saying:

"the Health and Safety Executive is reviewing existing explosives legislation and the review may result in changes to existing conditions for the keeping of fireworks for private use. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend is kept up to date as the review progresses."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 8 December 1999; Vol. 340, c. 271WH.]

The HSE review ended on Friday 18 February 2000. Now, nearly two years later, the HSE's report has yet to be published. How long it would take for any of its recommendations to be implemented is a matter that I leave to the House's conjecture.

I am happy to acknowledge that in 1997 the new Labour Government passed the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations, as set out in SI 2294. All fireworks sold to the general public must comply with those regulations and must accord with British standard 7114. The minimum age for purchasing fireworks was rightly raised from 16 to 18 years and various powerful fireworks such as maroons-in-mortar, aerial shells, aerial maroons and those fireworks of erratic flight such as helicopters, squibs and jumping jacks were all banned from public supply.

In my previous debate, I congratulated the then Minister on the fact that those measures had resulted in an immediate 26 per cent. drop in the number of injuries requiring hospital treatment to 908 in 1997. However, that positive trend was reversed in 1999, pushing the figure up to 1,056. My right hon. Friend's successor, the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), replying to my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North in October last year, took comfort in the idea that the blip could be accounted for by the millennium celebrations, which had pushed the volume of sales up. Unfortunately, my hon. Friend's logic was flawed, because although the subsequent year saw a drop of 8 per cent. to 972 injuries, the drop in the volume of sales was 30 per cent, so, proportionately, the number of injuries was much higher. There was also a substantial rise in the number of injuries to those aged between 13 and 15

The Under-Secretary also remarked that the voluntary code of practice whereby the industry restricts sales to the public to a three-week period around 5 November, though not perfect, "has generally worked well." Those of us who have been campaigning for many years for better controls on fireworks know that that is a unique code in the sense that it is distinguished by being more often broken than observed. My constituents have been subjected to a constant unabated barrage of fireworks from early October of last year through to the new year. They do not find the idea that the voluntary code has "worked well" laughable, but they certainly find it ridiculous.

The Under-Secretary stated:

"No fireworks may be sold to anyone under 18 years of age. That rule is also enforced by the trading standards department. Those who break the rules are subject to prosecution."

Those words caused nothing but despair to many at trading standards, who comment wryly:

"There never has been a maximum penalty imposed, or a custodial sentence . . . the penalties tend to be at the lower end of the scale and it is arguable over whether such a penalty is viewed as a deterrent at all."

The point is that there is no power under current legislation to revoke a vendor's registration. What is required, and what trading standards has repeatedly asked for, is a proper system of licensing that would enable it to enforce the laws and ensure that such a sanction applied to those traders who flout the regulations. My Bill will provide that.

On 27 October last year, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals received a telephone call from a parent whose small son had been traumatised

*[Mr. Barry Gardiner]*

by seeing a cat blown up by a firework on the school playing field. When the RSPCA went to inspect, it found the dismembered leg of a dog nearby. One child was traumatised. Two animals were dead. That was just one incident. Three days later the Under-Secretary stated:

"Legislation also deals with distress to any domestic or captive animal, under the Protection of Animals Act 1911."

My hon. Friend called that

"a legal underpinning for effective action".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 30 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 232-34WH.]

"The Fireworks Bill—a private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy)—would have introduced many sensible additions to the regulatory package now in place for the control of fireworks. The Government supported her Bill, and I greatly regret that two Conservative Members chose to talk it out. It would have given the necessary powers to provide for mandatory training of people who operate large public displays. It would have dealt with the times during which fireworks could be sold—now purely a matter for the industry's voluntary code of practice—and provided powers to limit the letting off of fireworks except at specified times. These problems cannot be tackled under the current powers available to us".

Those are not my words, although I agree with every one of them. They are the words of the current Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she replied to my debate two years ago. She concluded by saying

"It is a pity that that private Member's Bill failed. I hope that in a future private Members' ballot, any hon. Member who has an interest in this issue will succeed in reviving the Bill."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 8 December 1999; Vol. 340, c. 271-72WH.]

My Bill does precisely that. It builds on the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton. It revives her Bill and it would bring enormous relief to thousands of people in constituencies around the country where fireworks are no longer enjoyed but loathed and dreaded.

Given the words of the Secretary of State that I have just quoted, I trust that I have her support.

3.39 pm

**Mr. Robert Key** (Salisbury): I rise to oppose the Bill, for reasons that I shall explain. First, let me say how delighted I am that the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) has raised this issue.

I oppose the Bill for two reasons. First, I do not like banning things without extremely good reason. As a Conservative, I believe in more, rather than less, freedom, and I certainly do not like banning things unless I am certain that the legislation will work, which this Bill will not. Secondly, I represent in my constituency the excellent organisation Pipedown, the campaign for freedom from piped music, which has asked me to raise this issue in the House. The honorary secretary wrote to me saying:

"I myself have always loved fireworks, but they have become, over the years, bigger and noisier and are let off far, far more frequently, almost all the year, so needlessly upsetting small children, animals and people who just want to sleep."

I agree.

My constituent Caroline Currie of Salisbury wrote to me in these terms:

"Firework nuisance. Right that's it. I started to write this letter on Sunday 11th November, the eleventh night in a row that enormous echoing bangs have sent my cat flying downstairs in terror to hide under the dresser. During the small hours of Friday 9th November I was awakened by two explosions. Are we at war? We know we are, and that is all the more reason to control this increasing menace . . . It's the noise I object to; nobody grudges children the sparklers and catherine wheels."

The existing regulations are quite draconian. All fireworks have to meet British standard 7114. Fireworks are protected under the Consumer Protection Act 1987, the Firework (Safety) Regulations 1997 and the General Product Safety Regulations 1994. In addition, the importation of fireworks can only be authorised by the Health and Safety Executive pursuant to the Placing on the Market and Supervision of Transfers of Explosives Regulations 1993.

The use of fireworks by the public is regulated by the Explosives Act 1875 as modified by the Control of Explosives Regulations 1991 and as amended by the Explosives (Age of Purchase) Act 1976 and the Consumer Protection Act 1987.

All the examples that the hon. Gentleman gave could be covered by amendments to existing legislation. His proposals will change nothing, not even cruelty to animals, which is an important issue.

The hon. Gentleman's main proposals should be seen in perspective. First, public displays are not the problem. Storage of fireworks is already controlled under existing legislation. The hon. Gentleman's proposals on public displays will not prevent the abuse of people's privacy and quiet.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman wants the Government to restrict the times of year at which fireworks can be bought. Great! On 4 November people will stock up with fireworks for the year. Nor do I wish to be a spoilsport. I love seeing fireworks all the year round—at birthday parties and celebrations for all sorts of very good reasons. It is only the British who celebrate 5 November; the rest of the world has fireworks all the year round. People just have a different approach.

Can hon. Members imagine statutory instruments deciding the times of year when people can set off fireworks, as the hon. Gentleman proposes? They would have to vary from summer to winter and between Land's End and John O'Groats according to the daylight hours.

The licensing of vendors would not control the main problem, which is noise. People object to the volume of explosions. Old people loathe it, especially if they are hard of hearing. Children loathe it, as do shift workers and night workers. Of course, so do cats and dogs. The hon. Gentleman has given us examples of that. Vets will confirm the distress caused to animals.

Last Saturday I was with a group of farmers on Salisbury Plain. We were not just taking the air; I admit that there was a certain amount of noise involved in our activities. The farmers said that they, too, think that the noise of modern fireworks is distressing to their cattle and sheep, and above all to their hens. Those farmers farm around the Salisbury Plain military training area. The Royal Artillery can fire tanks and guns; the Royal Air Force can fly over the Hercules; Boscombe Down can fly out its Tornadoes from the Empire test pilots school and the Army Air Corps can fly its helicopters—but set off a firework in Amesbury and Richard Crook's hens stop laying.

On 26 November 2001, the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), said that the Government

"have no plans to ban the sale of fireworks to the general public."

Quite right. She also said:

"The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 prohibit from sale to the public several types of noisy category 3 fireworks such as aerial shells and restrict the size of others. We will, of course, consider any representations that are made."—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2001; Vol.375 , c. 672W.]

The key to the problem is to amend existing regulations. We all agree that fireworks have become too noisy and that the bangs are too big. Constituents who write to us and talk to us in the streets say that they are concerned about the noise.

If the Government were concerned about safety they would have a different attitude. No one disagrees that too many people are injured by fireworks, but the regulation proposed in the Bill is preposterous. There is a mass of legislation that could be suitably amended. With a simple statutory instrument, the Government could resolve the noise problem.

Noise is the main problem. It is not dealt with by the Bill, and that is why I oppose it.

*Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business, and agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Barry Gardiner, Linda Gilroy, Linda Perham, Mr. Harry Barnes, Sir Teddy Taylor, Shona McIsaac, Siobhain McDonagh, Dr. Nick Palmer, Joan Ryan, Ross Cranston, Mr. Martin Salter and John Barrett.

### Control of Fireworks

Mr. Barry Gardiner accordingly presented a Bill to make provision with respect to the sale and use of fireworks; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 15 March, and to be printed [Bill 78].

# Orders of the Day

## Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]*

*Order for Second Reading read.*

3.47 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

In introducing this Bill, the Government have one aim—to address the problems faced by far too many residential long leaseholders. I know that hon. Members from all parties are sympathetic to this intention and that many have received representations from disgruntled constituents who have wrestled with the difficulties of the leasehold system.

At this point, I declare a potential interest, in that my wife and I own a long leasehold on commercial property in London.

The Bill is divided into two parts. Part 1 introduces commonhold, a robust and effective alternative to long leasehold. Because of a long-standing division of labour between Departments, this part of the Bill, which is about land law, is the responsibility of my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor, and I shall deal with it during its passage through this House.

Part 2 of the Bill will help relieve the plight of those who hold long residential leases by reforming the existing leasehold system. The law relating to leaseholds is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), will deal with that and will wind up the Second Reading debate this evening.

The problems of long leasehold provide the impetus for the Bill. They are the wrong that the provisions of this Bill are intended to put right.

The underlying necessity for the Bill stems from a historical quirk of freehold land. Over time, the common law developed a rule that the burden of a positive covenant—that is, a promise to do something or to take on some obligation—does not run with land. That is not the case with a restrictive covenant, which is a promise to refrain from doing something. With a positive covenant, the burden does not pass from the seller to the buyer of freehold land, and successive owners of freehold land cannot enforce positive covenants when that land is sold. It is possible to enforce positive covenants only while the original covenantors retain the land.

It is therefore highly inadvisable to build freehold flats, as each flat depends on those around it for support and shelter. Similarly, the stability of the building depends on the maintenance of the flats and the common parts. A duty to support a flat above one's own would be a positive obligation, as would a duty to contribute money to repair and maintain the common parts. The recognition and enforcement of this duty would need to be realised through positive covenants, with all the consequent and serious drawbacks that I have described.

**Mr. Oliver Heald** (North-East Hertfordshire): Does the Minister agree that the duty to insure is particularly

*[Mr. Oliver Heald]*

important and that it would not be possible to enforce that on a freehold owner of a flat, whereas it would be with a leasehold owner?

**Mr. Wills:** I will come on to the problems of leasehold, but the problems of positive covenants are not associated with freeholds, as I shall describe shortly.

A flying freehold is a freehold above another property, so called because it relies on positive covenants of support from the owner of the property below. At some point in the future, when the original owners move, the covenants will no longer be enforceable. As a result, mortgage lenders are reluctant to lend on the security of such properties and it is extremely difficult to sell them.

Leasehold presents no such problems. A lease is a form of contract, and contract terms pass from successive sellers to buyers. This means that, in practice, when a developer sets up a scheme with ownership of interdependent properties and maintenance of common parts, it is based on leasehold ownership. Leasehold properties change hands subject to positive and restrictive covenants in the lease and the problem with freehold covenants is circumvented. However, in its place arise the drawbacks of long leasehold.

A long lease is a wasting asset. This is because a lease is granted for a defined duration, a specific term of years. However long the period, at the end of the lease the property reverts to the freeholder. Even before reversion, the gradual reduction of years left to run is significant for the long leaseholder. As the years remaining in the lease diminish, so the value of the leaseholder's interest decreases. From the moment the lease is granted, it wastes away. The problem is indiscernible at the commencement of a long lease but becomes acute as the date of reversion looms.

In many circumstances, the lease may be renewed but the landlord may charge leaseholders a great deal of money or refuse the extension. Leaseholders are understandably distressed by this, as a long leasehold costs nearly as much a freehold, yet must ultimately be returned to the freeholder who can sell another lease at the going rate. It can be difficult for a leaseholder to accept that the amount paid for a long lease does not leave one the outright owner of the property.

Leaseholders invariably pay a service charge to their landlord. That is an amount of money levied by the landlord and used legitimately to maintain, repair and run the development. Leaseholders complain that they do not participate in determining the amount, and rightly protest when the service charge they pay is used in a manner they consider inappropriate. For example, the leaseholders pay a service charge for regular works but the landlord may execute the works himself or herself to a questionable standard or install features that are not required or desired by the leaseholders.

Our approach to tackling these long-standing problems has been based on keeping provisions as simple and flexible as possible to provide quick and practical solutions and avoid over-elaborate proposals that could have unintended consequences.

Let me turn to the first part of our solution—commonhold. Commonhold land is freehold land with certain special statutory attributes for which the Bill will make provision. Commonhold provides for the individual ownership of the freeholds of interdependent properties and the corporate management of associated common parts by the freehold owners. Every commonhold comprises units and common parts. Each property within a commonhold is a unit, and a "unit-holder" is the owner of a freehold unit.

As a freeholder, the unit-holder will not suffer any diminution of the unit's value. The asset will not waste. At no point will a unit-holder relinquish the unit to a higher authority. The unit belongs entirely to the unit-holder. No one has a greater interest in a unit than the registered unit-holder; no landlord will interfere with the unit-holder's enjoyment of the unit.

**Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): The Minister rightly describes all the benefits of commonhold versus leasehold tenure. However, how does he expect commonhold to take hold in this country if he still maintains that existing developments should require 100 per cent. consent of all interests and that in new developments it should not be mandatory to have commonhold from day one?

**Mr. Wills:** If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I shall come to that point. That is a familiar argument, and it was rehearsed extensively in another place. I will come to that point; I want to spend a little time addressing those concerns, but in their proper place, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bear with me for just a few moments. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman would listen to me, he might learn a little more about our proposals for commonhold. It is important to understand exactly what the new form of commonhold will entail.

**Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Wills:** I will give way in a moment, but I shall explain a little more about the concept of commonhold, then interventions may have a little more purpose.

Each unit-holder, and only the unit-holders, will be members of the commonhold association, which will govern the community and manage the common parts. The commonhold association will be a private company limited by guarantee. In another place, the Government were questioned about choosing that vehicle as the basis for commonhold, rather than another Companies Act company, a limited liability partnership or a tailor-made corporation.

The Government believe that, rather than creating a new corporate body for the commonhold association, it is preferable in the interests of simplicity and familiarity to build on existing provisions. We believe that a company limited by guarantee will offer the most appropriate route. Legal professionals are adept at working with the existing corporate structure, so advice will be available for potential unit-holders and commonhold developers from the start. Many leaseholders have already elected to enfranchise in that way. Using the existing corporate structure throughout the Bill will standardise the commonhold and leasehold reform procedure.

I now come to the commonhold community statement. Each unit-holder member will sign up to rules and regulations similar to covenants. Those rules will appear in

the commonhold community statement and the memorandum and articles of association, and each unit-holder will be bound by those documents. The commonhold scheme will provide for the enforcement of rights and duties between unit-holders and the commonhold association. Where internal disputes arise, we intend that the commonhold association and unit-holders should undertake a three-step process, including alternative dispute resolution, to resolve any conflict.

Assuming that the informal processes fail, the first formal process will be an internal complaints procedure. Secondly, under clause 41, we will prescribe the use of the commonhold ombudsman. The commonhold ombudsman will be modelled on the independent housing ombudsman, who has a wide range of dispute resolution procedures at his disposal, including arbitration, mediation and adjudication. The last recourse available will be to the courts. The commonhold rules, coupled with the dispute resolution procedures, will ensure that positive and negative obligations can be imposed on unit-holders and that they can be enforced by the commonhold association.

**Ms Ann Coffey** (Stockport): As the Minister will be aware, leasehold valuation tribunals are a very formal forum, and both parties are usually accompanied by very expensive lawyers. Has he considered strengthening the more informal independent arbitration procedures as a way of resolving disputes between landlords and leaseholders? He will know that landlords are not now obliged to go to independent arbitration even if the leaseholders would like to do so. I should be grateful if the Minister would consider some of my constituency correspondence, between the Tatton Court residents association and Peveril, which shows the current problem with using leasehold tribunals to try to solve such disputes, and makes a good case for strengthening independent arbitration.

**Mr. Wills:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, and if she would like to give us that constituency correspondence, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who has responsibility for leasehold reform, and I will certainly consider it. Of course, we would always encourage people to try to resolve disputes before they go to a tribunal. We are carefully considering the working of the leasehold valuation tribunals, and I shall say something about that later in my speech. We are trying to encourage greater use of pre-trial hearings in that procedure, and I hope that that will address many of my hon. Friend's concerns.

**Mr. Boswell:** I make no particular claim to expertise in these matters, except perhaps to say that, like many hon. Members, I am a long-leaseholder. I am grateful to the Minister for explaining in a reasonable way what he seeks to do. Given the exchanges that have already taken place, is he not a little concerned that the programme motion requires the Bill's Committee stage to be completed by the end of January? Although I have no particular wish to be associated directly with that process, given all the angles and extreme legal complexity of the issues, is it really common sense to rush on with that process and try to get it completed in three weeks? Would it not be much better to take a considered look, so as to make absolutely sure that the wrinkles that remain in a matter as complex as this are properly ironed out?

**Mr. Wills:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making his point in such a reasonable way. He is right that this is a complex matter and that is why the provisions in the Bill are simple, practical and designed to be flexible. That is why we have also made provision for the use of regulations to deal with what will inevitably be a complex and fast-evolving property market. However, even with the good will of the House and all the time that he wants to scrutinise the Bill in Committee, there is no way that the Committee could possibly iron out all the potential wrinkles in such a complicated subject.

We believe that the Bill will provide quick, practical remedies for long-standing problems and that we have allocated enough time for its consideration. Many of the arguments were extensively rehearsed in another place and I have yet to hear arguments that have not already been extensively considered. I am sure that we shall return to them in Committee and I am confident that, with good will on both sides, we shall have time to give the Bill the proper scrutiny that it deserves.

**Mr. William Cash** (Stone): Does the Minister recall that the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee considered regulations relating to commonhold? Even though they involved Henry VIII provisions that restrict the opportunity to examine them properly but can allow for the amendment of an Act of Parliament—which would be a major step—there was much discussion and the Government accepted the Committee's recommendations. The Committee declared itself to be satisfied with the Government's response which was that they would introduce draft regulations so that the House would have an opportunity to see exactly what was going on. Unfortunately, my latest information, as of about an hour ago, is that no such draft regulations have been introduced. If I am wrong, I am open to correction but that is the information that I have just received from the Library.

**Mr. Wills:** I hesitate to say this, but my information is slightly different from the hon. Gentleman's. If he can bear with me, I shall try to resolve the question of whose information is more accurate and provide him with a more definitive answer. At 4.3 pm, I cannot say precisely where we are on that point, but I shall try to find out. I assure him that it is our intention to introduce such regulations. We have always been open and laid the alternatives before the House, and we shall continue to do that. I can reassure him on the general point, but will have to return later to the point of detail.

**Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): The Minister has been generous with his time and, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), he said that the Bill's whole purpose was to make the issue simple. I am certainly no expert on leasehold and commonhold, which is why I have come to listen to the Minister's speech. The explanatory notes run to 75 pages. I have seen many Bills, but never 75 pages of explanatory notes, so how can he argue that the subject is simple? Surely, we need longer in Committee to discuss the Bill intelligently. A swift timetable motion will mean that it will be driven through with many clauses not being discussed.

**Mr. Wills:** I think that I have already answered that question. I note the hon. Gentleman's view, but I do not

*[Mr. Wills]*

think that he has quite understood my point about the need to produce quick, practical solutions to long-standing problems. Even with all the time in the world in the House, we will not be able to iron out all the wrinkles that might occur. I am sure that he has carefully read the 75 pages of explanatory notes and I am deeply flattered that he has taken the trouble to come here to listen to me in the expectation that I can add something to them. I am grateful for his confidence in me on that point at least.

The so-called 100 per cent. rule for commonhold, to which the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) referred, has concerned many people. We received a number of representations on it, it was exhaustively debated in another place, and I shall explain the reasons for adopting our approach. For those hon. Members who are not familiar with the rule, the Bill allows for the conversion from leasehold to commonhold to accommodate those leaseholders who want to move beyond enfranchised leasehold to commonhold.

The Bill requires that 100 per cent. of those with a substantial interest in the land that is to be registered as commonhold land are to be required to consent to conversion. That includes the freeholder, whose interests would probably have to be bought out, anyone holding a lease that is granted for 21 years or more, and others such as those holding certain charges over the land. The written consents of persons falling into those categories must be lodged with the Land Registry before land can be registered as commonhold land and the conversion process gets under way. Leaseholders who are not required to consent—that is, those who do not have a substantial interest in the land—will be compensated if they suffer loss as a result of conversion.

We have been criticised for that. We recognise that obtaining the necessary consents is a high hurdle for leaseholders, but we do not believe that it is impossibly high. We acknowledge that take-up for commonhold will probably be greatest in new-build developments and we anticipate that commonhold will become standard for new-build developments that consist of interdependent units and common parts. However, we expect a unit that is owned freehold to become more desirable and trade at a premium compared with equivalent leasehold properties. That should improve the chances of achieving 100 per cent. consent as hesitant leaseholders see the practical benefits of commonhold.

We have never said that it would be impossible to devise a system that requires fewer consents than 100 per cent. However, we believe that the difficulties that would ensue, both during the conversion process and when attempting to manage a hybrid commonhold, would far outweigh the perceived advantages. Inevitably, that will give rise to a set of complex and technical arguments, and I have no doubt that we will consider those in Committee. However, I ask the House to consider what might happen if the 100 per cent. rule were not in place. Without it, there would be two different classes of occupants and two different streams of management under two statutory regimes; two different sets of money to collect and two different sets of accounts to produce; and an infinite variety of different tailor-made schemes to draft and administer.

In short, anything less than a 100 per cent. rule for commonhold will involve schemes that are more bureaucratic, costly and complex than necessary. In addition, they will ultimately be unnecessary because there is an alternative if fewer than 100 per cent. of leaseholders want to change their method of tenure. Part 2 sets out a new improved scheme for collective enfranchisement. The enfranchisement scheme is tailor-made for that purpose. To push for commonhold with fewer than the necessary consents would be to reinvent collective enfranchisement needlessly.

**Mr. Mark Field** (Cities of London and Westminster): My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) made a clear point on the 100 per cent. rule. One thing strikes me as odd. What is to stop an unscrupulous freeholder in a large block of flats providing a lease to a relative to ensure that he gets around the provision, and therefore preventing all other dissatisfied leaseholders from taking the commonhold route?

**Mr. Wills:** I have endeavoured to explain the basis on which we are approaching the problem. Two routes are available to leaseholders who want to change their method of tenure. We expect the commonhold route to be taken primarily in respect of new-build developments, although it is possible that groups of leaseholders and existing leaseholders will also want to do that. Although that option is open to them, there are other routes that give them many advantages. Part 2 covers schemes for collective enfranchisement. They clearly offer huge advantages over the current situation and will deal with many of the problems of leasehold.

**Mr. Waterson:** I shall try to restrain myself from now on.

I do not necessarily accept what the Minister says about existing blocks, and those are perhaps detailed matters for consideration in Committee, but none of the objections that he listed can possibly apply to brand-new developments, so what is the objection to making commonhold mandatory for new developments if the Government intend that in the medium or long term commonhold should supplant leasehold?

**Mr. Wills:** I am glad that we have moved from the 100 per cent. rule to another area of concern. I understand the arguments, and obviously we believe that commonhold offers enormous attractions, but it would be wrong of us to prescribe it at this stage. The property market is complex and fluid, and we think that the scheme should have time to bed in. We want to see how the market responds to commonhold, so the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is, in short, "Let the market decide." We believe that it will make the appropriate decision and recognise the full advantages of commonhold.

**Mr. Cash** *rose—*

**Mr. Wills:** Before I give way to the hon. Gentleman, I can tell him that I have in front of me a note saying that he is right about the laying of draft regulations, and I can assure him that they will be laid before a Committee.

**Mr. Cash:** I am grateful both for that assurance and, I hope, an answer to the question that I am about to ask.

I am sorry to disappoint the Minister, but we have not quite got off the 100 per cent. rule because, in the proceedings on 5 July, the Lord Chancellor made an extremely interesting point about it. He said:

"However, if a well-judged amendment were put forward, for which there was substantial cross-party support, the Government would listen to the debate and consider it very carefully."

He made it clear that

"there is undeniable merit in not allowing one person out of step"

to obstruct the entire scheme, and said that the sensitivities involved

"may be an overriding consideration the other way. But the Government will listen."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 5 July 2001; Vol. 626, c. 887.]

I say to the Minister, and I am sure that he will understand my meaning, that although he is, understandably, putting forward the best case, we will have to probe this question in Committee because it is important and the Lord Chancellor has made it clear that he understands how important it is.

**Mr. Wills:** I am delighted to repeat the Lord Chancellor's assurance: of course we will listen, and we will consider any well-judged amendment. I am afraid that we have not yet seen such an amendment, but if one is forthcoming, we will of course consider it carefully. I have no doubt that we will return to the subject in Committee at some length.

In the perhaps vain hope that we have now dealt, temporarily, with the 100 per cent. rule, I will move on to other features of the new system. Another standard feature of any commonhold development will be the common parts, which are any part not designated a unit. As commonholds could encompass a wide spectrum of developments, the common parts are defined negatively to ensure the flexibility necessary for commonhold to be an option in a range of circumstances. Members will realise that commonhold has greater potential than simply for replacing long leasehold in blocks of flats. The possibilities for it to be a vehicle for development are vast, and we have tried to reflect that in the Bill by not limiting them unnecessarily. The commonhold association will be responsible for the repair, maintenance and insurance of those common parts.

We will look to standardise commonhold documents in the commonhold community statement, which will regulate the rights and duties of the commonhold association and the unit-holders. One standard feature will be the regulation of leasing within commonholds. We intend to prescribe that any lease that a unit-holder grants in his or her unit cannot be sold for a premium or be for a duration longer than seven years, although it will be renewable. That, as hon. Members will recognise, is to prevent long leasehold creeping in through the back door. I have already alluded to the fact that the Bill does not, as hon. Members may have noticed, contain precise details about the management and day-to-day running of a commonhold, as that information will be contained in the commonhold community statement and regulations.

We are aware of the scarcity of parliamentary time for amending primary legislation. Commonhold will be a completely new facet to our land law, and we recognise that despite all the hard work and extensive consultation on the Bill, when commonhold comes on line, some provisions will inevitably be found to be capable of improvement. We want to be able to react rapidly in such circumstances and secondary legislation affords us the opportunity to do so. We have made progress in drafting the commonhold community statement and the memorandum and articles, and we shall place them in the Library before Committee.

Within the parameters provided by the Bill and associated regulations, every commonhold association will be permitted to add extra rules and regulations to their commonhold community statement specific to any unique need of the individual commonhold community: for example, to allow for the running of a communal swimming pool or sports hall. The character of each commonhold will be shaped by the decisions of the unit-holders through the commonhold association. Commonhold will afford control of the management of a development so that whether the development is a block of flats, an estate or even a complete town, commonhold will give control to the community.

**Mr. Charles Hendry** (Wealden): The Minister will be aware that under the Rentcharges Act 1977, estates were exempted from the right of redemption from a rentcharge because it was deemed that there was no alternative means of running the common interests. Commonhold appears to offer such an alternative. Does he agree that it would be proper to allow estates exempted under the 1977 Act to transfer to commonhold, or at least to provide that those within a rentcharge are liable to the same degree of public accountability?

**Mr. Wills:** Rentcharges are not an issue that can be dealt with under the Bill, which deals with commonhold and leasehold reform, but we acknowledge the importance of the issue and will consider it.

A commonhold community statement must make provision about the commonhold assessment. Unit-holders will be required to pay commonhold assessments to fund expenditure on the management of the commonhold and on maintenance, repair and insurance of the common parts. They will be involved in approving the sum to be levied from them. The directors of the commonhold association will be responsible for calculating a budget and the details of the assessment required to meet the budget for the next year's running costs, and for setting an assessment for any reserve fund.

**Mr. Adrian Sanders** (Torbay): Will guidelines be published on the conduct of meetings, covering matters such as secret ballots, availability of papers and due notice of when meetings are to take place?

**Mr. Wills:** I am happy to give an assurance on the details. The essence of commonhold is that there will be a standard form of procedures applicable comprehensively and universally. That is one of the great advantages of the form: it is extremely simple, standardised and common.

**Glenda Jackson** (Hampstead and Highgate): The Government believe that commonhold will, in the first instance, be reserved to new build—to new blocks of flats. I am perplexed about how the tenants—the commonholders—are to have a voice in devising the articles of association. Are they to be imposed? A block of flats is not sold in its entirety in one fell swoop, so when are the people involved to meet to express their

*[Glenda Jackson]*

point of view to, I presume, the developer of the block of flats? Is there to be an imposition? Are not wide variations in the charges likely? There must be a way to ensure that what is currently iniquitous between leaseholders and freeholders is not passed on by developers in what the Government hope will be, in the main, commonhold property.

**Mr. Wills:** I should stress that although we envisage that the primary take-up of commonhold in the short term will be in new-build development, that will not necessarily be exclusively the case. We believe that existing leaseholders will occasionally convert to commonhold.

Commonhold community statements and memorandums and articles of association will be in a standard form—we shall lay the latest draft before the House—so everyone will sign up to a standard, common form of arrangement. That is the essential simplicity of the system. We believe that fairness and straightforwardness are two of the main advantages of the commonhold form of tenure. I hope that my hon. Friend is reassured.

I was running through the budget obligations, which will be important to commonholders. The directors of the commonhold association will be responsible for calculating a budget, the details of the assessment required to meet the budget for the next year's running costs and setting an assessment for any reserve fund. The unit-holder members will then be able to vote on the proposals; the Bill and secondary legislation will allow unit-holders acting corporately absolute control over decisions relating to their commonhold assessment.

At every stage in the development of part 1, we have striven to consult and involve people whom commonhold will affect. We undertook an extensive consultation with leaseholders, leaseholder organisations, property developers and other interested parties, and that is continuing. We met interested parties through the commonhold working group and, more recently, have had meetings with individual groups to discuss their concerns and suggestions. Although we regard commonhold as the long-term solution to the problems of the leasehold system, we need to protect existing leaseholders who, for whatever reason, cannot convert to commonhold. Part 2 therefore introduces a wide range of measures that are intended to resolve the problems of a wasting asset and poor management.

I shall now summarise the main provisions of part 2. The right to manage is intended to provide an effective long-term solution to management problems that will be easy to exercise. Leaseholders of flats will be able to take over the management of their building without having to prove shortcomings by the landlord or pay compensation. Leaseholders generally have a much larger stake in the building than the landlord and we consider it only right that they should be able to take responsibility for managing their investment. The new right will give leaseholders the chance to make a better job of managing the property. Its very existence should help to concentrate landlords' minds on giving their leaseholders better value for money. The eligibility conditions are designed to be as simple as possible to minimise the scope for legal challenges. They mirror the proposed new rules for collective enfranchisement, which I shall come to shortly.

To ensure clear allocation of responsibility, democratic management and effective dispute resolution, the right will be exercised by a company limited by guarantee with a prescribed constitution suited to the task of residential property management. It will be a right-to-manage company. All leaseholders will have the right to be members which, I stress, is a no-fault right. Although leaseholders will exercise it because of the landlord's shortcomings, they are not required to prove those shortcomings. We must therefore incorporate suitable safeguards for the landlord's legitimate interests. We have tried to strike a fair and workable balance. In other areas of the Bill, we are making it easier to use existing rights if the leaseholders wish to remove all responsibility from the landlord.

We therefore propose to simplify the eligibility rules for collective enfranchisement in respect of blocks of flats, which have proved to be an unnecessary barrier to leaseholders' legitimate expectations. The changes will enable many more leaseholders to qualify. The Bill will abolish the residence test and remove the requirement that at least two thirds of the leaseholders in a block must participate. The existing requirement that the participating leaseholders hold leases on at least half the flats in the building will be retained because we do not consider it right to allow a minority of interests to take over.

The Bill will raise the proportion of the building that can be occupied for non-residential purposes from 10 to 25 per cent. and remove the low rent test in the few circumstances where it still applies. It will also restrict the existing exemption for converted houses with resident landlords to houses that they owned at the time of conversion. We propose to require the use of a company limited by guarantee with a prescribed constitution to buy the freehold and manage the building along similar lines to those proposed for the right to manage and commonhold; it will be a right-to-enfranchise company.

**Mr. John Taylor** (Solihull): Will the company limited by guarantee that undertakes management be the same company that will own the freehold? Is that the Minister's intention?

**Mr. Wills:** No. There is no reason why it should not be, but the two are not linked; they are alternative routes for leaseholders to get control over their flats. One is a more limited measure in which a company limited by guarantee manages the building. The other involves setting up a right-to-enfranchise company, also limited by guarantee, which owns the building on behalf of all the leaseholders who have a stake in it through the company.

**Mr. Taylor:** Does the Minister agree that it would not be unusual for long leaseholders who want to manage then to want to own the freehold as well? If they have an existing vehicle for the first purpose—a company limited by guarantee—can they not conveniently use it for the second?

**Mr. Wills:** Of course, I agree that that may well happen, as the process and vehicles are in place. The Bill provides for that possibility. We are trying to give existing leaseholders a variety of mechanisms to deal with the problems that they currently suffer.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): My hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) made

another point. Many people are concerned that the Bill alters the way in which our great leasehold estates are managed in relation to the former estate management scheme in the Leasehold Reform Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. The right-to-manage company will have to incorporate the provisions on how the leaseholds are managed, but how will the company be negotiated in the first place, what rights will there be in the absence of agreement and how will appeals be managed? Furthermore, what rights will there be to alter the right-to-management agreement once it has been made?

**Mr. Wills:** This is a very important point. We are aware of the concerns about estate management schemes and have received a number of representations about them. However, we cannot simply abolish them. They are often needed to ensure the maintenance of common facilities on an estate. I understand that the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises affects a significant number of people. We will continue to consider carefully the representations that we have received. I am afraid that I cannot give any commitment at this stage, but we may return to the matter in Committee and I should be happy to discuss it further.

Let me return to the right-to-enfranchise company. The point is that it will ensure democratic management and an effective mechanism for resolving disputes. It will help leaseholders to progress from the right to manage to enfranchisement if they wish to do so. The hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) is no longer in his place, but I was about to reassure him that the provisions also enable leaseholders to transfer to commonhold if they wish to do so. All long leaseholders will have a new right to become members of the right-to-enfranchise company. That is an improvement on the current position. At present, leaseholders can be and are unfairly excluded from an enfranchisement once the required majority has been achieved.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** The Minister said that all commonholders would have the right to enfranchise. Why will commonholders who hold leases under the Crown not be given similar rights?

**Mr. Wills:** The hon. Gentleman may have misunderstood me. I was talking about leaseholders rather than commonholders. If he would like to return to the point later, perhaps in Committee, I should be happy to try to clarify the matter. I fear that he may be labouring under a misapprehension.

I turn now to the valuation rules. We share the concern that has been expressed by many leaseholders about the cost of enfranchisement, but we must also recognise that landlords have legitimate interests, and we consider that they are entitled to a fair market price for those interests, including a share of any marriage value. However, we know that disputes about the price can ensure that leaseholders incur costs that may amount to as much as the price itself. We intend to make it easier and quicker to determine a price that is fair to both sides and that will reduce the scope for well-resourced landlords to drag out the process to their advantage.

The Bill provides that where marriage value exists, it will be divided equally between the parties. When the unexpired term of a lease is long, marriage value is likely to be minimal. The Bill therefore provides that no marriage value will be payable when all the leases in a block have more than 80 years to run. According to the survey of English housing, about three quarters of leaseholders have leases with more than 80 years to run. The Bill also provides that the valuation date will be the date of the initial notice. That follows the approach for leasehold houses. It provides more certainty and removes any incentive for landlords to delay proceedings in a rising property market.

Finally, the Bill introduces a requirement to obtain permission to appeal against any decision of the leasehold valuation tribunal. Some landlords routinely appeal to the Lands Tribunal to persuade leaseholders to settle at a higher price. The Bill would amend the right of individual leaseholders of flats to buy a new, longer lease. Many of the changes reflect those proposed for collective enfranchisement. For example, any marriage value would be shared equally between the parties and no marriage value would be payable where the unexpired term of the lease exceeded 80 years.

The Bill would remove the existing three-year residence requirement to help leaseholders who occupy their flats as a second home or sub-let. To prevent the possibility of short-term windfall gains by speculators, however, leaseholders must hold a long lease for a period of two years before being able to exercise the right. There are special provisions to help the personal representatives of deceased leaseholders.

The Bill amends the rules for enfranchising leasehold houses under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 along similar lines to those for flats. It grants new rights to leaseholders of houses who have extended their leases under the 1967 Act. They will be able to buy the freehold after the extended lease has commenced and they will be entitled to remain, under an assured tenancy, when that lease expires. The Bill also amends the procedures for acquiring the freehold of a leasehold house where the landlord cannot be found, to bring them in line with those applying to flats.

The Bill will extend and improve leaseholders' existing remedies against unreasonable charges and other abuses. It amends the definition of a service charge under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 to cover improvements, where those are payable under the terms of the lease. That change will help leaseholders of social landlords in particular.

The Bill gives leaseholders new protection against unreasonable administration charges, including charges for granting approvals and providing information—for example, for prospective purchasers—and penalties for late payment of rent or service charges. There is widespread concern about such abuses and the Bill will tackle that.

The Bill will improve security and accountability for service charge moneys, which will normally have to be held in a separate designated trust account for each property. Accounting requirements will be revised to provide greater transparency and there will be a new, specific right for leaseholders to withhold service charge payments if key requirements are not met.

The Bill extends the existing requirements under the 1985 Act to consult leaseholders on proposed works. There will be a new requirement for the landlord to consult leaseholders before entering into any contract for

*[Mr. Wills]*

the provision of works or services lasting for more than 12 months. For specific works, consultation will be required when the costs payable by any leaseholder exceed a prescribed sum.

The Bill will make it easier to remedy defective leases. The grounds for seeking a variation under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 will be extended and clarified and jurisdiction transferred from the courts to the leasehold valuation tribunals. The Bill provides that ground rent will be payable only when the landlord has sent a notice to a leaseholder in a prescribed form. Provided that payment is made within 30 days of the notice, the landlord will be prevented from making any additional charges or starting any proceedings.

The Bill will also introduce new restrictions on the commencement of forfeiture proceedings for breaches of covenants or conditions under a lease. Landlords can use the threat of forfeiture, sometimes based on spurious or non-existent grounds, to persuade leaseholders to pay unreasonable sums of money. Landlords will be prohibited from commencing forfeiture proceedings for any breach of a covenant or condition in a lease, unless a leasehold valuation tribunal or court determines that a breach has occurred.

The Bill will make a number of changes to the jurisdiction and procedures of the leasehold valuation tribunals. The changes are intended to improve the effectiveness of the tribunals and to speed up the resolution of disputes. Together with the administrative changes, they will implement the recommendations of the financial management and policy review that were published last year. Taken together, those changes will greatly enhance the rights of leaseholders. They will redress the current unfair balance that exists between landlords and leaseholders, but at the same time they will respect the legitimate rights of landlords. Together with the proposals for commonhold, they will implement the Government's commitments and put us on course for a fairer system of land tenure that is far more appropriate for the times in which we live.

Consultation has shown a broad consensus in support of the Government's proposals. Due to the conflicting interests, there are inevitably differences of opinion on particular aspects. Some leaseholders have complained that the proposals do not go far enough. We have tried to strike a fair balance. I believe that we have done so. Our proposals are aimed at resolving the main difficulties that face most leaseholders in England and Wales and I believe that they will do so. The Government believe that this is a good Bill and I hope that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree.

4.34 pm

**Mr. William Cash** (Stone): I rise to welcome the Bill, which brings together a process that has lasted for more than 30 years. In the House of Lords, the Bill had innumerable readings, including two First Readings, two Second Readings, a lengthy exercise in the Moses Room and discussions during its unfinished Report stage. It subsequently had its other Readings during its second round. With the number of noble and learned Lords in the other place, therefore, nobody can say that the Bill has not been given the most careful consideration. It does not follow, however, that all the matters relating to it have been resolved, and there will no doubt be issues into which we shall have to dig deeper in Committee.

We are in favour of the Bill as a whole, subject to what I have just said. I should declare an interest, not only as a solicitor, but as one who lives in a block of flats that are on long leaseholds. I am not at present contemplating informing myself of the provisions for commonhold, but—who knows?—it might be suggested by tenants in the other flats.

As the Minister said, flats in blocks are at present invariably sold on long leases. This leads to two problems. First, such flats are a wasting asset. As the leases grow shorter. it becomes increasingly difficult to mortgage the flats, which is a serious consideration for the people living in them—particularly with mortgage rates as they are now, and with people being anxious to get in on the act if they possibly can. Secondly, the flat-owner is in a continuing relationship with the landlord, who has a duty to maintain the building and needs to raise money from the lessees to carry out that function. An adversarial relationship is, therefore, implicit in the arrangements from the beginning.

The commonhold provisions of the Bill are intended to address the problem of a leasehold flat being a wasting asset, by giving flat-owners full tenure of their flats. The leasehold reform provisions are intended to deal with the second problem by allowing lessees in blocks of flats to take over the management of the flats. Those provisions are also intended to alleviate the problem of shortening leases by easing the provisions for lessees purchasing the freehold and obtaining lease extensions.

The reason that so many flats in blocks are sold on long leases is a technical one. A block of flats obviously needs repairing from time to time, and the only way for that to be done in practice is for all the flat-owners to club together to pay a reasonable service charge. Sometimes the service charge is not reasonable, but that is a separate question that we shall no doubt consider in Committee. A flat is dependent for support on the flats beneath it, and dependent for protection from the elements on the flats above it. Thus are flat-owners bound together in a relationship of mutual interdependence.

Unfortunately, one of the long-established principles of English common law—which, of course, I support on all conceivable occasions—is that positive covenants do not run with the land. In practice, that means that if a block is sold off with each flat a freehold, the flat-owners can agree among themselves to contribute a fair amount to the service charge and to support each other's flats. If a flat-owner sells his flat, however, that obligation is not automatically passed on, for the reason that I have given. In other words, a later purchaser will have no obligation to his fellow flat-owners to pay the service charge or even to support the flats above him. That is the defect in law to which the Minister alluded—perhaps not in quite such detail—and it is important to get it in front of the House, because it is a practical problem of the first importance and it must be dealt with.

The defects of the system were first shown, surprisingly, at Lincoln's Inn. At the end of the 17th century, the benchers who ran Lincoln's Inn decided to go in for a bit of property development. The result is the attractive buildings on three sides of New square. Unfortunately, the benchers, no doubt being somewhat

grasping—*[Interruption.]* Say no more. The benchers decided to sell off the flats in the new buildings in New square as freeholds, and the result was as I have described. After a few years, none of the freeholders had any liability for any repairs and the buildings were kept in repair only because they were still part owned by the Inn and rented out. It is, of course, ironic that the home of English conveyancers produced that completely foreseeable disaster.

Eventually, the matter could be sorted out only by the Inn itself obtaining a private Act of Parliament, which happened in the 19th century. I must make the point that if elite lawyers—those responsible for the great developments of the law on conveyancing, equity, trusts and the rest of it—can get into such a tangle, that is a salutary lesson to us all.

**Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the problem could be resolved in this country under English law if positive covenants were allowed to run with land, as they do in other jurisdictions where there are commonhold and strata title associations? Part of the problem with the Bill is that, having incorporated English company law as the basis for commonhold, one runs into such difficulties, which will be overcome, one hopes, only when the Law Commission produces its report on flying freehold.

**Mr. Cash:** The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. If so much of the Bill depends on the problem arising over positive covenants and given the fact that the Law Commission could have made proposals to deal with it, that difficulty might have been resolved, but that is a hypothesis and we face the reality before us. We are considering the Bill and no doubt we shall have an opportunity to discuss his point in Committee, but if he tables an amendment that the Bill should not proceed unless the Government make a proposal on changing the law on positive covenants, I suspect that he will receive a simple answer: that is outside the scope of the legislation. He makes an interesting hypothetical point, but I shall leave it at that.

Having made my point with respect to the lawyers in Lincoln's Inn, I must make the general point that we are no longer dealing with the elite. Following the development of enfranchisement, property rights and the relationship between voting and democracy as well as the passing of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 and subsequent events, it is fair to say there are many more property owners, many of whom have the benefit of property ownership as a result of the right-to-buy proposals conferred by the Conservative Government under Baroness Thatcher, than in the mid-19th century.

Having said that, many of those voters have reverted to new Labour or, indeed, the Liberal Democrats. I hasten to add that I say that without enthusiasm. They may find that that was a mistake, but, none the less, it has happened, so there is a general point to make with respect to the Bill: all parties accept that it is in the national interest and that it will benefit people from all walks of life. There are many more flat owners these days, and all political parties are supported by such people.

In other countries, the problem of freehold flats has been met by legislation introducing a condominium system, sometimes known as a strata title. That gives flat owners the management of their blocks and gives each flat owner the equivalent of a freehold of their flat. As long ago as 1987—I say this with pride—the Conservative Government produced a report from an interdepartmental working party proposing a form of commonhold. That was positively received and the late Lord Hailsham, the Lord Chancellor, asked the Law Commission to produce a report and a draft Bill. The Law Commission reported back in late 1990. After further consultation, the Lord Chancellor announced that commonhold legislation would be introduced as soon as parliamentary time could be found for it.

Progress was then halted by the 1992 general election. Immediately after the election, the Conservative party devoted the available parliamentary time to the cause of leasehold reform, but by 1995 a draft Bill and consultation paper on commonhold had been prepared. The Bill was proposed in the Queen's Speech in October 1996, but never progressed owing to the general election of May 1997. The rest is history.

Originally, the Labour response to the idea of commonhold was apathetic. In October 1997 the right hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), then Parliamentary Secretary to the Lord Chancellor's Department, told the British Property Federation

> "The pressure of other business . . . means that there is no likelihood of legislation being introduced on this topic in the near future."

That disappointed those of us who were hoping that the new form of tenure would be introduced.

In the event, it was only in December 2000 that the Government introduced a commonhold Bill in the other place. Unfortunately that Bill failed after the calling of a general election in May last year, despite having been given a Third Reading in the other place. The Government are to be commended on nevertheless reintroducing the Bill after the election. It is a pleasure to see them fulfilling long-standing Conservative commitments.

Less commendable, I regret to say, is the Government's response to suggested improvements in the Bill. In the case of a largely technical Bill such as this, it might be hoped that an element of bipartisanship would exist. I have referred to the national interest, and to cross-currents in the population and different demographic considerations. I must also reiterate what a number of my hon. Friends have said about the programme motion.

This Bill deserves examination of a kind that would be possible within a reasonably limited amount of time, but not the limited amount that the Government are providing. It needs proper consideration, but it is clear that the Government do not intend to provide time for such consideration. I have no doubt that we will oppose the programme motion.

Sadly, in the other place the sponsoring Ministers considered it a matter almost of personal honour to refuse to accept any amendments tabled by the eminent lawyers, on both the Opposition and the Cross Benches, who opposed their proposals. A very obstinate attitude has been taken to important amendments. I shall return to the unanimity rule in a moment, as it illustrates the fact that, although the Government indicated that they were prepared to listen, absolutely nothing came of it.

*[Mr. Cash]*

The Minister has no direct responsibility for that, but he has influence. I look to him in the hope that, if we table amendments, he will be as good as his word and not only consider them carefully, but go beyond consultation to acceptance.

**Mr. Robathan:** Is not the main point the fact that, if the motion is passed, various amendments and new clauses that I am sure will be proposed in Committee will not even be reached? The Minister has not addressed that. He says that the position is simple, but amendments tabled in good faith and not on a partisan basis will not be reached, however important they may be.

**Mr. Cash:** That returns me to a point I made earlier: this Bill should be bipartisan. If assurances given by the Lord Chancellor in the other place are not followed by proper and adequate consideration because not enough time has been provided, inadequacies and deficiencies in the Bill will result in protests not only from those who happen to be members of the Conservative party, but from those with an interest in commonhold and leasehold matters who would like the Bill to be improved to respond to important questions in respect of which amendments will be tabled but, apparently, not considered. Those protests will fall heavily on the Government, and I ask them to reconsider the programme motion.

**Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): In past Parliaments, there were three separate attempts by the then Government, now the Opposition, to reform leasehold, all of which failed. Was there any attempt during consideration of any of those three Bills to adopt a bipartisan approach?

**Mr. Cash:** It speaks for itself that there has been a natural progression from the dates that I gave earlier. We have tried to arrive at the position that I think we are on the threshold of achieving: a Bill that will go through with all-party endorsement. However, for reasons to do with the programming motion, it will be the responsibility and liability of the Government if proper consideration is not given to important amendments that are in the interests of persons throughout the United Kingdom.

**Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): My hon. Friend has already referred to the complexity of the legislation. Does he agree that careful thought needs to be given to how the measures are explained to members of the general public? As a new Member of Parliament, I am looking for a second home in London. I have been struck by how the information—not the advice—that I have sought from different estate agents has ranged from non-existent to entirely contradictory. There are 75 pages of explanatory notes to the Bill. Does my hon. Friend agree that thought needs to be given to ensuring that information on the Bill can be put over simply to members of the public?

**Mr. Cash:** It may be necessary to make such information available to Members of Parliament as well. My hon. Friend has almost selected himself for the Committee stage, as a result of which he will discover even more. The Minister and I get on quite well for a fair amount of the time, although not all the time. In our contests over the past few months, he and I have established an understanding about transparency of information. He has been forthcoming. It would be helpful—perhaps the Government already have it in mind—to produce a layman's version of what the Bill involves: to put it in simple language so that the public at large will be able to understand it after it has gone through. It is very important. It affects so many people.

**Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Cash:** I shall for the last time for a while, because I must make some progress. I still have my marker for five minutes before me.

**Mr. Pike:** Some of the things in the Bill, including leasehold enfranchisement, were moved as amendments in 1993 by the then Opposition and voted against by people such as the hon. Gentleman on the Government side.

**Mr. Cash:** I am delighted, if that is a factual point, to concur with it. After all, as I keep on saying, we are adopting a constructive position with respect to the Bill. If it so happens that at that point in time good points were made by the then Opposition, so be it. If the consequence is that we end up with a better Bill, that is the object of the exercise. In matters of this kind, where there is no substantial philosophical or principled distinction between the parties, we should do nothing other than seek to arrive at the best possible solution for all our constituents.

However, as I have said, there have been inadequate responses by the Government to suggested improvements to the Bill. Although it has been examined at length twice in Committee in the other place and gone through Report and Third Reading twice, the Government have doggedly refused to make improvements to it. I find that difficult to accept and I hope that the Government will bear it in mind.

Let me turn to two particular matters where obstinacy seems to have ruled. Obviously, commonhold is a new form of tenure. It is unfamiliar to lawyers who deal in conveyancing let alone to the general public. The point about managing agents is also important. The extent to which the Government have not dealt with these matters is covered in the Library research paper published on 14 December which refers to the regulation of managing agents. Nothing in the Bill deals with that problem, yet on Report and on Third Reading Lord Williams of Elvel moved an amendment to provide for the establishment of a professional regulatory body for property managers, or a licensing scheme or other arrangements deemed appropriate by regulation after consultation. Lord Falconer set out the Government's position in a nutshell, saying:

"Obviously I am not in a position to say when that would be"

—in respect of producing some form of legislation to deal with those issues.

"We should hope that it would be in the next Session, but plainly that would depend on a whole range of unpredictable issues on which I am not in a position to comment."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 November 2001; Vol.628, c.942.]

In response to my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) who raised the matter, managing agents, surveyors and others who do a

good job, sometimes in difficult circumstances, may have some difficulty in dealing with the complications of the Bill and it is certainly in mind that there will be legislation and indeed some attempt to improve the information available not only to Members of Parliament and the public at large, but to those who deal with these matters on a daily basis. I am sure the Minister agrees that if the matter is not dealt with properly there will be real problems.

**Mr. John Taylor:** Before my hon. Friend concludes, let me draw his attention to a point that has not so far been covered. The Bill could win itself plaudits in the leasehold enfranchisement area if it had a patent, transparent price calculation mechanism for the acquisition of a freehold. The Leasehold Reform Act 1967 failed in that respect. Could not this Bill be commended for getting it right?

**Mr. Cash:** I am sure that the matter deserves further consideration and that we shall examine it in Committee. Any improvements that produce an accurate value of an interest will obviously be relevant.

We shall need clear rules to calculate and establish ownership of the different units. Valuation tribunals may offer one route to achieve that, but I suspect that there will be many disputes. No doubt we shall return to the issue in Committee if hon. Members table amendments on arbitration ombudsmen and so on.

I was drawing attention to the Government's failure to improve the Bill. If, as Conservative Members hope, commonhold is successful, it is important that it develops a degree of momentum so that it becomes the preferred form of tenure for blocks of flats. If only a few commonholds are established, lawyers will not gain the necessary practical familiarity with the new concept and the momentum for adopting commonhold as the standard method of flatholding will be lost. That is a serious point. At present it is quite common for developers to sell flats on long leases and give the lessees shares in the management company so that the lessees manage the block. Indeed, developers will often grant the freehold to the lessees. The selling of flats on 999-year leases is not dissimilar to the commonhold idea.

Opposition Members believe that it is vital that commonhold should add to what exists. It seems that the Government have not yet fully come to grips with the need to make commonhold attractive. That is a key point.

First, the Government have sought deliberately to restrict the availability of commonhold. If a block of flats is to be converted from leasehold to commonhold, the unanimity of all those with an interest in the building is required. All the flat owners must agree. The freeholder must agree. All the mortgagees must agree. Anyone who has registered a caution on the Land Registry must agree. Even people with a right of way or some easement over the property must agree.

In practice, therefore, in all but the smallest blocks, there is no realistic scope for converting from leasehold to commonhold. I trust that the Minister is giving that serious matter a great deal of thought.

Earlier, I mentioned the remarks made by the Lord Chancellor on 5 July. For the purposes of the record, I shall repeat what he said:

"Let me stress that the Government are taking careful note of all the arguments put against the rule which requires the consent of 100 per cent of the prospective unit holders for conversion from leasehold to commonhold. We doubt that allowing long leaseholders to continue physically within, but legally at least semi-detached from, the commonhold arrangement would be a sensible way through. The only alternative, which would bring a non-consenting minority within the new arrangements, might be characterised as expropriation.

However, if a well-judged amendment were put forward, for which there was substantial cross-party support, the Government would listen to the debate and consider it very carefully."

I sense from the mood of the House that that substantial cross-party support exists, but the inference that the Government have not listened carefully can be made from the fact that no movement has taken place.

**Mr. Wills:** That does not follow at all.

**Mr. Cash:** I am glad to hear the Minister say, from a sedentary position, that that does not follow at all, as that is a good indication that we will have an opportunity to consider—and agree—the amendment in Committee.

The Lord Chancellor continued:

"That said, the position which the Government have hitherto maintained, and to which they still adhere unless persuaded to the contrary, is that, although there is undeniable merit in not allowing one person out of step with the proposed new regime to obstruct the entire commonhold arrangement agreed upon by the others, the sensitivities inherent in expropriating that one person may be an overriding consideration the other way. But the Government will listen."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 5 July 2001; Vol. 626, c. 887.]

That is a sensible and constructive approach. We now know, and the Minister has agreed, that the Government will listen to the arguments that are advanced in this House. However, the unanimity of flat owners is not the only requirement. For all the reasons that I have given already, the process will affect mortgagees, those who put on cautions, and those with easements and rights of way.

Cautions can be put on for all sorts of reasons. The other day, the Minister and I spent several happy hours dealing with the Land Registration Bill. Perhaps we should have discussed this one at the same time. Easements are also prone to complication. One person prepared to be difficult in this respect can create so many practical difficulties that there must be some way of relieving the obstruction that can be caused.

Although the precedents and analogies may not be precise, I recall drafting legislation and looking at matters relating to frontages. For example, the law covering changing or extending the frontage arrangements applicable to the alley running behind stables that had been converted into new residences provided that only a certain percentage of the people involved had to agree. When that percentage was secured, the other people had to go along with the decision. If the Minister were to do a bit of digging in that area—

**Mr. Heald:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Cash:** I give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald).

**Mr. Heald:** Has my hon. Friend been able to identify any detriment that would be suffered by a non-consenting

*[Mr. Heald]*

unit-owner? Clearly, one would not want greatly to disadvantage an individual, but it is hard to imagine what the detriment to an individual would be if his opposition was overborne.

**Mr. Cash:** Plenty of people might say no—perhaps not for good reasons. Many personal considerations might come to bear. I do not want to generalise, but things can get personal in a block of flats. Many objections could be vexatious and frivolous, although there might be other substantial issues. As I have already pointed out, somebody with no more than a minimal interest could veto a range of matters. We need to look at that carefully in Committee, and I am extremely glad that the Minister is showing such a constructive interest.

**Mr. Don Foster:** The hon. Gentleman looks for examples where 100 per cent. agreement is not required. May I draw his attention to the most relevant example—large-scale voluntary transfers whereby council house tenants can choose a different social landlord? In those cases, 100 per cent. agreement is definitely not required.

**Mr. Cash:** That is most helpful. As we proceed, other examples will no doubt be offered. The unanimity test has been exaggerated by the Government. I am not sure about their reasons as we have not been given a full explanation, but we shall doubtless have a chance to consider the matter in Committee.

As I have a number of things to say, I shall turn from the problem of unanimity to the extension of the commonhold. We should like the commonhold system to apply to all residential flats after the Bill becomes law. Allowing conversion from leasehold to commonhold would require a careful scheme. The freeholder could not have his interest expropriated, so provision would need to be made for those who did not want to convert. None the less, the Government should be able to propose a workable scheme for the conversion of existing properties. I hope that they will respond favourably to any amendments on that subject that we might table in Committee. Indeed, perhaps they will have the good sense to introduce amendments to deal with the matter themselves.

Secondly, the Government also want to restrict the ability of unit-holders—flat owners—to rent out their flats. Clause 17 gives the Lord Chancellor Henry VIII powers to make regulations to stop flat owners being granted residential leases for flats. In an intervention, I referred to the problem of regulations. I am glad to know that they will be published in draft in future.

In the other place, the Government suggested that they propose to limit renting to leases for no more than five years at a rack-rent without taking a fine. We agree that, in the abstract, it would be nice to have a commonhold association if all the members lived in the block, and stopping unit-holders renting out their property on other than short leases would contribute to that. The issue cannot, however, be viewed merely in the abstract. As a result of the Conservative reforms that culminated in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, there is now a thriving private rental market. Equally, there is a thriving market for flats—not to occupy but to rent out.

Someone buying to rent will have a choice: a block sold as commonhold or as leasehold. If restrictions are placed on investors renting out commonhold flats, they will inevitably buy leasehold flats. That is an important consideration. We have to deal with the practicalities of the marketplace.

Thirdly, the Government have not given commonhold associations sufficiently strong powers to enforce the terms of the commonhold community statement. With leasehold property, the landlord has a right of forfeiture if the lessee breaches the lease. At first blush, that sounds extremely harsh, but in fact forfeiture is very much a last resort.

If a tenant is simply behind with the rent, all he has to do to obtain relief from forfeiture is to pay off the arrears. If he is in arrears with the service charge, the landlord must obtain a statement from the leasehold valuation tribunal that the service charge is reasonable. If the tenant has broken some other term of the lease, the landlord must serve a special notice under section 146 of the Law of Property Act 1925 requiring the tenant to remedy the breach, and even then the tenant can apply for relief of forfeiture. So there are plenty of safeguards, and very few long leases are forfeited. That is a fact. However, this weapon of last resort means that lessees and their mortgagees can be forced to pay.

With commonhold, the Government take the view that moneys owed by way of service charge should simply be enforced as normal debts. In other words, the commonhold association would have to take the defaulting unit-holder to court to obtain a judgment and then enforce that judgment. The Government envisage that a judgment will be enforced in the ordinary way. The standard method will be to put a charging order on the unit-holder's unit and then sell it if the unit-holder continues to be recalcitrant. However, the Government are ignoring the fact that a defaulting unit-holder will probably already have a mortgage on his flat and may well have a second or even a third mortgage. This means of enforcement will therefore work only if there is equity in the flat. With leaseholds, the landlord will usually be paid by the first mortgagee, who does not want to forfeit its interest in the flat. With commonhold flats, that will not apply. That is another practical point. I ask the Minister to consider these matters carefully, because if we are to make the system work it must not be snarled up by practical problems on which there should be no party political difference.

The absence of adequate enforcement provisions will, in our view, lead to disaster sooner or later. If a block requires extensive works and the tenants are already heavily mortgaged, it will take only a small number of defaulters to make the block unmanageable.

Fourthly, so-called ungrounded developments will not be permitted. That means that it is not possible to have a mixed development in which there are shops on the ground floor and a common residential area above. Surely it would be sensible for the Bill to provide maximum flexibility to encourage commonhold development. If developers have no choice but to make the whole of a mixed development commonhold, they may be reluctant to adopt commonhold due to the perceived reduced investment value of the commercial elements.

Let me turn to flying commonholds—flats over shops. The Bill does not allow flying commonholds where residential properties exist on the upper floors of a

property only, such as flats over shops. That is in line with the law on leasehold. Currently, no more than 10 per cent. of the whole block must be commercial if residential leaseholders want to purchase their freeholds. We support the raising of this hurdle, and as much as 25 per cent. has been suggested. That will encourage people to live above commercial property. Mixed-use schemes such as "Living Over the Shop" should be promoted, as that will assist urban regeneration and the provision of affordable housing in our towns and cities. I think that the Minister may recognise some of that language.

**Glenda Jackson:** Not emanating from the mouth of Conservative Members.

**Mr. Cash:** It certainly is, because the point has just been made.

Fifthly, the Bill prohibits commonhold associations from charging the common parts of blocks. That may prevent commonhold associations from borrowing to finance emergency works or works of improvement. In jurisdictions elsewhere in the world, it is common for the equivalent of commonhold associations to borrow against future service charge income, and in our view it would be desirable for something similar to be made permissible under the Bill. Thus we welcome that form of tenure, but we believe that the Bill can be improved.

We also broadly support the provisions on leasehold reform. Again, however, there are problems with matters that the Government have simply not thought through. The most glaring example is that they propose that lessees should be entitled to establish a right-to-manage company. We support the right-to-manage proposals, although some of the detail needs to be considered more closely, and we shall do so in Committee. However, it is proposed that council premises, where the landlord is a local authority, should be excluded from the right to manage. Some 12 per cent. of right-to-buy sales have involved leasehold flats. Public sector tenants should not be excluded simply because of Labour's anti-right-to-buy dogma.

When the appropriate procedure has been followed, the right-to-manage company will take over the block's management from the landlord. So far so good, but there obviously has to be some means to hand over the management from landlord to the right-to-manage company. In any block, many people, ranging from the caretaker to a building company retained to carry out works, are likely to have a contractual relationship with the landlord. Some means of regulating the handover must be required—another practical consideration.

Astonishingly, the Bill as originally drafted made no provision for handover; it merely provided that, one month after the relevant notices had been served, the management should be taken over by the right-to-manage company. Despite the central issue of handover being discussed twice in Committee in the other place, it was on the Bill's Third Reading in November last year that the Government were obliged, by the arguments of Lord Kingsland, to recognise that there was a problem, and they finally decided to hold a consultation exercise. I hope that we shall not experience such resistance in this House. However, it is said:

"Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

The difficulty, as the Government were repeatedly told, is that there are only three possibilities. First, the contracts could be transferred automatically to the right-to-manage company by a statutory novation. Secondly, the contracts could be terminated automatically. The last possibility would be to allow a sufficiently long handover period to allow contracts to come to a natural end, as would ordinarily be the case with building repair works.

The problem with statutory novation is that the right-to-manage companies will be extremely weak financially. The Government intend that they should be companies limited by guarantee, with lessees being liable for the grand sum of £1 each in the event of the company going into liquidation. That is obviously extremely unsatisfactory from the point of view of anyone who entered into a contract in good faith with a financially solid landlord.

The alternative—an automatic termination—is equally unsatisfactory, for the right-to-manage company could be held to ransom by a builder halfway through the works. That is another practical point. The only workable proposal may be to allow a longish handover, but I have listened with interest to the results of the Government's consultation exercise, and we shall examine their proposals with care.

Chapter 2 deals with collective enfranchisement by the lessees of flats. We welcome the principle of those proposals. In the other place, we suggested various technical improvements. Again, those suggestions fell on stony ground, but we may return to some of them on Report.

In conclusion, we are concerned that the Government are once more showing their contempt for Parliament by providing for so much of the Bill's contents to be made by regulation, but I am glad to hear that the proposed regulations will be made available to us fairly soon. We believe that it is time to consolidate the various measures that relate to the ownership of leasehold land into a much clearer, single Act. It is time that we consolidated all that law in a way that is comprehensible and transparent for the benefit of our constituents. The Opposition support the Bill, but we will make constructive proposals in Committee.

5.19 pm

**Mr. Kevin Barron** (Rother Valley): I completely agree with the final comment of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). The law on leasehold is confusing on occasion even to lawyers. It should be consolidated. Although we cannot do that in this Bill, time should be provided for both Houses to consider the whole issue of leasehold and to ensure that people are made aware of their rights.

I disagree with the hon. Gentleman that the Government have not moved in another place. I have read the proceedings that have taken place in another place since the general election and, on more than one occasion, Opposition Members have thanked the Government for moving on particular issues. They may have been obscure points of law which the hon. Gentleman is more likely to understand than I am, but the Government have responded to the arguments made. It is wrong to suggest that they have not moved at all.

I welcome many of the changes in part 2 that try to clarify the position of leaseholders. Like our constituents, many of us have been confused over the years and are sometimes angered by what happens.

*[Mr. Kevin Barron]*

I declare an historical interest. Eight months after my wife and I married in 1969, we had scraped together £150 for a deposit on a home. We went to an estate agent in our village who told us that that the property that we wanted to buy was leasehold. I had worked in industry and I did not know what the term meant, so we put down the deposit and moved into the house. When I asked what leasehold involved, I was told that it meant £6 a year ground rent and, although I was not earning a lot of money at that time, that was not going to stop me buying the house.

We bought the property in 1970 and I subsequently found out that the lease was to run for 800 years. I paid the initial £6 a year—the sum went up to £8—to a landowner who used to live locally but who now lived in the Isle of Man where he presumably avoided certain levels of tax. I sent my cheque off every year and thought that that was the end of the matter.

However, a few years later, we wanted to improve the property. By then we had three children and I had also bought a motor car, so I wanted to put a garage on to what I believed was our property. I applied to the local planning authority, an architect drew up the plans and they were approved. A neighbour told me that I should write to Mr. Parkin to tell him what I was doing because he would want money off me, but I said I did not know why I should do that because I had already obtained planning permission and gone through what I thought was the law. So the garage and kitchen extension were built. Although I now suspect that I should have been, I was not in correspondence with the landowner at that time because I thought that it did not matter. I believed that, to all intents and purposes, I had kept within the planning law, so we carried on with the work.

However, when we came to sell the house in 1985, there was a big dispute about retrospective permission for the building of the garage and the kitchen extension. Months later, I received a letter from my solicitor saying that he had spoken to the landowner who was adamant that he wanted £100 to give retrospective consent for the building of the garage and kitchen extension. My solicitor also wrote:

"As previously mentioned to you he is entitled to charge the costs of a Surveyor inspecting the extension confirming that it corresponds with the plan and reporting accordingly.

We would estimate that this would be in the region of £50."

That angered me a little. The planning authority inspects the work that is carried out, yet the landowner had what I thought was the right to extort money from me. He had me on the end of a hook, because I had moved into another home and wanted to sell my property, for which I had a buyer.

In the end, we sent a letter to the solicitors and the prospective buyer saying that we would ensure that they would have no costs to incur because of our dispute with the landowner. That was in 1985, and I have heard nothing since. The £100 charge and the cost of the surveyor seem to have disappeared.

**Mr. Gardiner:** Wait until Friday morning.

**Mr. Barron:** I cannot.

I then moved into a freehold property. However, the last flat that I bought in London is in contrast to the leasehold property. It is in Abbey Court on Macleod street SE17 and, when it was built in 1986, a small management committee was put together comprising the tenants who moved in. Within about six months, the tenants offered to buy the freehold off the developer. It was the first time that he had built a block of flats and the freehold was duly bought. The flats are now run by Suthwalk management company. It is a limited company of the type described by the Minister which should be created under the Bill. There are 21 shares in the company and there are 21 flats. Each flat owner is a shareholder. The company secretary is Mrs. Shelagh Farren, who does a great job looking after all 21 of us, including four Members of the House and a leading tabloid journalist who is an eminent Lobby correspondent. Those interests are undeclared in the Library, so I might get into trouble for mentioning them.

We run a committee within the company which deals with problems. The Minister mentioned matters in which the management committee could get involved. It deals with problems such as people making noise next door, and calls people together to get things sorted out. We have no problems with parking next to the flats. The garden is looked after and the stairwells are tended and decorated. We pay a monthly service charge and an annual ground rent, but sometimes neither is requested, depending on the balance of the account. If we do not have to expend the money, we do not call it in. Most people would accept that to be a civilised way in which to organise one's life. People want to have somewhere for them and their families to live and to be able to go out to work. The way in which we manage our flats is a civilised way to achieve that.

Commonhold should be supported in the Bill. However, although the measure introduces commonhold tenure, it will, I fear, remain only a theoretical possibility for current flat owners. As we heard, existing leaseholders will have to obtain 100 per cent. agreement of all those with an interest in their blocks, including that of existing landlords, to achieve a transfer to commonhold. Moreover, fewer new developments will take place on a commonhold basis because no developer in his right mind would sacrifice the rich pickings of the leasehold system, even with the changes in part 2. I am not convinced that we are right in this regard.

On Second Reading in the other place, the Earl of Caithness said:

"I did not like the provision that required 100 per cent. agreement to move from leasehold to commonhold. It seemed to defeat the object of moving to commonhold in the first place and I felt that it could not progress all that far."

I agree with him. In the same debate, Lord Goodhart, who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, said:

"there are a number of problems, some of them serious. As the Bill now stands, the main problem is the requirement for 100 per cent. consent from all interested parties—freeholders, leaseholders, chargees—before the conversion of existing properties to commonhold is possible. This will make it very difficult to convert existing leasehold blocks to commonhold. It might be possible in some small buildings containing, say, no more than three or four flats, but hardly any larger blocks would be likely to convert."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 5 July 2001; Vol. 626, c. 890-894.]

I agree with that analysis. To take another situation, if someone with a vested interest in getting money from a lease owns a flat in the building concerned, should there be a right of veto? We must consider these issues seriously.

In winding up the debate in the other place, the Lord Chancellor said:

"When the Bill was last considered, there were some who suggested that we should forbid any further leasehold development and require existing leasehold developments to be converted to commonhold. But we shall continue to maintain the position that stopping leasehold in its tracks is not the most prudent way to proceed. Instead, we shall continue to attempt to win the hearts and minds of potential developers, investors and buyers to ensure that commonhold is established as the preferred alternative for those building interdependent properties."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 5 July 2001; Vol. 626, c. 889.]

I suspect that most people who have had problems with landowners will think that statement a bit naive and in need of further explanation.

I described a problem that I had when I was a leaseholder many years ago. There are not many leasehold problems in my constituency, but many hon. Members have many constituents who are trapped in leasehold situations, so I must tell the Minister that I am a little disappointed by the Government's reticence in introducing commonhold, particularly as it is the most successful form of flat ownership outside England and Wales, whereas leasehold has consistently been shown to provide the worst form of flat ownership and management. The key to commonhold is that it removes third-party landlords and gives full control of a block of flats to the flat owners. That is the arrangement that we have at Abbey Court in SE17, and the House should be introducing it more widely so that existing owners of flats, as well as new owners, can benefit from it.

Both the Lord Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary have said that we should leave it to the market. We can do that if we genuinely believe that people are not prepared to give up the money that they can make from leasehold. However, the House could take other action. I suggest that the Government consider providing more powers in the Bill to introduce commonhold, at least for new build, if the market does not do so. If people want to continue to build leasehold flats and use them as a form of profit generation, as they have done in the past, the Secretary of State should have the power to take action. We should not have to wait five, 10 or 15 years for a parliamentary slot to introduce further legislation. It would be reasonable for us to consider the introduction of such powers during the proceedings on the Bill.

To some extent, I accept what the Minister says about the extension of enfranchisement for current flat owners in part 2. However, the issue of valuation is very important, although it is a little embarrassing for Labour Members. On 19 November, Lord Jacobs spoke on Third Reading in the other place. I believe that Lord Jacobs was recently appointed by the Commission for Public Appointments, and I am not sure whether he has a political affiliation. He said:

"It is true that leaseholders will gain from enfranchisement or lease extension. As the Government have indicated before, in the former case they can grant themselves a 999-year lease. But we are talking about people's homes. Why should they not have virtual outright ownership? I fear that the weakness of the Government's argument is the belief that landlords and tenants are two sides of the same coin, when the truth is that the landlord's interest increases in value, excluding inflation, on a daily basis, while the tenant's value—I remind your Lordships that this is his home—decreases in value on a daily basis."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 November 2001; Vol. 628, c. 921.]

The Bill will still require leaseholders to pay more than open market value when acquiring their freeholds, even though the freeholder would have paid no more than its open market value when acquiring the freehold and contributes nothing towards the repair and maintenance of the property. I believe that that is true in most cases, although the Minister may want to correct me if I am wrong. That situation arises because leaseholders will have to pay 50 per cent. of the so-called marriage value in addition to the open market value of the freehold.

This issue is extremely embarrassing to Labour Members of Parliament—look at what we said in opposition, not so many years ago. In 1995, the then shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), and the shadow housing Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), declared in their proposal—I think it was a policy paper—on leasehold reform, entitled "An End to Feudalism":

"Since the 1967 Act, which provided a simple and fair basis for valuation, the process has become progressively more convoluted . . . we believe that it is right to go back to the fundamentally sound logic behind the 1967 Act, which did not include 'marriage value' in the valuation process."

The paper continues:

"The concepts of 'marriage value' and 'injurious affection' are the two elements most likely to cause problems for leaseholders seeking to enfranchise . . . the easiest solution would be to scrap the two concepts entirely. They were not included in the 1967 Leasehold Reform Act and they certainly should not apply to leaseholders in houses."

Many believe that they should not apply to leaseholders in flats either.

I hope that the issues will be addressed seriously. It is many years since we have been able to get our hands on this area of law and make major changes, and many years will pass before another opportunity arises. I hope that the Government will take the Bill seriously in the few weeks available for consideration, and that the Opposition take seriously their own arguments that there is not much time—although there was more time in another place, because the general election interrupted the Bill's passage through that House. We must focus on the real issues and ensure that we have opportunities to vote on them.

There are many good things in the Bill, especially part 2, which deals with leasehold valuation tribunals. I accept that relevant criteria, scope and access are being considered, but it is important to note that access is all about who can afford it. Even if we broaden the tribunals, many people will not be able to afford access to them unless we do something else to ensure fair access. For many years, people hiding behind money and lawyers have prevented others from getting justice, and it would be fundamentally wrong if we missed an opportunity to ensure fair access. I am not talking about means-testing. We must establish a system that enables people who believe that they are being treated wrongly by the property owner to get justice.

My speech has been quite critical even though I accept the majority of the Bill. We must face the hard reality of what has been out there for many years. We must tackle the injustice that many have suffered because of leasehold reform. If we are to introduce a system that resembles the one governing my London dwelling in Abbey Court—

*[Mr. Barron]*

I hope that we are, especially for flat owners—we should do it now, get it out of the way and move on to making more progress and more improvements to people's lives.

5.38 pm

**Mr. Adrian Sanders** (Torbay): I declare an interest as a freeholder receiving ground rent.

John Stuart Mill described the leasehold landlord as

"a sinecurist quartered on the land",

and Gladstone spoke of ground rents as "great unearned increments". When introducing his unsuccessful leasehold enfranchisement Bill in 1884, Lord Randolph Churchill asked

"Where was freedom of contract, where the whole of the property in an area was owned by one man?"

It was in response to such informed 19th century distaste for what has been described as "urban farming" that in 1883 the first Leasehold Enfranchisement Association was formed. More than 100 years on, with more than 16 Acts passed to try to remedy the situation, the Government, who have a big majority and a long history of opposition to leasehold, are asking the House to support a Bill that will give continued life to that feudal form of tenure. Regrettable as that is, the Bill at least seeks to improve the situation, although for many leaseholders the abolition of leasehold was the very least that they expected from the Government.

The Bill is not the measure that many leaseholders were expecting. Some, such as those represented by the Leasehold Enfranchisement Association, would prefer the Bill to be defeated. It is certainly not a Bill that a Liberal Democrat Government would propose to the House because it does not go nearly far enough. Many improvements are necessary, and some of them were mentioned by the hon. Members for Stone (Mr. Cash), speaking for the Conservative Opposition, and for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). Liberal Democrat Members strongly favour the introduction of commonhold and a further stage of leasehold reform.

We welcome the principle of commonhold. Freehold ownership of flats is impracticable and long leaseholds also present serious problems, especially the difficulty of obtaining mortgage finance when the outstanding term of a lease falls below 30 or 40 years. Various forms of collective ownership have been developed in other parts of the world, the most relevant of which perhaps are those in the USA and Australia. They have undoubtedly worked there and there is no reason whatever why they could not work here. We therefore warmly welcome the introduction of commonhold.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley referred to Lord Goodhart, who mentioned a number of problems with the Bill in the other place, notably the 100 per cent. consent of all interested parties provision. Those interested parties are not just the leaseholders, but the freeholders and the chargees. If any one of them is opposed to changing the management of the property, they have the right of veto; that is not right. If that provision remains in the Bill, the great majority of commonhold is likely to be on new build. It is perfectly possible to devise a workable scheme in which a small minority of leaseholders, perhaps no more than 20 per cent, refuse to give consent. That would involve the commonhold association acquiring the freehold and simply leaving the leases of non-consenting parties outside the commonhold scheme until they expire.

There are no formal structures for voting in the Bill. Is that to be part of the commonhold association's rules and regulations? Rules are needed on quorums, the conduct of meetings and the method of voting, but we have yet to see any of those details in print. There is no power in the Bill to divide commonholds to encourage diversity of use and investment, which was referred to by the hon. Member for Stone. The contribution that that could make to economic regeneration schemes and the creation of housing should not be underestimated. The Government talk about joined-up thinking, so surely they acknowledge the need for more diverse housing provision for economic regeneration, which we hear about from many branches of government. The Bill could preclude good things in that direction if it remains unamended.

Another serious problem with commonhold is the recovery of arrears of service charges and other liabilities due to the commonhold association from unit-holders. At present, with leaseholders, the threat of forfeiture is usually enough to secure payment. However, if forfeiture is not available—in the case of unit-holders, it is not—that is not possible. It is true that a charging order can be obtained for arrears, but that involves an application to the court, which is likely to take some time. Of course, existing charges on the property take precedence over a charging order. That could mean serious cash-flow problems for commonhold associations, even if they eventually get their money back. Prompt payment is vital but will not occur without effective mechanisms for securing it. We would like arrears of service charges to be treated as priority debt, so that if mortgagees sell commonhold units, they must pay off the arrears before reimbursing themselves.

The question of the best corporate structure for commonhold associations has been mentioned. The Government propose a company limited by guarantee. Some critics have objected that the structure is too formal and complicated. We accept that there must undoubtedly be a corporate structure for commonhold associations, but believe that the structure and administration of limited liability partnerships under the Limited Liability Partnerships Act 2000 is likely to be a good deal simpler. For commonhold associations with no more than 10 members, a limited liability partnership could well be more appropriate than a company limited by guarantee.

Limited liability partnerships are a novel form of incorporation. It may be premature to provide them as an alternative at present, but the Government should at least include powers in the Bill to enable the introduction of a limited liability partnership at a later date if it appears likely to benefit small commonhold associations. That point applies also to the right-to-manage and right-to-enfranchise companies as well as to the commonhold associations.

On leasehold reform, we support the principle of extending the right to manage to enable tenants to form a right-to-manage company without having to prove mismanagement by the landlord. The matter has been a bone of contention for many years. When a property is well managed, lessees are probably unlikely to want to take over the management themselves, but the need to prove

mismanagement has deterred lessees from claiming the right to manage where management has been unsatisfactory or incompetent rather than grossly oppressive.

The Bill gives landlords an automatic right to be members of a right-to-manage company. Such companies should represent tenants and be able to deal at arm's length with the landlord. We accept that when the landlord is also the occupier of a flat it may be reasonable that he should be a member of the right-to-manage company, but allowing non-resident landlords the right to be members of the company gives them an unjustified advantage.

We also believe that the Government have not dealt properly with the position of management contracts subsisting at the time when management is taken over by a right-to-manage company. There was a confused debate on the matter in Committee in the other place. It appears that the Government assume that existing management contracts will be terminated on the taking over of management by a right-to-manage company, although that is a matter of general law rather than the consequence of any provision in the Bill. That may be technically correct, but if so, it seems to us to be undesirable. Management contracts may be held with a cleaning company for the cleaning of the common parts of the building or with a gardener for looking after the garden. The basic principle should be that such contracts should continue with the substitution of the right-to-manage company for the landlord. That rule should be adopted in the Bill, subject to the right of the right-to-manage company to terminate contracts in cases in which, for example, the landlord has given a contract to a friend or relative who is providing services at an excessive cost.

We welcome the provision that extends the right of collective enfranchisement. It extends the right to join in such enfranchisement to a number of leaseholders who did not have it previously, but there is one defect of fundamental importance. The Bill does not require the automatic transfer of membership of a right-to-enfranchise company on the assignment of a lease. That seems to us to be essential if the purpose of the right-to-enfranchise company—to give leaseholders the right to participate in ownership—is to be achieved. We see a right-to-enfranchise company as an embryo commonhold association. If the leaseholder can sell his or her lease, but retain an interest in an RTE company, we will simply recreate the problem that the legislation was designed to remedy. In other words, we will create a new set of absentee landlords.

The only issue that raises a conflict of principle between the Liberal Democrats and the Government is the inclusion of marriage value in the computation of the price to be paid to the landlord on enfranchisement and on the extension of a lease.

The basic price to be paid is what the freeholder loses—that means the market value of the reversion being required by the leaseholder or an RTE company, or the reduction in the market value of the reversion as a result of the grant of an extended lease.

We have no quibble with that principle. We are not pressing for the extension of the artificially reduced value that was originally provided for in the Leasehold Reform Act 1967. That provision could well be contrary to the Human Rights Act 1998, although the case of the Duke of Westminster indicated that at the time it was thought not to be. However, the market value paid to the freeholder is increased on the basis that the leaseholder is a special purchaser and will be willing to pay more than someone buying the freehold as an investor. That concept is fundamentally unfair. Leaseholders are in a weak bargaining position in that notional market. Unless they buy the freehold, or obtain an extended lease, they will face inconvenience, disturbance and the distress of having to move home. It is wrong in principle that the freeholder should be allowed to take advantage of that weakness in the bargaining position of the leaseholder.

Marriage value should be eliminated from the equation. The leaseholder should have to pay what the investor would pay for the property and no more. We will fight throughout the proceedings on the Bill for the abolition of the marriage value.

The Bill as it stands is a step forward, but it is an enormous disappointment and could be a great deal better.

5.52 pm

**Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. I broadly support the Bill, but I hope that some improvements will be made and some amendments agreed.

I congratulate the Government on being bold enough to introduce the commonhold proposals. They have been discussed for many years. The previous Conservative Government considered commonhold, but never did anything about it. At least a Labour Government are now introducing the proposals and going ahead.

I want the Government to do two things, which have already been touched on in the debate. The 100 per cent. rule is a worrying factor, because the agreement requires unanimity on the part of the people who live in a property as well as the owner or of the leaseholders and the freeholder, and because other interested parties are also involved. We need to consider more closely the definition of interested parties. Clearly, we need to consider those aspects as the Bill progresses in Committee and on Report. The provision would make it easy for someone to put a veto on an agreement and stop progress being made, which might not be in the best interests of the majority.

As the Bill is drafted, the majority of commonhold properties will initially be new build. Again, the Government could be a little bolder. They could make it clear that if a property is not to be freehold, commonhold should be the preferred option for the developers, unless there are good reasons why that should not be the case.

I hope that the Government will consider those two matters. Virtually every hon. Member who has spoken, apart from the Minister, has expressed concern about them.

On the leasehold provisions, as I told the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), the Bill will go a long way towards introducing some of the measures that we tried to include through amendments to the Leasehold Reform Housing and Urban Development Bill in 1993. At that time, we were well briefed by the Leasehold Enfranchisement Association, which also has concerns about this Bill. Many of the provisions that we tried to introduce in 1993 are involved today.

I want the Government to accept that leaseholds in the south and London are very different from those in Burnley and other parts of the country. The problems in my part of the country are different from those in London.

*[Mr. Peter Pike]*

My only dealings with a London leasehold property were while my daughter was out of the country last year, when I had to sell her flat. I had to buy an extension of the lease before I could sell it as the building society would not give the purchaser a mortgage without an extension. It seemed crazy to have to pay several thousand pounds to extend the lease to complete the sale. The property in which I live in London is not leasehold.

In my constituency, the leaseholds are not short and the property is not as valuable. Nearly all the leases are for 999 years, with minimal ground rents and, in many cases, minimal conditions attached. In the past few years, I have studied many leasehold documents. Although the handwriting is good, many of the leases drawn up in 1887 are difficult to deal with, as they are extremely lengthy. It is hard to follow the exact conditions laid down and to decide whether the provisions that the present freeholder claims are contained in the documents are there. They are not always there. I have had to tell several people who have implied that a lease contains conditions relating to insurance, for example, that the document in question gives them no right to do what they are trying to do. One has to spend a lot of time studying each document, as they are not all exactly alike.

I have bought the freehold of the property in which I live in Burnley. For many years, I advised people not to bother to buy the freehold. I said, "Why bother to buy, when you are only paying £1, or £5 a year and you have 800-odd years to go?" Also, the conditions were minimal. Why did I decide to buy my freehold? I was fortunate enough to be able to do so and I saw the problems of my constituents. I did not want to suffer a similar hassle or problem and I could afford to buy, so I paid £250 plus the legal costs and bought it out. I was paying only £4 a year. Even then, the landlord was overcharging. The lease stated that it should be £3.87, but I never argued about the extra 13p; I always coughed up the £4 when he asked for it.

**Mr. John Taylor:** The hon. Gentleman has effectively pointed out that leasehold traditions in different parts of the country are very different. He talks about 800-year leases in Burnley. In contrast, in the west midlands, residential leases are almost always 99 years. There is a different sort of pressure on the leaseholder as the 99 years contracts to 60, 50 or 40 years and the lease becomes difficult to dispose of.

**Mr. Pike:** The hon. Gentleman has a valid point. The majority of hon. Members who speak today will be talking about that sort of problem. A number of Members who represent London will highlight the problems with 90-odd year leases when they are reduced to 60 or 30 years. As the number of years reduces, the value that my hon. Friend the Minister mentioned is reduced and it becomes increasingly difficult to sell the lease. The person who is looking for a mortgage is not prepared to take such a lease on.

I am trying to highlight the problem that my constituents face. What is their particular difficulty? The ground rents are not significant. The problem is that people are now being told, "You must insure with us and buy this particular insurance." The people who have now bought the freeholds are in most cases no longer local—they are either from London or, in some cases, Wales. They can make more money from the commission that they get on the insurance than they can from the ground rent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) mentioned that people make alterations to a property without having obtained permission to do so, and that a charge might then be made for retrospective approval. In some cases that could be £250, and I have heard of cases in which £600 or so has been charged. That nearly always comes to light when the person concerned wants to sell the property and has found someone who is willing to buy. Nine times out of 10, they pay, whether their solicitors advise them that it is a reasonable figure or not. They pay because, in Burnley, if people want to sell a house, they sell it as soon as they have somebody willing to buy. There are 4,000 houses standing empty there.

The other week, during a by-election, I canvassed someone who told me, "I bought my house five years ago for £24,000. When you knocked on my door in May it was worth £16,000; last week, when I asked the solicitors what it was worth, they told me it was worth £6,000." People just cannot sell their houses, so if they find someone who is willing to buy, and they are told by the freeholder to pay £250 or £600, they cough up, fair or not, to get the sale. They know that far too much time will be taken up arguing about fairness and unreasonableness if they do not. That is the difficulty that we have to deal with.

Although I accept that part 2 addresses the problems that exist in the south, and that other aspects of the Bill are important to many people in London, Brighton and other areas where such problems exist, there are other issues that we must deal with as the Bill progresses through the House.

I have had a lot of dealings with various local solicitors, and with the Burnley and Pendle Law Society. I would like to quote from a briefing that the society sent me the other day. It emphasises the points that I have already made, but it is interesting to hear what its members, as legal professionals, have to say. The briefing states:

"The problems arise out of leases that were created in the 1880s and 1890s in particular and of a long leasehold nature of 999 years plus and with what are now nominal ground rents. I acknowledge that the ground rents when created could be compared to a week's wage whereas nowadays the same rent would not even buy a pint of beer."

That is a significant point, and very true. The briefing continues:

"The covenants contained in the leases are the biggest problem with which we have to contend. Most leases created over a hundred years ago contain very few covenants and the few that did exist were rarely enforced, e.g. insurance, approval of change of external appearance by additions. However, these covenants have now proved to be a major problem in that the ground rents held by local landlords have now been sold to commercial companies that read through the leases with a fine tooth comb to see what can be gleaned in the form of fees—the ground rents are a minor issue. Where any lease contains any provision about approval of insurance, it leads straight to the property owner having to insure the property through the freeholder or alternatively paying an administration fee for releasing the provision—these fees can be quite expensive. A similar situation applies where a house owner wishes to erect e.g. a kitchen extension—if the lease makes provision for approval being required then the freeholder will charge a fee for the approval."

In many cases, those fees are neither reasonable nor fair, and that is why we need to make changes. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), who

is going to speak in this debate, has called such freeholders "ground-rent grazers", and that is exactly what they are. They look through leases and try to make extra money from them in different ways. That is what they are doing in many cases in Burnley. Thousands of my constituents are affected in that way, and as the Law Society has pointed out, there are similar cases in Wales, Newcastle and other parts of the country. It is time that we did something about it. We must tackle the major issues to which the Minister referred, but we must also ensure that the people of Burnley, and their like, do not have to endure the problems caused by the present provisions on leaseholds.

6.5 pm

**Mr. John Taylor** (Solihull): I intend to make only a brief contribution to this debate, because other hon. Members have been gracious enough to allow me to intervene on them, which has given me the opportunity to register a point or two.

I should declare an interest at the outset. I am the owner of a residential long lease on an apartment in my constituency. I am therefore interested in such issues as management companies and, ultimately, I hope, the acquisition of our freehold. I should also declare that I am a solicitor, but I have not practised since 1988—I went straight 13 years ago.

As a very young, recently qualified lawyer, I was involved in some of the early applications of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967, which provided the first opportunity for people with residential leases—at that time only of houses—to acquire their freeholds. Indeed, I bought the freehold of the first house that I ever owned. However, one of the weaknesses of the 1967 Act was that the political process—which I blame collectively, rather than in a partisan way—fought shy of defining a price mechanism. There was no reliable formulation in the Act to enable either the holder of a long lease or the holder of the freehold reversion to work out exactly what sum of money could be expected to change hands for the enfranchisement. There was not even a near miss.

Therefore, cases all of a sudden had to go, at some expense, to the Lands Tribunal. It was some time before the tribunal's decisions began to form a reliable pattern of precedent so that people could say, "Right, we've got the picture now. They have made so many hundreds of decisions and it is clear what the applicator figure should be." Initially, and perhaps rather innocently, thoughts on the valuation of the reversion turned on a simple question: what capital sum would have to be prudently invested to produce the same annual return as the ground rent? That produced some very favourable acquisitions of freeholds and, as an early enfranchiser myself, I took advantage of that thinking when it prevailed.

However, with the passage of time, a different view began to be taken, using nuptial idiom—if I may say that—and the concept of the marriage value. The proposition was that the value of the whole might be greater than the sum of the values of the parts, in the hands, at any rate, of the leaseholder as purchaser. I am not supporting that proposition; I am saying that that is the way in which the thinking began to develop.

I am reminded of the rule in estate duty law that the gift may not be the same at both ends. The gift may be more valuable to the recipient than it is to the donor. My law lecturers, all those long years ago, used to give an example. If I owned 49 per cent. of the shares in a company, and someone who owned 2 per cent. of the shares gave me that 2 per cent., I should, as the new owner of 51 per cent. of the shares, have received something of infinitely greater value than it had enjoyed in the hands of the person who gave it to me.

There are subtleties in those valuations and I do not want them to be worked out expensively by our constituents. The Bill has been criticised, but I am here only to promote and advance one point: all our constituents, whether they live in Burnley, London or Solihull, will be grateful to the House for its careful scrutiny if the Bill finally goes to the statute book with a perfectly clear mechanism telling people what to expect to pay if they act in concert as long residential leaseholders seeking the freehold.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) said in his comprehensive and elegant remarks that the relationship between landlord and tenant is inherently adversarial. Maybe it is, but, as far as we can, we should keep that to a minimum. I do not want the price for the freehold to become a ground for argument, bitterness and, ultimately, expensive litigation. The House has it in its power to keep that potential to an absolute minimum, bearing in mind that another matter will probably be considered at the same time.

There have been discussions, not least those involving my hon. Friend the Member for Stone, about the various mechanisms for transfer of management functions, but if the long leaseholders are at war with the landlord over the price of the freehold, even when the management functions are being transferred, that will be as unpromising a recipe for fruitful negotiation that could possibly be devised.

The final form of the Bill may go one way or the other, enhancing the potentially adversarial nature of the relationship between landlord and tenant or minimising it, providing good formulation and every prospect of satisfactory negotiation between the parties.

**Mr. Pike:** As a solicitor, the hon. Gentleman will recognise that some people thought that they were buying out the freehold under the 1960s legislation, although all they bought out was the need to pay ground rent. Is it not important that we ensure that people know exactly what they are getting, and not only on that point?

**Mr. Taylor:** The hon. Gentleman obviously has extensive experience of those matters. As we agreed, he made the good point, which I acknowledged, that leasehold practice varies a great deal in different parts of the country. I am sure that the detail of what he describes from his experience is correct, but I shall answer in general terms.

The clearer and more transparent the situation, the better, not merely in respect of what one gets for one's money. There should be a reliable formula that provides a fairly accurate estimate of the money likely to be needed to acquire that defined asset, which is my only reason for striking a slightly discordant note: good scrutiny and a good final product, which the Bill is intended to be, are not helped by limiting scrutiny by timetable.

There is so much complexity here, but I detect a lot of good will and a lot of heads nodded on this side of the House when contributions were made from the other side.

*[Mr. Taylor]*

and vice versa. Members want to get the Bill right, but the timetable is not helpful. It is a reality—there is nothing I can do about it—but we must make the issues as clear to our constituents as possible. We are not in the business of giving them law lectures, nor do we expect them to become amateur lawyers overnight. As the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) said, he earned his living doing something completely different, so he could not be expected to understand all these matters any more than I could be expected to do the job he did at that time.

I wish the Bill well and hope that it reaches our constituents in the clearest possible form as the law governing their affairs.

6.15 pm

**Mr. David Crausby** (Bolton, North-East): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to say a few words in support of an exceptionally important Bill. Nothing is more important than a measure that will deliver improved rights in the interests of everyday people. The desire to own one's home lies at the core of our natural instinct for independence and security, and it is both highly rewarding and emotive, but fulfilment of that desire cannot be complete without the principled right to buy the land on which that home stands—at a fair price, of course.

I therefore warmly welcome the proposals for those who want to acquire control over their freeholds and commonholds, thereby improving their prospects for independence and individuality, but I shall concentrate my remarks on those who choose, for whatever reason, not to buy and to continue with a leasehold. I believe in the right to purchase a freehold, but I also defend those who do not want to go to what may be considerable expense.

I have constituents in Bolton who are contracted to pay very small amounts in ground rent—sometimes little over a pound a year—and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), I must say that, financially, it is difficult to justify buying a freehold in such circumstances. Those people should not be pressured and their choice not to buy should not allow unprincipled landlords to mistreat them, thereby coercing them to buy.

One such example of abuse by freeholders is a landlord insisting on the lessee purchasing household insurance from a specific company. I fully understand and accept that landlords have a legitimate interest in ensuring that their properties are properly insured, but, let us face it, the truth is that the motive for insisting on a specific company is almost exclusively related to securing commission from unscrupulous insurance companies. Such people do not buy up ground rents to collect a couple of pounds a year.

My constituent, Mr. Raby from Harwood, wrote to tell me that, along with many of his neighbours, he had paid ground rent of £4.50 a year since moving into his terraced property in 1966. In recent years, his landlord, who lived close by, died. Mr. Raby tried in vain to find out how and whom he should pay. In 1998, he received a letter informing him that the freehold had been disposed of to a London company, which sent him a bill for just over £20. He promptly paid the new freeholder what he owned. Shortly after, he was offered his freehold for £500. He declined the offer. A year later, he was offered it for £350. Again he declined. Quite reasonably, he felt that he could not justify paying £500 or even £350 compared with annual ground rent of £4.50.

In the middle of 2000, Mr. Raby received a letter from a company called Terra Firma saying that his insurance did not meet its requirements. It claimed that his insurance was inadequate, despite the fact that it knew nothing of the terms of that insurance. It nevertheless felt able to demand that he insure in future with a company called Owners Combined Ltd. He initially put up a struggle, but the firm continued to harass him until he surrendered. As he put it in a letter to me,

"They had me over a barrel".

He tells me that he has now separated his buildings insurance from his contents insurance, and that he now has to pay an extra £60 a year—not much for a big insurance company, but an awful lot for my constituent.

In my constituency, a company called Compton Insurance Services recently bought up freeholds in the area and now insists that residents use AXA Insurance. The company's main motive in buying up freeholds clearly relates to the insurance business that that will generate. It writes intimidating letters to my constituents, insisting that they fill in application forms for the new insurance.

Mr. Warburton of Astley Bridge wrote in a letter to me

"I was born at this address over eighty years ago and my parents and myself have paid the ground rent of £2 a year on this lease. I am insured with Age Concern and people especially at my age should not be subject to this aggro."

Members may ask what kind of insurance company would put a man of Mr. Warburton's age under such pressure. AXA is a large and, on the face of it, respectable insurance company. It is big enough to sponsor the FA Cup, for example. I wrote to AXA complaining about the way in which Compton was, in my view, intimidating and virtually blackmailing people into using its insurance.

**Mr. Pike:** I receive letters of exactly the same kind. Is it not worrying that, for every person who writes to my hon. Friend or me, there are a number of people who feel so pressurised that they cough up even when they cannot afford to do so?

**Mr. Crausby:** Absolutely. Thousands of people are so intimidated that they feel there is nothing else they can do.

When I requested a meeting with AXA to urge it to refuse such business, I naively assumed that it was unaware of the tactics employed by Compton—that it did not know what was being done on its behalf. AXA, however, refused to meet me, telling me that the matter was nothing to do with it and suggesting that I meet representatives of Compton instead.

Mr. Andy Homer, AXA's chief executive, told my local newspaper, the *Bolton Evening News*, that he could not comment because the dispute was between Compton and its tenants. In other words, "It's not me, guv". I can only assume from AXA's behaviour, and from its lack of concern, that it is just as bad as Compton—interested only in profits from the insurance business. It is clear that it desperately wants to pour money into the pockets of multi-millionaire footballers, and is prepared to fund that by forcing pensioners in my constituency to buy its insurance.

I spoke on the telephone to an elderly lady who had lived in the same property, with her husband, for more than 40 years. Throughout their married life, they had paid their insurance through the Co-op to an insurance

collector who called at the door. The couple had received a series of aggressive letters from Compton. When the lady raised the matter with her insurance agent, the man from the Co-op, he advised her to give in and take out insurance with AXA.

That lady cannot believe that in this day and age, in Great Britain, it can be legal for her and her husband to be harassed and intimidated in such a way. To be honest, neither can I. It is fundamental to our freedom in this country that we should not be intimidated—that we should not be forced by those who are stronger or wealthier than us to do what they bid, especially when they act for no better reason than to make themselves even stronger and wealthier. It is the responsibility of democratic Government to ensure that the public are protected. The British public should be bullied by no one: they should not be bullied at school, they should not be bullied at work, and they certainly should not be bullied in their own homes.

This sorry tale of intimidation by large, wealthy organisations or householders who have worked all their lives to buy their homes is bad enough, but when we consider that the freeholder is armed with the draconian measure of forfeiture and is prepared to use it—prepared, certainly, to threaten to use it—we can imagine the pressure that elderly residents will experience. It is no wonder that so many cave in.

Forfeiture is just one example of the way in which the existing law is tilted in favour of landlords. Its use, or should I say misuse, to force leaseholders to take out insurance by people threatening the loss of their homes convinces me that it is a power that should be abolished.

When the Bill's predecessor was discussed in the other place last March, Lady Hanham tabled an amendment to void provisions in a lease requiring a tenant to insure with a company nominated by the landlord. It was a simple amendment, intended to address a simple injustice. Why should anyone be forced to buy insurance from a company with which he or she does not want to deal? Lord Whitty expressed some understanding of the concerns behind the amendment, and said that he felt some sympathy with it. He promised that the Government would look at it in the longer term, outside the scope of the Bill.

The problem is that, on a daily basis, poor people are being taken advantage of. To put it simply, they are being ripped off. If we do not stop these anti-competitive practices now, they will clearly increase to a point at which all insurance companies will feel compelled to become involved in what is a very seedy business.

I strongly agree that the Bill takes householders' entitlements in the right direction. I hope very much, however, that in Committee we will take the opportunity to strengthen its proposals further in the interests of the people. We have a responsibility to prevent companies from being able to stipulate in lease agreements the firms through which buildings insurance should be organised. If we do not do that, the Government will be forced to return to the matter as they have so many times before.

6.28 pm

**Mr. Oliver Heald** (North-East Hertfordshire): I welcome the Bill. I agree with the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) that the actions of some freeholders and managing agents are unacceptable: indeed, I think that much of the pressure for the Bill has come from those who see commonhold as a way of escaping from certain managing agents and certain freeholders. I shall say more about that later.

Of the Bill, I say "Better late than never". In 1996, when the Conservative Government presented a draft commonhold Bill for discussion, the Minister for Local Government, the right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford)—the then Opposition spokesman—expressed criticisms. He said, nearly six years ago, that

> "Labour in Government will have no hesitation in introducing a comprehensive leasehold reform package including commonhold legislation".

He went on to say how unacceptable it was to wait four and a half years, as the Tory Government had, to introduce the measure and to allow it to be properly debated within the term of a Parliament. Therefore, it was with certain wry amusement that I noted that, following Labour's election, almost exactly the same period elapsed before the Bill came before this place.

I support the introduction of commonhold. Although I accept what the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East said—it is wrong for a landlord to insist on a long-lease tenant taking out insurance with a company that may not offer the best terms—it is important to realise that tenants have been trapped in leasehold for so long because the only way of ensuring that properties were insured was to have a system under which the positive obligations of ownership could pass from one owner to another. It was necessary for each unit to have positive legal obligations towards its neighbours and for those to continue generation after generation, owner after owner. It would not have been possible to insist on insurance for all properties, which is vital, if the leasehold system had not been in place. It was not open to freehold properties to continue with those positive legal obligations.

That is why 1 million flats and 1 million homes are leasehold today. A majority of lessees would prefer to be freeholders or commonholders; the commonhold proposals will allow them to meet that aspiration. It is good that we are in a position to let so many people reach something that they have wanted for so long.

There will be fewer opportunities for unscrupulous freeholders and managing agents to take advantage of lessees. We have heard personal examples from the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), who was asked to pay a premium for putting up a garage and extension at his property. He had the ability to fight his corner and ended up not paying the money. However, many people would not have had the courage and fortitude to achieve that.

The combination of the commonhold and right-to-manage proposals in the Bill will mean that there are fewer opportunities for the sort of misbehaviour that we have heard about and for other forms of misbehaviour by freeholders and their agents. The campaign for the abolition of residential leaseholds sent a list to us all, which criticises some of the behaviour by landlords.

It is important to include the caveat that many freeholders and agents do an excellent and efficient job and behave entirely properly. One would not want to criticise them, but it is wrong that some landlords should steal money from maintenance funds that in law should be held on trust; falsify tenders for works to premises, which they are carrying out at a secret profit; make

*[Mr. Oliver Heald]*

leaseholders pay the landlord's legal costs even if the landlord is in the wrong; bully and intimidate; charge for services or work that has not been carried out; fail to carry out essential works until the costs become astronomical; fail to disclose money missing from maintenance funds in the annual accounts summary—apparently, according to the Institute of Chartered Accountants, it is legal to omit the fact that money is missing from the fund—create phoney management companies to levy unnecessarily high charges; and hold lessees to ransom when they sell their properties by imposing huge administration fees for answering queries.

Some of those actions would be illegal under current law, but not all. If we move to a system where more long-term tenants are able to have commonhold and own the freehold in effect, or have the right to manage their properties, there will be less abuse of the system.

I share the concerns of the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) about the conversion rules. It will be possible to convert from leasehold to commonhold only if certain criteria are met. Among the details in the Bill is the 100 per cent. rule—the freeholder and each unit-holder would be able to object, as would cautioners and others with minor interests in the land.

What worries me is that a cautioner could hold one unit-holder to ransom and everyone else would be denied the opportunity to become a commonholder. One can imagine circumstances where a caution has been entered on land in respect of a debt that is owed to one creditor. That creditor may have no hope of ever getting the money out of the unit-holder in normal circumstances. When the commonhold suggestion comes up, he may say, "I am not prepared to agree to the registration unless the caution is vacated and I get my money." For all we know, the unit-holder may not be able to pay. One hundred or 400 long-lease tenants in a block of flats could all be deprived of the opportunity of commonhold, which would avoid some of the difficulties that I have mentioned and which may be a long-held aspiration for many of them, just because of a dispute over a debt that cannot be resolved in relation to one unit-holder. The Committee will need to look at that. It is not right that all those people could be denied the opportunity of commonhold because of that sort of dispute.

There may be an argument about a right of way. We all know that that happens. In my surgery, I get cases about disputed rights of way from time to time. Someone may own a right of way that is used by residents in a block of flats. Do we want that person to be able to stop 400 or 100 people becoming commonholders? Probably not. The Committee will have to look closely at whether the 100 per cent. rule is right, or at least at the categories of persons who can object. If it is to be every minor cautioner or every owner of a right of way, that is far too restrictive. There is cross-party consensus that commonhold should proceed. That could scupper it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) said, there are already systems with long leases—999 years, for example—where the freeholders have in effect contracted out the management of the premises to the tenants, or where the tenants are freeholders in a company and are able to manage the premises themselves. In those circumstances, there needs to be some attraction for commonhold to become the rule. If minor property holders of the sort that I have described are able to scupper the conversion, that will defeat many attempts. That needs to be examined.

My hon. Friend was on to a strong point when he said that it was wrong for the Government to be able to exclude local authority premises from the right to manage. The Government need to justify that. One of the compiaints that one hears and is reported nationally from time to time is that local authorities are not always the best landlords of premises. One would want to know why local authorities should be exempted from the right-to-manage proposals. Surely if tenants are not happy with their current arrangements they should be able to obtain the right to manage the property themselves.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a curious anomaly in the Bill that local authorities are exempted from the right to manage, but housing associations are not?

**Mr. Heald:** Yes. The Government say that they are in favour of transferring the entire stock of local authorities to housing associations. If they are prepared to trust housing associations in that way, why should there be one rule for housing associations and another for local authorities? Why should there be a lower standard for local authorities? Surely if we want to lever up the quality of public services, we should encourage local authorities to reach the same standards as housing associations and private landlords. They should be able to do that, particularly given all the examples that we have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the House of poor-quality private sector landlords.

Surely the Government are not saying that local authorities cannot attain the standard of the private sector when it comes to property management. That touches on another point that my hon. Friend the Member for Stone made about the regulation of managing agents and those who look after property. In her reply to the debate, will the Minister tell us what proposals the Government have for the regulation of managing agents?

It is good that commonhold will enable more people to own the freehold of their properties. It is good that people will have the right to manage their properties, but the third leg of the tripod is to sort out the regulation of managing agents and to ensure that there is proper guidance and regulation.

What should be done about the bad unit-holder who does not pay his rent or insure his property and does not behave in a neighbourly way? One can criticise the abuse of the right of forfeiture, as the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East did, but it is very important on grounds of safety as much as anything else that bad unit-holders should be made to maintain and insure their premises and to be as neighbourly as possible.

In a block of flats people's lives can be put at risk by a bad unit-holder who does not fulfil his or her obligations. So it is not such a bad thing to have the ability to take draconian measures when an important covenant is breached. Although it should not be abused, in some cases the right of forfeiture is useful in concentrating the mind of the bad unit-holder or tenant and ensuring that properties are insured and maintained in the interests of everybody in the block. That option will not be available in the case of commonhold, at least as it is currently

proposed, but I hope that the Committee will consider seriously what leverage there will be to deal with bad unit-holders.

I suspect that many unit-holders will not consider a charging order to be much of a threat or as significant a penalty as forfeiture. It should also be noted that one has to go through quite an expensive rigmarole in order to obtain a charging order. If a creditor or a commonhold association feels unable to become involved in a great deal of expense and inconvenience there may be a temptation to let certain issues slide. That would be bad for public health and public policy. I hope that the way in which the bad unit-holder is dealt with will be considered fully in Committee.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again. He has touched on a very important point. Under a commonhold system, the rogue owners could effectively prejudice the interests of the majority. Therefore it is crucial that the commonhold association has powers to deal with rogue owners.

**Mr. Heald:** I agree. The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) suggested that the commonhold association could be a priority creditor when the property was sold. I do not think that that goes far enough, but it shows that the issue has struck a chord with hon. Members from all parties—I notice the odd nod from Labour Members—and I hope that some way will be found to protect the innocent unit-holder who does everything right from the bad unit-holder who does not. That is one reason why responsible freeholders are keen to insist on the insurance obligation. If one tenant is not insured, it can often prejudice the insurance of everybody else in a block of flats. These are not minor issues; they are important considerations and I hope that the Committee will address them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) spoke about the need to have a clear price mechanism for enfranchisement. He said how important it was to have adequate time to deal with these issues in Committee and I echo that point. A million flats are in leasehold occupation; they could be home to 3 million people or more. An additional 1 million houses are in leasehold occupation. If we can solve some of these problems by developing a clear price mechanism for valuing a freehold or dealing with bad unit-holders, we will help millions of people. So to be less than generous with our time and say that we are only prepared to spend a week or 10 days on it is denying quite an important duty to millions of people.

I hope that sufficient time will be provided for these issues to be dealt with properly, particularly as, as far as I can see, there is no real party political argument about the principle of the legislation. Our draft Bill was criticised for being far too late; the Government's Bill has been criticised for being five years too late, but we all agree on the principle, so it should be possible to sort out these technical issues, as 2 million households are looking to us to do just that.

6.48 pm

**Glenda Jackson** (Hampstead and Highgate): With all due respect, I think that the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) fell into a trap into which many speakers have fallen this evening in attempting to get to grips with the Bill—that of being infinitely too detailed in attempting to protect someone who, by virtue of a lease, is outside our thinking in relation to home owners. I accept absolutely that people who live in flats are in a different situation from home owners who live in a row of terraced houses where everyone owns their properties. However, the damage that can be inflicted on a row of terraced houses by one rogue property owner can be just as great and just as disturbing as that caused by one rogue tenant or commonholder in a block of flats. I do not believe that the House would be prepared to pass legislation that was so detailed in that respect that it set out precise ways of preventing the appearance of a rogue householder. We would look to the existing tenets of the law to protect other people.

The Bill gives the House another opportunity to solve a problem with which Parliament has been struggling ever since I entered the House in 1992. I was much encouraged to hear that the Conservative party has changed what I perceived to be its attitude to leasehold enfranchisement. Conservative Members now regard that as an issue of national interest that demands a bipartisan approach to the Bill. It is a shame that that was not the attitude of the Conservative Government in 1993 when they introduced their Bill on leasehold enfranchisement. If that Government had accepted some of the amendments tabled by the then Opposition, there would be no need for us to debate the matter this evening. The rumour in 1993 was that the then Conservative Government had been forced to emasculate their initial proposals on leasehold enfranchisement, not by lack of bipartisan support for the Bill but by fear of the major London ducal estates.

I represent a London constituency, and I found that two of the most interesting of this evening's contributions were made by my hon. Friends the hon. Members for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) and for Burnley (Mr. Pike). They mentioned freeholds being offered for sale for £350, whereas in London it is par for the course for freeholds to be offered for £350,000. Such statements come as something of a shock.

When it comes to enfranchising leaseholders and implementing the other provisions of the Bill, we must take national differences into consideration. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East crystallised the argument when he said that the aim of the House must be to balance up the gross inequity that exists between those who own freeholds and those who have leases.

My constituents have given me examples of the difficulties that they face as leaseholders. I remember the evidence presented to the House in 1993 on this matter, and I do not think that I exaggerate when I say that the majority of the freeholders with whom my constituents have had to deal would not still have properties standing on the land that they own were it not for the fact that the leaseholders who live in those properties had maintained them, year in and year out.

The leases involved may place various demands on the freeholders, but those demands have never been met. In contrast, my leaseholders have maintained the fabric of the buildings in which they live. They have engaged in major repairs when necessary, and in many instances have been responsible for the decoration, internal and external, of the properties.

My hon. Friend the Minister said that, for all their investment and commitment, leaseholders have seen their right to live quietly, calmly and securely in a home that

*[Glenda Jackson]*

they have created diminish every year. That is the problem that the House is attempting to solve with this Bill. We need to make the balance rather more equal, especially in London. The present imbalance persists, despite the improvements that have been made with regard to leasehold enfranchisement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East said that the basic principle involved was one of human rights. We must ensure that, in the 21st century, no one in our society can be imposed on by the essentially uncaring but more powerful part of the leasehold equation. The Bill should be approached in that spirit.

However, I must tell my ministerial colleagues that my constituents are extremely disappointed with the Bill's requirements regarding commonhold. I share their disappointment, especially over the requirement that 100 per cent. of leaseholders in a property must agree before that property can move to commonhold.

I do not understand the Government's thinking on that matter. For example, the Bill has been changed to reduce the requirements that must be met before leasehold enfranchisement can be entered into. The Bill does not require 100 per cent. of leaseholders to agree before they can join together to buy the freehold to a property, so why does it do so over the introduction of commonhold?

The Minister said that, if commonhold were dependent on something other than 100 per cent. agreement, the result would be that the block involved would have two strands of management. Yet that arrangement exists already in those local authority properties where not all tenants exercised their right to buy. Indeed, local authorities are obliged to buy back leases in order to maintain properties.

I was amused to hear the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire mention the exclusion that precludes local authority tenants from exercising the right to manage. I presume that that provision exists because such tenants already have the option to create their own management structures. Moreover, the Government are encouraging local authorities to offer tenants the option of setting up their own management structures or of giving management responsibility for their property to another housing association. In either case, the clear understanding is that the majority of tenants must be in agreement.

Given that that option is open to local authority tenants, why cannot it be open to potential commonholders? If a majority of tenants involved can make such decisions about local authority housing, it seems entirely feasible to say that a majority of leaseholders can do so in relation to commonhold.

The Government believe that commonhold can make the sort of changes desired by hon. Members of all parties. However, I do not believe that they are right to rely on the initial steps being taken in relation to new build. That will not secure the results that all hon. Members want within the period of time that would be acceptable to my constituents.

We are not talking rocket science. I think that Britain may be the only country in the world that does not have some form of commonhold. Commonhold works best when it has tradition behind it, and when people have known each other and the blocks in which they live for a considerable time. To pin our hopes on new build for the first steps towards commonhold seems to me to be to neglect the fact that none of those supports will be in place.

In an intervention that the Minister kindly allowed earlier, I asked about commonhold associations, and I am still somewhat perplexed. The Government expect that such associations will redress the imbalance between freeholders and leaseholders. What will be the contribution of individual commonholders to the management of the block in which they live, given that they will not all meet for a considerable time? I made the point earlier that all flats are not sold at exactly the same time and that all tenants do not automatically move in on the same date. Moreover, I expect that the amounts of money that developers determine must be paid each year to maintain properties will vary widely.

People moving into a block of flats for the first time might read that the flats would be in a commonhold system and that there would be regulations to ensure the basis of the commonhold association, but if it were me, I should still feel that I was buying a pig in a poke because I would have had no say in the constitution of the future management system for the block.

I hope that the Government will return to the issue of commonhold—certainly on the requirement for 100 per cent. agreement. They should certainly return to the issue if they hope that commonhold will be driven by new build—although very, very few developers in London will be willing to give up what they still regard as a sizeable investment: freehold. I hope that the Government will reconsider those points.

I also want to raise with the Government issues relating to marriage value. I know that it is extremely difficult to reach agreement on that topic, but my constituents constantly raise it with me. I notice that there is no requirement for marriage value on leases that run longer than 80 years. However, I point out to my hon. Friends that some of my constituents who would dearly love to extend their present leases so that the need for marriage value is removed at present find that the freeholders vastly inflate the amount of money asked for the extension of the leases.

Some of those constituents certainly feel that they are yet again being excluded from a measure that they believed would transform their situation. In essence, they feel that they are maintaining someone else's property and that when push comes to shove they will always be in the vulnerable position of having maintained that property—of having sunk not merely their life savings but their lives into it. They will always be vulnerable if the freeholder can see ways of squeezing yet more money out of the leaseholders. Heaven knows, many freeholders are immensely imaginative in doing that.

Several hon. Members have spoken about insurance. I certainly recall the discussions of that topic when the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 was in Committee. An outrageous force majeure is being wreaked on tenants—especially the elderly, as was pointed out—whereby they must obtain their insurance from a particular company.

I am sorry to repeat myself. It is par for the course not only for the management companies of blocks in London to charge sizeable amounts for insurance under their

agreements, but in the case of an accident for leaseholders to discover that the premiums have never been paid and that they are completely uninsured.

I am sure that we could all produce for the benefit of the House horror stories of the realities of life for leaseholders. I am telling the stories that my constituents have told me about London, where, as we know, there are huge complexities owing to the shortage of affordable properties. I pointed out to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) that it came as a shock to hear such phrases emanating from the mouths of Conservative Members, but if they are moving in that direction it is to be welcomed. There are huge pressures in London; there is a desperate shortage of land.

I end where I began. The reason why we are considering the Bill is the same one that has applied in all our discussions of the matter—certainly since I became a Member: to redress an unfair balance between people who own a freehold and those who buy a leasehold. In many cases, if the leaseholders did not give their commitment to the property, the freeholder would merely have an empty piece of land.

Many aspects of the Bill are to be welcomed. However, opportunities have been missed and I trust that some of the Bill's inequities will be tackled in Committee. I was impressed to hear my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department say that the Government are prepared to listen. No doubt these arguments will be made again and I hope that the Government will accept amendments on some points.

7.4 pm

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I declare an interest. I am the owner of a long lease in London, and from time to time I have advised, as a lawyer, on property matters.

It is high time that we reformed the system of covenants running with land—the whole feudal system with which we are dealing today. There is unanimity on that throughout the Chamber. I do not want to get involved in discussion of how much time was taken by one side or the other; now, we are proceeding in the right direction.

Leaseholders have typically been in a weak position in enforcing covenants against their landlords. Landlords have always had the whip hand in that regard. Earlier, the Parliamentary Secretary mentioned the dreaded flying freeholds and flying commonholds. I once languished in a law lecture hearing about a flying freehold, with the confident expectation that I should never be confronted by one. After only three months of legal practice I came across one, and although that was 20 years ago I have never forgotten it.

The land commonhold system in England and Wales really needs improvement. There are no colleagues representing Scottish constituencies in the Chamber—understandably, because their system is better than ours.

The Bill is most welcome, although obviously there are still matters that must be addressed. Members on both sides of the House have referred to various problems. I listened intently to the powerful speech made by the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), who spoke strongly from a personal point of view about certain problems. I suspect that he might not be serving on the Standing Committee—although I may be wrong.

In 1985, I acted for a small carpet retailer who was buying small warehouse premises in Llandudno in north Wales. He wanted to open a small retail outlet in the town in a leasehold property that had been a commercial warehouse for heaven knows how long. We had to apply to the landlord for permission to put in a small shop window and for retail premises to be situated in the building. Even at that time, the landlord asked for £7,000—for nothing. However, because of time constraints we had to negotiate for a sum approaching that figure. There were obviously problems.

There are huge problems in the city of Cardiff, not only with commercial but with residential leaseholds, so I welcome the moves to reform leaseholding in general. I certainly also welcome the commonhold principle, but I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) and others about the unanimity rule. If a possible commonholder was in arrears with his or her mortgage payments it seems ridiculous that that might be enough to make the mortgagee decide that there was no compliance or agreement, so the whole scheme would fall flat.

**Mr. Cash:** Given the hon. Gentleman's genuine enthusiasm for the principle of the Bill and also the fact that there is an element of national interest, does he agree that it would be an interesting test—in the light of the parliamentary reforms to the whipping system proposed by the Leader of the House—to propose that there should be proper representation on the Standing Committee and that it should include Members, such as the hon. Members for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who expressed concerns similar to those that he is raising? That would ensure proper representation on the Committee.

**Mr. Llwyd:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. I should be pleased to see the hon. Members for Burnley (Mr. Pike), for Rother Valley and for Hampstead and Highgate in the Standing Committee; I am sure that its proceedings would be much enhanced. My endorsement may be the kiss of death, of course, in which case those hon. Members can be confident that they will not serve on any Committee in the foreseeable future.

**Mr. Pike:** I am always willing to serve on Committees. However, I am on the Chairmen's Panel and am also chairing another Committee. It is impossible to do everything that one would wish, as I am sure every Member of the House agrees.

**Mr. Llwyd:** That must be right.

Applying for a charging order against an errant commonholder is a difficult and expensive legal procedure. In any event, the charging order fails if the debt is small in comparison with the value of the leasehold interest. Charging orders are a total waste of time. However, I welcome the extended rights for leaseholders in the Bill. I also welcome unreservedly the relaxed conditions for leaseholders of houses to extend their lease or to enfranchise; the new right for individual leaseholders not to be excluded from collective enfranchisement; and the new right for leaseholders of flats collectively to take over the management of the block. All those proposals are to the good.

*[Mr. Llwyd]*

There are some good things about the Bill, which has been a long time coming, and which I am sure will be improved in Committee. I think that the commonhold system will be of considerable use and assistance to many tens of thousands of our constituents.

I have some queries on commonhold, which the Minister will undoubtedly address at some point, although perhaps not this evening. I wish to know about the status of unregistered interests where consent to register is sought; the rights of mortgagees where the mortgagors vote to sell off common parts; whether leases should automatically terminate if the commonhold terminates; and the ability of a commonhold association to recover service charge arrears, particularly if a unit changes hands. That was mentioned earlier with regard to the charging order, nisi and absolute.

The extended work load of the leasehold valuation tribunals is a good thing, and I am sure that the people involved will be trained appropriately. That is not meant to be patronising, but this is a fairly new area of law. It is a good idea for more applications to go to the LVTs rather than the courts. I should like the LVT procedure to be as informal as possible, although I know that that might be difficult to achieve bearing in mind the need for valuers.

The Law Society contends that the LVTs should be able to deal with all residential leasehold issues and should act as a one-stop shop. At present, issues are divided between tribunals and the county courts. For example, the majority of applications concerning whether costs incurred in relation to services, repairs and maintenance works are reasonable are dealt with by LVTs, while judgments on arrears are made by county courts. Such duality is probably not in tenants' interests.

I agree that the law needs to be consolidated. The hon. Member for Rother Valley and others have mentioned numerous pieces of legislation. It is a very complex situation and will remain so even after the Bill, amended or not, reaches the statute book. There are more than a dozen statues involved. They include the Landlord and Tenant Acts 1954, 1985 and 1987, the Rent Act 1977, the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 and the Housing Acts 1988 and 1996, to name but a few. Clearly, there is a crying need for consolidation.

I cannot understand why we are not considering a form of mandatory introduction of commonhold with new build. The Minister said that the markets will be the determining factor. In other words, the benefits likely to accrue in a commonhold situation will in some way persuade developers and commonholders to adopt this particular model. I remind the House that the Land Registration Act 1925 introduced the registration of freehold and leasehold titles. Until the late 1980s, only a tiny proportion of rural properties had ever had registered title until it became compulsory. The benefits of registered title were obvious, not just to lawyers. It led to the simplification of conveyancing, but did not commend itself to people in general. This might be a comparable situation. Perhaps the Government should think again about a mandatory introduction of the commonhold with regard to new build.

The unanimity rule has been dealt with eloquently by many speakers in the debate, so I shall not dwell on it. It is a very real issue. One errant commonholder with mortgage arrears will apparently scupper the whole system for everyone in the proposed scheme. That must be addressed. The Minister said in his opening remarks that the Government were listening. With respect, had they listened to what was said in the other place, changes would already have been proposed. Even at this stage, and even with the restricted timetable that is a matter of some criticism, bearing in mind the ground-breaking nature of this important Bill, I hope that the Government will think again about this issue in Committee.

On dispute resolution, clause 34(3)(b) provides that the directors of a commonhold association

"shall have regard to the desirability of using"

conciliation procedures. Some of us would like to see that provision strengthened.

The Minister said that there would be draft regulations on delegated powers, which I welcome. I hope that those will be made available before the Bill goes into Committee. On the framework of delegated powers in general, the Bill was considered by the Select Committee on Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform in its fifth report. The Committee concluded that the regulations should be available as soon as the Bill was before the House.

I echo everything that has been said about insurance arrangements and about freeholders determining which insurance company should be used. In addition, there should be better regulation of managing agents.

I echo what was said by the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor). There is an obvious tendency for ground landlords to seek inflated valuations, knowing that the leaseholders are usually anxious to complete a purchase. It is known as the Delaforce effect. I do not see much change in the Bill. The freehold valuation is usually based on the percentage site value approach, which is often arbitrarily determined.

I would like a change in the statutory fee for issuing a demand to purchase. It is routine for the leaseholder to pay the legal and surveying fees for both parties. How are those fees determined? I have been involved in situations in which ridiculous fees have been asked. I would like a mechanism in the Bill to put a stop to that without having endless correspondence about it.

My comments are sincere and are meant to be constructive. This is a good Bill, but it needs improving, and I hope that that will happen in the coming weeks.

7.19 pm

**Mr. Piara S. Khabra** (Ealing, Southall): It is easy, at present, to get swept away by the constantly changing events overseas and their implications for this country's interests at home and abroad, yet it is essential that we do not neglect day-to-day legislation, which, although possibly not so dramatic, has the power to affect the lives of many people in this country. The Bill will address some of the issues faced by many people.

I am not an expert in the intricacies of housing legislation, and many hon. Members have a great deal more knowledge and expertise in this matter, but the Bill will affect leaseholders in constituencies across the country, especially in London and the south-east, which contain more than half the United Kingdom's leaseholders. I am therefore glad that the Government

have reintroduced the Bill at the earliest opportunity. I participated in previous debates on such matters, and I am happy to do so again today.

Although leasehold suits some, it has many drawbacks for long-term residential occupiers in England and Wales. Many people, including some in my constituency, experience serious difficulties with their landlords, who neglect their obligations under the lease, either wilfully or because they are absent. The Bill will go some way to redress the balance of power between landlord and tenant, and, arguably, it will better reflect the relative investment values in the property.

I welcome the changes being introduced to create the new commonhold tenure for blocks of flats and other multi-unit properties, as well as further reform of residential leaseholds, particularly in respect of making it easier for people to purchase the freehold of their properties.

The introduction of commonhold should provide a better system for the future management and ownership of blocks of flats and other interdependent buildings with shared services and common parts, and it is designed with the admirable intention of giving people in commonhold the opportunity to own the freehold of their homes. Commonhold is a new concept for the United Kingdom, and thus may take some time to be accepted, but it should prove a popular option for new developments.

The Bill will provide an option to convert from leasehold to commonhold, but it is likely that many leaseholders will find that their concerns are sufficiently addressed by the proposed leasehold reforms. For leaseholders, one of the most welcome aspects of the Bill is that proposed under the chapter entitled "Right to Manage".

The Leasehold Advisory Service has said that it receives a large number of inquiries that relate to complaints about service charge abuses and over-charging, mismanagement and the neglect of properties by landlords. I sometimes receive complaints from my constituents on such matters. The Bill will provide tenants with further powers to address those problems. So long as certain reasonable conditions are met, such as the building, or part of the building, being self-contained and containing at least two flats, tenants will be given the power to manage the property without the need to buy the freehold. They also need not prove fault on the part of the landlord, as would be the case if they were applying for a management order under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987.

I also approve of the improvements in the rights of those who inherit a leasehold house from a deceased leaseholder, provided that the tenant had certain rights immediately before his death and that they do not serve the notice any later than six months after the grant of probate or letters of administration.

I should like to ask the Minister to consider a point that appears to have been missed: what happens when a long lease—one over 21 years—expires? Robert Orr-Ewing, a leasehold reform specialist, has pointed out that when a long lease expires, the leaseholder has the right to remain as an assumed periodic tenant under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. However, leaseholders have the right only if they qualify as tenants, but people do not qualify as tenants if they pay more than £25,000 per annum. That may sound like a great deal, but it is not really that much in some areas, especially central London. Thirteen years after the relevant Act was passed, I wonder whether that ceiling should be removed, or at least raised.

Overall, I am positive about these reforms. I agree with Ray Walker, a housing and planning specialist who has worked closely with the Co-operative Bank and written a pamphlet for the Mutuo think tank on the issue. He argues that if the regulations are to work, leaseholders will need extra support, including better guidance on how to form and run effective management companies, and details of accredited solicitors and other experts who can help prevent abuses in the system. However, I believe that we are taking important steps, that this important Bill will take us forward and that leaseholders and freeholders will get a good deal from the reforms.

Finally, I am impressed by what seems to have been an outstanding level of co-operation and consultation with the public and professional bodies to find resolutions to the issues that have been raised. I support the Bill.

7.26 pm

**Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): I intend to make a brief contribution, but first, like many hon. Members, I declare an interest as the director of a family property and building company and the owner of a flat with a long lease in Poole and another in London. Several other hon. Members are in similar situations.

I congratulate the Minister on the manner in which he opened the debate and took many interventions—rather more than I might have done in his position in discussing a technical and complex subject. The Bill has been a long time coming. It is easy to make political statements about wanting reform, but rather more difficult to determine the details and come up with the goods. The delay has produced one benefit in that widespread consultation has taken place. I welcome that because improvements have been made, but as an Opposition Member, I regret the fact that there is a programme motion, under which proceedings in Committee must be concluded by the end of the month.

We can all agree on the principles behind much of the Bill, but the devil is in the detail. I fear that if the Bill is rushed and some clauses are not fully debated in Committee, there will be more work for the lawyers, of whom I have seen many in the Chamber today. It is important to get the Bill right, even if that takes a little longer, and I hope that the Government will take that into account.

There are rather more hon. Members present than during some debates, because, as we have heard, there are 2 million residential leaseholders in the United Kingdom. Almost all of us have heard in our surgeries about examples of bad practice with freeholders or managing agents. All of us have had to wring our hands and give advice about the state of the law, which has not always adequately protected our constituents. However, we are dealing with two sides of a bargain—there are freeholders. Although we have discussed many bad landlords, there are also many very good landlords. Indeed, many pension funds, which are owned by the people, own freeholds and develop property in the United Kingdom. We must get the balance right. We must not draft the law so that it discourages legitimate pension funds that invest in property companies from producing the physical capital that the country needs to be a competitive and first-rate economy.

*[Mr. Robert Syms]*

As I have said, there are many bad landlords involved in the misuse of maintenance funds, dodgy tendering systems for building work, failure to carry out work and hitting people with large repair bills that they find difficult to meet. We have all heard of such examples, so I broadly welcome the Bill and any proposals that will make it easier for leaseholders to become enfranchised and to take over the freehold of their flats.

When that has happened in my constituency under the existing legislation, which was introduced by the previous Government, people are on the whole happy. They have managed to buy freeholds, have usually granted themselves a longer lease, set up a company to own the freehold and then found managing agents to run it. That system works very well, but it is a long, tortuous process and it takes someone to drive it through. It usually happens when one of the leaseholders gets the bit between his teeth and pursues the matter for the several years that it sometimes takes to reach the end of the process. Any changes to legislation that will make it easier for leaseholders to get on with the process and to take proper control over their lives must be welcomed, but difficulties will still arise.

We all welcome the principle of commonhold, but I wonder whether the concept will take off. The Bill's 100 per cent. rule for existing blocks sets a very high hurdle. We have heard about lower hurdles, such as for the transfer of local authority stock, so I wonder whether we should not reduce the figure from 100 per cent. Commonhold will not take off if we rely purely on new building projects. People are conservative about property matters and commonhold will take off only if people see many examples of it happening very quickly. To make commonhold a success, existing flats must transfer to the new system.

As the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) pointed out, there are real problems with new developments. The properties in blocks of 10, 20 or 30 flats sell one at a time and, to a large extent, any new scheme may well be set by the developers and that fact may concern the purchasers. The first person to buy a flat in a block that will be commonhold may not be sure quite what they will get. Indeed, some commonhold blocks may not even be physically finished before the units start to be sold. The time at which a building project is completed is not always entirely clear. There will, therefore, certainly be problems with commonhold.

Under the leasehold system, if tenants do not pay legitimate service charges, a procedure can be used so that the threat of forfeiting a flat can force them to pay up. As far as I can see from the commonhold system, if members of a commonhold block do not pay the charge, they will not have to pay a price for not doing so. That issue must be examined. If it is not, the system will not work very well.

Broadly speaking, I support the Bill, but the devil is in the detail. Much of the real work will have to be done in Committee and I regret the fact that the Committee stage will last for only three weeks. Unless the members of the Committee work extraordinarily long hours, I do not see how all the details in the Bill can be considered. There will be snags and, given the scale of the Bill and the timetable for its consideration, we may have to return to this issue again before the end of this Parliament. That would be a terrible pity and a waste of time.

7.33 pm

**Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): Hon. Members come into the House because we believe that some things are right and that some things are wrong. We come into the House because we want justice for those that the law has been unable to protect. We come to make law and also to change law; we come to improve it and thereby to improve the lives of the people whom we represent. It is for that reason that I wish to speak in this debate.

Since 1884, when the first Leaseholders (Facilities of Fee Simple) Bill was introduced and defeated, hon. Members have sought justice for leaseholders in this country. In the 118 years that have elapsed since then, they have introduced 31 different Bills dealing with leasehold reform. All but two of those 31 Bills have been defeated and, of those two, only one managed to achieve fundamental reform that gave—and then only to a very limited group of leaseholders—the full benefit of home ownership. Such has been the power of property and the landed classes in this country, and such is the injustice that so many people outside Parliament have hoped for years that a Bill might overcome.

For the past five years people in the media, such as Mira Bar Hillel, Sarah Pennels and Karen Wolfson, have campaigned for the Bill. Peter Haler and Tony Essien from LEASE—the Leasehold Advisory Service—have also campaigned for the Bill and all of them would want me to pay tribute today to the years of their lives that Stella Evans, Charlotte Martin, Neil Mulcock, Joan South, Shula Rich, Owen Humphries, Nigel Wilkins, Joyce Glasser, Terence Michael, John Patterson and Muriel Guest-Smith have devoted to trying to achieve justice for leaseholders through legislative change.

Not all those individuals agree with each other—let alone with the Government—and I will freely and honestly say, with some of them overhearing me, that on many occasions most of them have succeeded in being a complete pain. They have certainly refused to let successive politicians off the hook. However, for those of us working in Parliament on the issue of leasehold, they have kept us focused on the problem. Whatever merit there may be in the Bill is due to them. I have the greatest admiration for them all and believe that they deserve the gratitude of the whole House. The faults in the Bill must rest, I fear, with us politicians.

There is both merit and fault in the Bill. It is of course in the nature of Parliament that we are quick to point out the fault and happy to take the merit for granted. However, we should recognise that the Government have sought in the Bill to achieve three important changes. First, commonhold is a form of tenure that is used all over the world. It enables a flat owner to enjoy the full and inalienable benefits of ownership rather than having the mere right to inhabit a property for a designated period of time. Until now, this form of tenure has not existed in England and Wales. The Bill will introduce it, and that is good.

Secondly, the no-fault right to manage that the Bill will give establishes the principle that the leaseholder—the person who lives in the property and who pays the bills—has the right to determine what work needs to be done and how their money is to be spent. That, too, is good.

Thirdly, the process of enfranchisement under the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 has been too complicated and too expensive. It has left many leaseholders no better off because of onerous qualification and residency requirements. The Bill will reduce that burden and simplify the process. That, too, is good.

My hon. Friend the Minister will rightly expect that my remarks will focus on an examination of the Bill's defects. He will know too that I wish to suggest ways in which these may be remedied in Committee. I hope that he will take comfort from the fact that I and others acknowledge the progress that has been achieved and welcome the central benefits that I have just outlined.

At the time that the House was breaking up for the Christmas recess, an application for forfeiture was heard in the county court. The freeholder who made the application was the London borough of Camden and it related to unpaid service charge and ground rent in the sum of £1,266.38. The flat involved is one of three in a converted house and its market value is £350,000. On 13 December, the application for forfeiture was heard and, on 21 December, forfeiture was implemented. Neither the local authority nor the judge in this case appears to have made any inquiries as to the circumstances of the leaseholder or her whereabouts. Forfeiture was granted in a straightforward way and the London borough of Camden has recovered more than its £1,266.38. It has made a profit on top of the debt it was owed—a profit that amounts to £348,733.62. So let no one in the Chamber say that forfeiture is a reasonable penalty to be available in the hands of landlords.

To its credit, the *Camden New Journal* noticed the case and made further inquiries. Unlike the council or the court, it bothered to check the land registry and discovered that the flat had no mortgage outstanding on it which suggested that, at the very least, the owner would have been easily able to secure funds against her equity in the property and pay the amount due. From talking to neighbours, it also discovered that the owner had not been seen for two years and was thought to have had a breakdown. If that is correct and the woman is in psychiatric care, she faces the prospect on her return to health of finding that she has no home to return to and has suffered the most enormous financial loss. That is what forfeiture means in practice. It is the power that a freeholder has to repossess a person's home in relation to what may be an insignificant debt. It is unjust and this Bill should abolish it. It does not.

Of course debts must be paid, and the all-party group for leasehold reform and commonhold, which I chair, took evidence from building societies and other financial institutions on how such debts might be handled. They were of the view that such debts could be handled perfectly adequately through the small claims court in the first instance. Ultimately, it should be possible to force a sale of a property in order to pay a debt, but the balance of the funds after settlement of the debt should revert to the leaseholder.

The Minister will argue that the Bill makes it more difficult for a landlord to implement forfeiture. Clauses 160 to 162 do indeed insist, for example, on a determination of the breach before a landlord can serve a section 146 notice for forfeiture under the Law of Property Act 1925. However, such arguments are fundamentally flawed in two respects. First, they fail to understand that many unscrupulous landlords use the threat of forfeiture as a means of polite extortion. I call such landlords, as my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) remarked, the ground-rent grazers. Grazing animals require vast areas to feed on and they make up in bulk what they lack in quality. Siemarc, Castle New Tower Holdings, the Compton Group, Helpfavour, Shenstone's and Estate Management Ltd. are all ground-rent grazers which have bought up tens of thousands of freehold interests, usually at auction and very cheaply in the north of England.

The freehold interests are sold for a few pounds each. Unlike London and the south-east, most of the properties are leasehold houses rather than flats. The ground-rent grazers have little interest in the ground rents themselves. They are usually a nominal sum of only a few pounds per annum. Unlike a service charge, however, a ground rent is due whether demanded or not, and on a house the right of forfeiture can be pursued by the landlord for arrears of ground rent. For the sake of a £4 ground rent that is a day overdue and has not been demanded or invoiced, the ground-rent grazer can start recovery proceedings. On top of the £4 ground rent, recovery costs are then invoiced. That is what those companies want.

I will not forget the case of Mr. Mitchell of Rugeley in Staffordshire who told me that he had paid his ground rent of £20 promptly when reminded, but that his freeholder, Castle New Tower Holdings, had demanded £698.78 for its time and trouble in sending him an overdue notice in which it pointed out that his home was under threat of forfeiture. For many elderly people in such a situation it is the threat that they might lose their home that frightens them into paying such extortionate charges. It is simply no use for the Minister to insist that the Bill will require notification of ground rent or that forfeiture will be made more difficult, because as long as forfeiture exists unscrupulous landlords will use it to extort money from elderly and vulnerable people.

The second reason why such arguments are flawed is perhaps even simpler to understand. It is against natural justice that a creditor should be allowed to recoup vastly more than the amount that they are owed by selling another person's home from under them. It is particularly intolerable when there are perfectly effective alternative means for enforcing the debt without such disproportionate suffering and loss. I urge the Minister to assure the House that this matter will be given the closest scrutiny in Committee, with a view to ending such clear exploitation. Forfeiture should be abolished.

On commonhold, I have welcomed the principle behind it and commented that we lag behind the rest of the world in introducing it. I can now add that we have gone about it in a peculiarly British way. Commonhold is not the completely new and separate form of title that it is in other countries and that campaigners hoped it would be here. It is defined in clause 1 as

"a freehold estate in commonhold land".

That is to say that it is the ownership of a unit or flat in perpetuity with community ownership of the structure of the building, land and common parts through a commonhold community association.

Commonhold unit-owners are, therefore, freeholders. The fact that the commonhold community association must form itself as a limited company under company law has made the Bill unnecessarily complicated. Good

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examples of simpler systems are available off the peg from Australia and the United States. I regret that we in this country did not have the humility to learn from them.

I wish to focus on two aspects of the introduction of commonhold which can more easily be remedied and on which I hope there may be more chance of changing the Minister's mind. They are the unanimity requirement for conversion to commonhold and the failure to insist that commonhold becomes the default tenure for all new-build blocks of flats or conversions of houses. Before the 1997 election, the Labour Party published a policy document entitled "An End to Feudalism". Some say that it has become quite scarce these days in Government circles, but I am pleased to quote from it. It says:

"Labour will introduce legislation creating the commonhold tenure. Our proposal is that this should apply where new tenancies are created and where existing leaseholders wish to transfer from their current status. In such cases the support of a majority of the leaseholders will be required to effect the transfer."

Why that eminently sound position has been changed is a matter for conjecture. I simply say this: the decision in the Bill to allow transfers from leasehold to commonhold only when there is 100 per cent. agreement of the leaseholders is the death knell of commonhold. That is an impossible hurdle to overcome.

In any large block of flats, such as those that make up most of the great estates in London, there are, at any given time, people who are trying to sell their property and who will have no interest in converting to commonhold. There will be elderly people who consider it not worth the investment for the relatively short period of the rest of their lives or who are too ill to get involved in such an undertaking. There are also absentee leaseholders who are sub-letting the premises as an investment and have no interest in participating in a commonhold association. By their insistence on unanimity, the Government have at once held out commonhold as the panacea for the ills of leasehold tenure and simultaneously made it unattainable for all existing leaseholders. It is a quite staggering achievement to neuter one's own Bill before it ever gets on the statute book, but that is quite simply what clause 3 ensures.

Ministers have sought to justify that provision in another place by expressing their concern about possible legal challenge to any interference with an individual's property title against their will. I simply point out that such provision already exists in our law. Under section 36 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 there exists the provision for the county court to make an order amending all leases in a building on the basis of the majority support of the leaseholders. There is no reason why similar constraint could not apply in this case.

Conversion to commonhold should be available on the same terms as the majority consent for leasehold enfranchisement. The spectre of challenge under human rights legislation is one that a Labour Government have seen off in the past. Indeed, the Minister will recall that when the Duke of Westminster challenged the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 in the European Court of Human Rights, it ruled:

"Eliminating social injustices is an example of the functions of a democratic legislature. More especially, modern societies consider housing of the population to be a prime social need, the regulation of which cannot entirely be left to the play of market forces . . . even where such legislation interferes with existing, contractual relations between parties".

That is paragraph 47 of James *v.* United Kingdom on leasehold enfranchisement.

Put in common parlance, a Government with, shall we say, less timidity faced down the legal challenge and gave the noble Lord a good whipping. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister not to wreck the centrepiece of his Bill because some duke shakes a legal opinion at him.

This is a fundamental flaw, which the Government must seek to redress in Committee.

Even more timid is the refusal to end leasehold tenure for all new build or conversions to flats. The Government state that the new commonhold legislation needs time to bed down before the option of leasehold is cut off. They ignore the fact that commonhold already works perfectly well in every other legal jurisdiction in the world without the safety net of leasehold. The Government even refuse to introduce a sunset clause for leasehold.

Ministers have stated that developers will prefer to build for commonhold as a premium will attach to it, and leasehold will therefore wither on the commercial vine. That is what Christine Hamilton, and Jeremy Bentham before her, would have called "nonsense on stilts". Any examination of the leasehold market will reveal that there is absolutely no difference in the purchase price paid for a property on a 99-year lease and that paid for a property on a 99-year lease with a share of the freehold. The market just does not recognise any premium, albeit for what is clearly a superior title.

The thought that developers will be tempted to forgo all the financial benefits from lease extension and enfranchisement on a leasehold block in favour of a non-existent premium is ministerial self-delusion on a grand scale. The Bill both precludes existing leaseholders from converting to commonhold and ensures that there will be precious few opportunities for would-be purchasers to take up commonhold tenure in new developments or conversions.

If Ministers are adamant that they will not dispense with leasehold for all new build, I would still offer them one way in which they might honourably cling on to their drug of choice. They should consider including in the Bill a provision that any new build or conversions sold on a leasehold basis are sold only as leasehold with a share of the freehold. There can be no objection to that as it is an existing and proven tenure, but it would deny the landlord the additional opportunity for financial gain from the leasehold system through ground rent, eventual lease extensions and, ultimately, enfranchisements. By taking away that opportunity for exploitation of the tenant, the Government would at least create the chance that some commonhold developments will get built. I urge the Minister to indicate in the wind-up whether the Government are prepared to consider such a compromise, to give commonhold some chance of establishing itself.

I have one final consideration about commonhold. I ask the Minister to liaise with his colleague, the Minister for Housing and Planning, to make provision that the type of property tenure can be admitted as a relevant and material consideration for planning authorities. If the Government are serious about wishing to advance commonhold over leasehold, it would be prudent to allow planning

authorities to discriminate in its favour. I trust that the matter may be considered in the context of the current planning White Paper.

Turning to the provisions on leasehold, I welcome enthusiastically the principle of the no-fault right to manage that the Bill introduces. Over 60 per cent. of all correspondence received by the all-party group in the past four years related specifically to problems and complaints about management. The fundamental reason why reform is necessary is that leasehold confers on the freeholder exceptional and unwarranted privileges and powers. Those powers fundamentally distort the relationship of investment and control in a property. Power should be related to the equity stake that one has in a property; under leasehold tenure it is not.

Imagine that I purchase a new car for £12,000 or £15,000 under a leasehold scheme, only to find that the garage recalls it after a month to fit it with a new set of tyres. "Don't worry, they're not needed," I say, "I've only done a 1,000 miles." "That may be so," says the garage, "but we've decided that we want to fit them and we're going to charge you £600 for the privilege." "But it's my car," I protest. "No," says the garage, "you merely own the right to drive around in it for 99 years." We would not consider that a sensible way to own a car. Nor is it a sensible way to own a home.

The value of the freeholder's interest on a property with a 999-year lease is no more than a couple of hundred pounds. By contrast, the leaseholder may have paid hundreds of thousands of pounds for his lease. Yet it is the freeholder who has the effective power in the relationship and who decides how the property is to be run and managed on a daily basis. I repeat: the proper relationship of power and investment has been distorted. It should be that the greater the equity, the greater the control; in fact, it is the reverse. The freeholder decides when a new roof is to be put on or when the heating system is to be overhauled. It is the freeholder qua manager who puts out the tender and chooses the contractor. Yet it is the leaseholder who foots the bill and pays a service charge commission, typically 15 per cent., for the privilege of not being in control of his own home.

Existing legislation gives unscrupulous managers enormous opportunities to exploit the vulnerable. Managers derive their income from commissions received on a building's capital works. It is therefore in the manager's interest to increase the capital cost of work done to maximise their income. The all-party group heard horrifying accounts of corrupt managing agents from a number of witnesses including the police: managers who had failed to maintain properties in accordance with the lease; managers who over-specified contracts and used arm's-length contracting companies to undercut genuine quotations, which they then carried out to cowboy standards, charging exorbitant costs for second-rate work; managers who absconded with leaseholders' funds, and managers who set up their own in-house insurance brokers so as to receive two lots of commission, charging one-off retail-price premiums for property insurance concluded on a wholesale basis.

Adam Smith may not be the most frequently quoted economist on the Labour Benches, but never was a truer word written than when he set down in "The Wealth of Nations":

"Landlords, like all other men, love to reap where they never sowed."

The no-fault right to manage justly gives leaseholders the power to take over the management of their own property without having to go to the considerable expense and trouble of proving fault against the landlord at a leasehold valuation tribunal. That is very much a remedy for abuse rather than the preventive medicine that is represented by enfranchisement, but it is an effective remedy, and I commend it. Or it would be effective if the Bill did not reintroduce the villain by the back door.

The Bill gives the freeholder the right to be represented on the board of the right-to-manage company. Worse, it insists that the no-fault right to manage can be exercised only by a limited company—something that will deter many leaseholders from availing themselves of their right in the first place. The freeholder has recourse under the Bill to refer any dispute to a tribunal, and many tenants organisations have made it clear that they consider that large estates will be able to use the threat of legal action once more to impose their will on the right-to-manage company. Leaseholders do experience intimidation by landlords. That is a fact. Giving the landlord the right to sit on the board will inevitably curtail the very freedom of leaseholders to manage their own affairs that the Bill has so properly sought to bestow on them. I urge the Minister to consider what safeguards can be introduced when the Bill goes into Committee.

Before moving from the subject of the right to manage, I must welcome schedule 9. Public sector leaseholders who, under the right to buy, purchased flats situated in council blocks have fared badly. In the 1980s, councils were encouraged to sell off defective housing at the same time as honey-trap legislation encouraged council tenants to avail themselves of the right to buy. They were given council-guaranteed mortgages when commercial lenders would not lend without a full structural survey. Subsequently, right-to-buy leaseholders found themselves paying service charges for what is often an extremely poor standard of service to them as council leaseholders.

Those works designated as improvements have not been challengeable under section 19 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985; consequently, council landlords have been inclined to designate works as improvements rather than repairs. Council leaseholders are deeply unhappy that the Bill does not enable them to seek the same redress as their private sector counterparts through exercise of a similar right to manage, but they will welcome clause 147 and schedule 9 with their provisions to ameliorate their position.

I turn now to enfranchisement and the question of valuation. The Bill simplifies certain of the previous regulations governing residency and qualification. That is a good thing and I welcome it. The only way to ensure that all forms of exploitation related to leasehold tenure are finally done away with is to give leaseholders the opportunity to own their own homes absolutely by enabling them to acquire a share of the freehold interest in their property through enfranchisement.

Cost has always been the major obstacle to enfranchisement, and the major element in that cost—at least since 1974—has been what is known as marriage value. Under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967, passed under a Labour Government, marriage value was not deemed to be part of the valuation of the freehold interest. The leaseholder was obliged to pay only the capitalised value of the ground rent plus the reversion of the site value. Subsequently, the 1969 Lands Tribunal ruled in

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Custins *v.* Hearts of Oak Benefit Society that marriage value be calculated as part of the valuation. Immediately, the Labour Government introduced further legislation to overturn that perverse decision. The then Secretary of State for Wales made the Government's position clear when introducing the new provision, stating:

"It is really a corrective Clause which will be welcomed by one million householders in the country, for it removes the misunderstanding which has existed ever since the Custins decision by the Lands Tribunal".—[*Official Report*, 22 May 1969; Vol. 784, c. 738.]

It has been said that the issue of marriage value is more complicated than the Schleswig-Holstein question, which only three people understood: one was dead, one was mad and the third had forgotten. I have not forgotten marriage value, and I am evidently not dead; I leave it to the House to form its own conclusions about my state of mind. On one thing I am clear: marriage value lies at the heart of the reason why leasehold is an unjust form of tenure.

I do not seek to embarrass Ministers by quoting their own words back at them—at least I do not seek only to embarrass them; it is just that they stated matters so much more clearly and better when we were in opposition. In the policy document "An End to Feudalism" prepared by my right hon. Friends the Members for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford) and for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), the case was stated succinctly, as follows:

"one of the most complex elements is the provision for 'marriage value', the added value of owning the property and the land together. This has played an increasingly significant role in valuations in recent years. To streamline and simplify the valuation processes, we believe that it is right to go back to the fundamentally sound logic behind the 1967 Act, which did not include 'marriage value' in the valuation process. Its subsequent appearance has tilted the balance significantly in favour of the landowner and there is a strong case for it to be deleted."

The fact that the Bill accepts the principle of marriage value is seen by leaseholders as a betrayal of all that they believed the Government would do to redress the fundamental and enduring exploitation that they have suffered. It saddens me that that should be so. I know from many hours spent in comradely debate with successive Ministers that it is not an issue on which the Government are likely to concede during the Bill's passage, but one of the functions of this House is to be a debating chamber in which arguments are presented for public consideration irrespective of the likelihood of their gaining ministerial favour.

Under the leasehold system, a freeholder can sell a property for its full market value—there is no difference between the price of a 99-year lease and the share of the freehold interest—yet after a period of time that property reverts to the freeholder who can sell it again for its full market value. That happens despite the fact that throughout the period of the lease the freeholder has made no contribution to the maintenance and upkeep of the property. In its simplest form, the argument against marriage value is that the freeholder has already received the full market value for his freehold interest. The calculation of marriage value is worked out by reference to the depreciation in the leaseholder's asset. It is that discrepancy between the full market value of an unencumbered 99-year lease and a depreciated lease that represents the marriage value. The leaseholder is therefore asked to pay a second time through marriage value the loss that he has already sustained from the depreciation of his asset.

The overwhelming number of representations received by the Government during their consultation on that issue urged them to scrap marriage value. They should have done so. They are not simply morally wrong to permit it; they are, ironically, technically wrong also. The Government have stated that

"Most compulsory purchase regimes are based on full open market valuation, and the government does not see a persuasive case on public interest grounds for departing from that principle in this instance."

The Government's error is revealed by an examination of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors statement of what constitutes the open market value of a property. It defines that value as follows:

"An opinion of the best price at which the sale of an interest in property would have been completed unconditionally for cash consideration on the date of valuation, assuming:

a. a willing seller;

b. that, prior to the date of valuation, there had been a reasonable period (having regard to the nature of the property and the state of the market) for the proper marketing of the interest, for the agreement of the price and terms and for the completion of the sale;

c. that the state of the market, level of values and other circumstance were, on any earlier assumed date of exchange of contract, the same as on the date of valuation;

d. that no account is taken of any additional bid by a prospective purchaser with a special interest; and

e. that both parties to the transaction had acted knowledgeably, prudently and without compulsion."

The leaseholder is clearly

"a prospective purchaser with a special interest".

As George Thomas intimated back in 1969 in this very Chamber, it is difficult to have more of a special interest in a property than that it has been one's home for the past 20 or so years. Equally, to suggest that an elderly leaseholder whose lease is about to expire and who cannot afford a rack-rent is acting without compulsion is to ignore the tragic reality that faces many individuals today.

The RICS practice statement makes it absolutely clear that a leaseholder in a collective enfranchisement must be regarded as a special purchaser—that is, someone to whom the property has a particular attraction that it does not possess for the market in general. According to that statement:

"The special purchaser is, in almost every case, the owner of either:

i. an interest in land which has or could have a particular relationship with the property concerned, e.g. the owner of an interest in a nearby or adjacent property; or

ii. another interest in the property being valued, e.g. a superior landlord or an under-tenant".

The practice statement goes on:

"A superior landlord or a sitting tenant may be a special purchaser because the merging of the two interests might liberate 'marriage value' which would justify a higher price than any other purchaser could afford to pay".

If, as they say they do, the Government believe that the basis for valuation of the property in collective enfranchisement cases should be that of full open market value, the RICS code of practice makes it clear that they should reject the inclusion of marriage value, which arises out of the special purchaser status of the parties involved.

I am confident that the Government will not reject it, but I am now content that they persist not in ignorance, but in wilful wrong.

I earnestly hope that all my criticisms of the Bill are ill-founded. I honestly hope that the Bill will achieve its stated aims. The first of those aims is to encourage the growth of a new property tenure of commonhold for new-build flats and conversions to flats. If more than 60 per cent. of new-build flats in the next five years are commonhold, and leasehold withers as Ministers predict, I will be delighted to eat my words.

The second aim is to enable existing leaseholders to transfer through to commonhold community associations and gain the benefits of an inalienable title to their home. If even 10 per cent. of right-to-enfranchise companies succeed in effecting that transfer, I shall rejoice at my own folly for ever doubting Ministers and their civil servants.

The Bill's third aim is to enable existing leaseholders to throw off the yoke of landlords' managing agents and avail themselves of the no-fault right to manage. If only 10 per cent. of current residents associations successfully establish themselves as right-to-manage companies, I will be astounded by the Bill's success.

The fourth aim is to enable existing leaseholders to enfranchise more easily. In that respect, my threshold drops lower still, to a mere 5 per cent. increase in the number of leasehold blocks that are able to enfranchise. I would be prepared to acknowledge that as a real success for the Bill. The House and the Minister will recognise that I have set exceedingly small benchmarks by which to measure its success. They are a measure of my pessimism and do not in any way reflect the enormous good will that I wish him on the success of the Bill, for which I have campaigned assiduously over the past four years.

I trust that the Under-Secretary will say in her winding-up speech whether her expectations are any higher than mine and whether she accepts that the targets that I have set are fair. The virtue of setting them is that we can assess properly the extent to which the Bill fulfils its purpose. I am confident that in perhaps six or seven years' time we can begin afresh the enterprise of making radical and comprehensive reform to the laws governing property tenure in this country. After all, what is six or seven years between comrades? Leaseholders have been waiting since 1884.

8.11 pm

**Mr. Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon): I fear that the Government will get an easier ride from me than they have from their own Members in the debate. However, the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) gave an impassioned and elegant speech.

I wish to make the obvious point that people enter into leases of their own volition. No one forces someone to take a lease, and although the hon. Member for Brent, North made several interesting points, that is essentially the position and has always been so. If, in a more global sense, there is something good about the Bill, it is that we are at least looking forward, and I accept that the hon. Gentleman recognised that. Rights and obligations on property in this country are well established. Over the years, they have supported wealth creation and have been vital to the growth of our businesses and therefore our economy. To a greater or lesser extent, they have ensured effective stewardship of our land. It is important that any tinkering with those rights is undertaken with great caution.

The legal system on leasehold is unique to this country and has both merits and problems. Over the years, it has made the property market fluid and adaptable; in its time it was revolutionary. However, I appreciate that times change, and as they do, we need to change our thinking on property laws. We have a right and obligation continually to review the position. On the practicalities, more and more single people are looking for housing; families are smaller; and there is a shortage of homes, which at the moment is getting worse. That problem is particularly concentrated in our cities, but is now spreading to our towns. Especially in cities but to a lesser extent in towns, houses have been split into houses in multiple occupation. In London in the past 20 years, a great many such houses have been characterised by high quality, especially in the private sector. In such private sector accommodation, dealing with common parts has become much more important in recent years. That lifestyle tends to suit people living an urban life, especially young working people.

The concept of house conversions into HMOs is relatively new, and our legislation needs to cater for it. About 11 years ago, a situation that I witnessed at first hand persuaded me that changes to the law were necessary. I was a councillor in an inner-city borough, where were three streets, although not in my ward, with mansion blocks, each of which was owned by separate company. As it turned out, those companies were owned in common by one owner. The problem is well documented and ended up in court. I am pleased that the family who owned all the companies were successfully prosecuted; they were making management charges on all the flats and putting them into the companies. They then shuffled the money around the companies and, of course, it eventually disappeared into their own pockets, creating misery for their tenants and enormous problems for the streets' environment, which deteriorated dramatically leading to all sorts of associated social problems.

That made me realise that change was needed. I do not support all the views of the campaign for the abolition of residential leaseholds, but it has given examples of problems that persist, such as holding lessees to ransom when they come to sell their properties by imposing large administration fees; creating management companies to order unnecessary levies and management charges; failing to disclose money missing from maintenance funds and annual accounts; and failing to carry out essential work until the cost of repairs became astronomical. I have witnessed examples of all those problems, which happen in real life.

The Conservative Government's reforms were of course important in tackling such problems. Many of the problems that now arise are as a result of violations of the existing law, which is not being enforced, rather than the law not being there in the first place. Much has already been done for tenant protection and enfranchisement. Although I was not in the House at the time, I followed the debates; there was great concern about the implications for freeholders, which I would have shared. The law was changed, and it is fair to say that, overall, it is working fairly and the valuation provisions have worked well enough. Many rights were given to leaseholders, including the right to information about the

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landlord; the right to seek recognition for tenants' associations; the right to information about service charges; the right to challenge unreasonable demands; the right to be consulted about major works; the right to information about insurance for the property; the right to a management audit; and, where the landlord has failed in their duty to manage the property, the right to seek the appointment of a manager and, ultimately, the compulsory acquisition of the landlord's interest in the building in certain circumstances.

It can hardly be said that we have not moved significantly on leaseholders' rights. The reforms were necessary to give tenants the right to an increased say in their own lives, to check management costs and to run the common parts of their buildings. However, that was necessary not because of the leasehold system per se. Indeed, for every one rotten landlord, I am sure that there are 1,000 conscientious and honest landlords who take care of their properties, look after their tenants and appreciate their obligations as much as their entitlements. We are now looking at new legislation to deal with the same sort of considerations; we are taking the ball game forward. When legislation such as this last came before the House, some people would have said—I am sure they did—that it should have gone further. I disagree with that view. In terms of leasehold reform, the incremental nature of the change is important: people must retain confidence in the system, which is long-established and must be changed slowly.

With regard to the need to deal with existing problems, it is fair to say that some of the legislation that was introduced 10 years ago has subsequently been shown not to be as complete as it could have been, even though it was heading in the right direction. I have personal experience with regard to the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 and the right of refusal that it contains. The Act ensures that in most circumstances, a landlord who wishes to dispose of property containing flats must give qualifying tenants the opportunity to buy it and tell them the price and other principal terms on which he is prepared to sell it. In practice, however, the Act has relatively few teeth and contains nothing that forces such notice to be given, so it does not enforce the ability of tenants to stop a sale occurring over their heads. That is an important example of how the current situation needs to be improved. The process continues, and the Government are now promoting commonhold—a new form of tenure that enables people who live in flats to own their homes individually and own the whole property collectively. The Government put it in the following terms:

> "Commonhold will provide a better system for the future ownership and management of blocks of flats . . . Conversion from leasehold to commonhold will only be possible where all of the leaseholders agree to participate and buy out any other interests involved."

As we have heard throughout the debate, the Opposition do not have any conceptual problem with the thinking behind the Bill. As many hon. Members have said, the devil will be in the detail. I hope that in a Committee stage that will inevitably be complicated, the Government will listen and work to the greatest possible degree on a bipartisan basis. Many hon. Members have expressed concerns about the programme motion and the timetabling of the Committee stage. I share those concerns. My current experience of serving on a Standing Committee to which a programme motion has been attached has not been especially edifying: the Committee considering the Adoption and Children Bill has failed to cover some 25 per cent. of the clauses that have come before us. The Bill was introduced on a pretty much bipartisan basis and contains relatively little politics, and is also very technical. Consideration in Committee of the Bill that is before us will also be technical. I think that the Adoption and Children Bill has been given two or three months, whereas three weeks will be a very tight timetable for considering the complicated clauses in this Bill. Perhaps a reconsideration of that schedule is in order.

The provisions on conversion mean that it will be possible to convert from leasehold to commonhold, but only if certain criteria are met. Details will be set out in regulations that we have not seen. I believe that the Minister said that those details would be made available to the Committee. I hope that that is the case, as it is important for the Committee to review them. We must return to the question of consent for conversion of 100 per cent. of the existing leaseholders. The concept is basically sound and should be put in place. In some years' time, it must be subject to a review of the sort that we are now giving to leaseholder questions that came before the House not so many years ago. I accept that that is a developing process.

Commonhold is a new idea and I hope that it will be applied to new properties. My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) made a valid point in that regard when he asked what would happen if a landlord's family had moved into his property, thereby enabling him to stop the 100 per cent. ownership. Whether or not the 100 per cent. figure is considered in Committee, the question of frustration must carefully be addressed. Another question arose with regard to the use of positive covenants—a matter which it was suggested was not within the scope of the Bill. I think that this would be good opportunity to address the law on positive covenants and to enable them to run with the land. I do not see why that matter should not be dealt with in the Bill, especially as it will be an essential component in the new concept of commonhold ownership.

We also need to keep it in mind that ownership is not the be all and end all in terms of commonhold. I should like to give a few examples to illustrate that point. In relation to nuisance neighbours, more than 70 per cent. of people who own the freehold of their blocks of flats are apparently finding that ownership is not the answer to all their problems. According to a survey conducted by a certain firm of specialist insurers, those people are still having to deal with neighbours who fail to fulfil their obligations as leaseholders and the problem is getting worse. The survey, which was completed by people who act as voluntary directors and officers of their residents' management companies, showed that only 40 per cent. of those surveyed felt that their neighbours were aware of their responsibilities as leaseholders, compared with 49 per cent. in 1998, when the previous survey had been conducted. More than half the respondents said that dealing with unsociable neighbours was a bugbear and the most difficult aspect of management. A full 70 per cent. said that they had experienced major problems. Collection of service charges, the sub-letting of flats by leaseholders to unsuitable tenants and the hogging of car parking spaces stand out as the most common areas of conflict.

In addition, there is a problem for managers who are facing litigation. Individuals acting as directors and officers of residents' management companies are increasingly likely to find themselves falling foul of the law, which recognises no difference between them and directors of big commercial companies. Increasingly, they are having to take out liability insurance to cover them against that possibility. It would be helpful if the Bill could deal with that problem, which will get worse as a result of the proposed legislation.

Finally, I must mention the problem of investors being put off investing as a result of the legislation. Investment is at the heart of urban renaissance, which is supposed to be about having mixed-use buildings. To achieve that, one must find investors who are prepared to invest in the commercial part of such buildings, which is usually the ground floor and, perhaps, the floor above. Such investors like to have some control over their investment and to be able to redevelop where necessary.

While it has been relatively easy for investors to keep control of a building, it has still been hard to find backers for that type of venture. The Government will find that life will be even harder for investors as a result of two measures that the Bill will introduce. First, it will increase the threshold of commercial space in a building for which leaseholders can buy the freehold from 10 per cent. to 25 per cent. Secondly, the Government appear to be proposing to do away with the low-rent test. Often the rents of city-centre buildings are too high for the buildings to be caught by the legislation. Those two provisions will result in virtually all mixed-use buildings being caught under it. The proposal to remove the low-rent test remains in the published Bill.

I have listed some issues with which the Government should deal in the Bill. The final question is one that many hon. Members have raised. Once the Bill has been enacted, will the Government have legislation that will make commonhold attractive? If it is not attractive, we will not be moving forward with this legislation.

8.30 pm

**Mr. David Lepper** (Brighton, Pavilion): I pay tribute to the excellent and eloquent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner). I endorse many of his positive comments on the Bill, as well as his criticisms.

The city of Brighton and Hove has about 25,000 leasehold tenancies, some in purpose-built blocks and some in Regency and Victorian conversions. The symbol of all that has been wrong with leasehold legislation is Embassy court on the border of my constituency and Hove. It is a grade 1 listed building and one of the few surviving examples of the work of the 1930s architect Welles Coates. I remember it from the late 1960s with its gleaming white exterior and plush interior. It was home to Keith Waterhouse and other celebrities of the time. Now, the constant refrain that I hear from visitors is, "When is that eyesore going to be demolished?" It has a history of 30 years of shameful neglect by a succession of incompetent and unscrupulous managing agents and freeholders.

The leaseholders faced a legal maze that made the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce look open and shut. Embassy court became Bleak House over that 30 years, despite the pride and best efforts of many leaseholders, often of advanced years. A number of those leaseholders have enfranchised, but the costs of refurbishment—in particular, late in life as many of them are—are prohibitive after the years of neglect.

The no-fault right to manage that the Government have introduced in the Bill would have been a real help to my constituents in Embassy court, but it was not available. It will be now, but it is too late for them. The majority of the people who come to my surgery or write to me about leasehold are concerned about management. They do not necessarily want to enfranchise and they might or might not be interested in commonhold. Management is the issue.

Although I welcome the proposals for a no-fault right to manage, two issues must be considered. One, which has already been touched on, is the landlord's right to be a member of the right-to-manage company not only in his own right but in respect of the leases that he has.

The fact that the Bill does not contain a provision to allow for the regulation and registration of managing agents is a major omission. In Brighton and Hove we have, I believe, the only pilot scheme for the registration of managing agents in the country. It is a voluntary scheme. Our partners are the council, the leaseholders association, the Association of Residential Managing Agents and the Leasehold Advisory Service. About 17 or 18 local managing agents have signed up to the scheme's basic charter of minimum standards. However, the council officer, Kathryn Greig, who has done sterling work on behalf of leaseholders within the council, tells me that because the scheme is voluntary it is somewhat toothless. Some agents have been excellent and have responded to complaints within days. Others have chosen to leave the scheme rather than be asked to answer for their behaviour. One ignores correspondence that it does not like.

All that points to the need for a statutory scheme. I welcome the fact that the noble Lord Falconer said in the other place on 19 November that the Government would consult on the need for a statutory scheme. However, there is no need to consult. The new right to manage will be weaker without legislation to back it up. Lord Falconer's answer also made it clear that if there was legislation after that consultation it would be at the earliest opportunity. Now, I have only been here for five years, but I know what a moveable feast "the earliest opportunity" can become when it is mentioned in this Chamber or in the other place.

I pay tribute to Shula Rich of the Brighton, Hove and district leaseholders association, and to Kathryn Greig and her colleagues on Brighton and Hove city council, for the work that they have done to support leaseholders. What is happening in Brighton and Hove—despite some criticisms—is probably a model for other parts of the country.

Under the current proposals in the Bill, the chances of commonhold thriving face many obstacles, and I believe that there is a need for a sunset clause. We should let commonhold bed down, but give a clear signal that after, say, five or 10 years, all new developments must be commonhold or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North suggested, give planning authorities the power, based on their understanding of their own areas, to make commonhold a requirement. We allow them to specify the proportion of affordable housing in planning schemes, and we expect them to fulfil a presumption in favour of

*[Mr. David Lepper]*

brownfield sites over greenfield sites. Why should we not give them this additional power, to be used in the light of local circumstances? I know that the chair of the planning applications committee of Brighton and Hove city council has suggested that, and would welcome its introduction.

I welcome the proposals to make enfranchisement easier. However, many hon. Members have pointed out that in circumstances in which people wish to convert, the requirement for 100 per cent. agreement is unreasonable. We do not require it for enfranchisement; why should we do so for conversion to commonhold? The requirement offers a loophole to unscrupulous landlords to take leases—even one lease—to scupper a conversion. Let us make the qualifying proportions for conversion the same as for enfranchisement. That would call the bluff of the property companies who have been buying up leases in blocks. It would also test the resolve of those who claim that they wish to convert to commonhold, because it would present them with some problems. We should, however, let the leaseholders make that decision, rather than have the Government set parameters that form an obstruction to conversion.

Shula Rich has drawn to my attention an important issue about forfeiture that has been mentioned often in this debate. Both LEASE and Ministers say that the incidence of people losing their homes through forfeiture is very small. However, the Brighton, Hove and district leaseholders association tells me that it has helped thousands of leaseholders over the past five years, and that the majority of the cases that it has dealt with have, at some stage, involved the threat of forfeiture—even cases involving some of the most reputable solicitors in Sussex. I shall name one: DMH. In a letter sent to a leaseholder on behalf of one of its clients, it states:

"You have received a demand for payment of Ground Rent and Service Charge from the freeholder's agent in the sum of £1,105.32 . . . we are now instructed to instigate proceedings against you.

This action will involve the preparation and service of a notice under Section 146 of the Law of Property Act 1925 . . . We point out that you are responsible for the costs . . . You should be aware that such action could result in the forfeiture of your lease and the loss of your home."

That was all for the sake of £1,105.32.

As has been pointed out, there are other means of debt recovery—such means must exist; that is only fair—that are much fairer than the threat of forfeiture. It is the threat that is insidious, particularly when accompanied by certain other refined practices. For example, leaseholders might return home to find the door of their flat superglued up. Alternatively, the landlord may move in belligerent neighbours next door to threaten them and make their life hell. The phone calls that I receive do not always suggest that people will really lose their homes, but the elderly in particular are frightened by such threats, so I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North said about the end of forfeiture.

Other hon. Members rightly talked at length about the injustice of marriage value, so I shall concentrate on a problem for leaseholders to which I was first alerted 20 years ago—the threat of forfeiture. I welcome the proposed recourse to a leasehold valuation tribunal. That is a safeguard, but it does not remove the threat posed by the armoury of the unscrupulous landlord or managing agent and there are already remedies through debt recovery.

Although I welcome much of the Bill, especially the right to manage on a no-fault basis and the introduction of commonhold, I am less sanguine than my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North about its chances of success. However, those who call for it to be withdrawn—scuppered completely—are politically inept and do nothing to help the majority of leaseholders. We have probably the only opportunity in this Parliament to legislate. We say that we are taking our time because we want to get the legislation right, yet in many ways we have made a pig's ear of it. We have a legislative slot, however, so I ask Ministers to go the extra mile and put an end to feudalism.

8.42 pm

**Sue Doughty** (Guildford): Affordable housing is a major problem for many of our constituents, particularly in the south-east, and as a result there are many leasehold properties, especially in my constituency where, despite what the public appear to think, a lot of people live in small leasehold properties. It is often said that beggars cannot be choosers and there is a shortage of property in the area, so I disagree with the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), because people do not always choose to live in a leasehold property. It may be the only one that they can afford and if they have to live in a leasehold property to stay in the area, that is what they do.

We have our share of poor landlords and managing companies that take unfair advantage of people for whom leasehold properties are the only option, so, on the whole, we welcome the proposed reforms and hope that the issues, which are long outstanding, can be resolved. However, time in Committee is short, especially given the many concerns and the technical nature of some measures, and work remains to be done to protect leaseholders from exploitation by unscrupulous landlords and management companies.

The hon. Member for Huntingdon said that there are 1,000 conscientious landlords to perhaps one bad one, implying that the rotten apple in the barrel causes the problems, yet time after time hon. Members have told us about large companies with responsibility for tens, hundreds or thousands of properties that use the nature of the leasehold to extort money from people for whom there are few remedies. I do not suggest that every large company is unscrupulous; I am sure that that is not the case.

We have talked about forfeiture, but less about what happens when people sell their properties, although the insights of the hon. Members for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby), for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) were helpful.

The Bill provides for appeals, through tribunals, for more information about how management charges have arisen. That is not so easy when a leaseholder wants to sell and move. As I am sure the Minister will appreciate, when a property such as a flat is on the market, a huge amount of pressure is put on both buyer and seller to push through the legal procedures. After all, those who sell properties do so for a reason: they may want a better

property, to move because of a new job, have embarked on a new relationship or need to downsize. In any event, for those who are selling, time is of the essence, and the same applies to buyers.

This is a time at which people are under extreme pressure, and will often accept what they would not accept if they had time to consider. They need to resolve the business to mutual satisfaction, and sometimes they will pay money just to escape from a situation. That is well known and exploited by management companies and landlords.

I have a letter about a property owned by one of my constituents, Mr. Kiley, and his partner Ms Ivory. It is from Mr. Kiley's solicitor, and what it contains is typical of what happens when a solicitor tries to resolve matters. Part of what is involved is trying to find out how much a leaseholder owes, so that contracts can be exchanged and the move can get under way. We have all been there: we know the pressure people are under. Delays cost money, often for those who can least afford it.

The letter, which was sent to the management company DGA plc, related to 20b Martyr road, Guildford. It contained the following passage:

"Over the last two or three weeks in particular you have continually assured me that the long awaited fax was to be sent imminently. You finally confirmed to me on Friday morning, 2nd November, that Mr Kiley was in credit with your company to the extent of approximately £250; faxed confirmation would 'definitely' be with me during Friday; at 2.30 pm on Friday I was to have faxed confirmation within 10 to 15 minutes."

The letter was written on the following Monday.

The letter continued:

"Notwithstanding all of the above, I enclose copy of the faxed statement received from your company . . . later on Friday afternoon showing two sets of 'yearly service charge in advance' and (notwithstanding no expenditure)"—

by the management company, that is—

"two 'end of year balancing charge' figures and an alleged net balance due by Mr Kiley of £704.28."

Mr. Kiley had been in credit to the tune of £250 in the morning, but by the end of the day he owed £704.28.

That is not untypical. When a flat is to be sold, the solicitors acting for the buyer—especially when the buyer has a mortgage—must serve notice on the landlord or the management company that the flat has been sold, and mortgaged. They must obtain a receipted copy of such a notice. In the ordinary course of events, a landlord or managing agent can legitimately refuse to receipt such a notice if there are arrears of rent or service charges. It is a heaven-sent opportunity.

Because solicitors acting for a lender have a duty to the lender to obtain the receipted notice, they almost invariably insist that the seller of the flat must discharge the service-charge arrears—whether or not there are any—before they can advise their client to purchase. It is at that stage that an unscrupulous landlord can recover unjustifiable sums from flat owners. Although the Bill provides for the provision of full information about management charges, and for the resolution of disputes, it is when a sale is in the offing that there is not enough time to bring about such a resolution. Time is of the essence. The Bill does not deal with that problem; nor does it suggest any penalties for landlords who use such opportunities to recover unjustifiable sums.

I am advised that some landlords regularly use the device when a property is being sold, and vendors have no option but to pay. If there are no penalties to deal with what, if it did not take place in this way, would be seen by some as a criminal activity, people will continue to engage in that activity. I urge that in Committee amendments be tabled to exact real penalties on landlords. I suspect that landlords and agents are acting in that way in respect of thousands of properties. These are not small fish and they need to be dealt with. It is extortion; there is no other word for it.

In another case, it is possible for dubious charges to be levied regularly on the purchaser. At one group of properties in Guildford managed by a separate company of managing agents, the leases of the flats contain a requirement that when the flat is sold the incoming owner should enter into a covenant with the landlord to observe the terms of the lease. The leases do not state that the covenant has to be in a specific form or that any costs have to be paid to the landlord in relation to it.

Nevertheless, the management company stipulates that it does not have to approve the deed of covenant and that an administrative charge of approximately £100 plus VAT has to be paid to it. It always collects. It says in linked correspondence that unless the covenant fee is paid to it, it will refuse to register notices of transfer and mortgage. By that means it does very nicely. Every time a flat changes hands, it receives £100. It is not a large sum of money, and we have heard of much worse incidents, but it is a constant cause of aggravation and it is wrong.

The Bill fails to provide remedies to avoid those sharp practices. It fails to provide penalties to deal with those landlords and that is a regular swindle. Such action by a landlord needs to be circumscribed. It is criminal. I hope that the Minister will look at what should be done. The right to manage would remove the problem for some people but it will not be universally available. We cannot say that that will provide the remedy. Can we look at that matter in Committee to rectify that injustice?

8.52 pm

**Gareth Thomas** (Clwyd, West): I shall confine my remarks since a number of hon. Members who have a real interest in the subject, which affects many of our constituents, wish to be called to speak.

The House has grappled with the fundamental issue of how to deal with the imbalance of power between landlords and leaseholders for many years, and I suspect that we will have to revisit the subject. I also suspect that although it would be eminently sensible to codify this area of law, in view of its complexity and the difficulties in acquiring parliamentary time, it will not be possible to codify it. However, it is a far from esoteric subject. As we have heard, no fewer than 2 million households live in homes under leasehold tenure.

The Bill is welcome and it will go some way towards redressing the imbalance to which I have referred. That imbalance arises from the practical difficulty ingrained in our land law, which does not allow positive covenants to run with land. That difficulty has created the imbalance to which so many hon. Members have referred.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on an impassioned and cogent speech. I will not go as far as him. I believe that the Government are right to proceed in a more cautious and

*[Gareth Thomas]*

pragmatic manner than some would like. Clearly, the Government must balance various interests and tread carefully.

I believe that the Bill takes a sensible approach to enabling a greater take-up of commonhold tenure. Having said that—and the Minister will appreciate that I support the Bill—my hon. Friends the Members for Brent, North, for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) and for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) made a strong argument for the Government to look again at the question of unanimity before conversion from leasehold tenure to commonhold tenure can occur. That is a fundamental problem and I welcome the fact that in another place the Lord Chancellor has professed to be open-minded about accepting a well-judged and carefully worded amendment.

I anticipate that the Government will be concerned about the implications of the Human Rights Act 1998, but surely it is possible to look again at the issue. If commonhold is to be a successful and popular form of tenure that redresses the imbalance that we have heard so much about, unanimity is an obstacle that must be done away with.

Part 2 of the Bill dealing with leasehold reform contains a number of extremely welcome measures. The right to manage will become an absolute right that is not based on the need to establish fault on the part of the landlord. That will substantially improve the position of many people I represent. Although it is a problem that affects London and other big cities, it is an increasing concern for retirement leaseholders, of whom there are some 100,000 living in purpose-built retirement blocks, subject to age restrictions. Some of these elderly people are subject to abuse and exploitation which is why the Government are entirely right to facilitate the right to manage and collective enfranchisement.

I congratulate the Government on tightening up the regime of service charges. The Bill provides protection against unreasonable administration charges and strengthens the requirement for greater consultation and improved accounting with regard to service charges which are an important issue for elderly people. However, I have some misgivings about certain details. I find it rather odd that the Bill will require a representative of the landlord to have voting rights in the right-to-manage company. I agree with the comment made in the other place that that will send confusing signals and may hamper the operation of right-to-manage companies.

I am also concerned that, at least at the moment, the Government are not prepared to introduce legislation to regulate managers. That is particularly relevant to retirement leaseholders on the north Wales coast who may not be sufficiently active or, frankly, may not want to be involved in the hassle of running a company. In those circumstances it is reasonable for them to want to appoint a manager. They need assurances that the right-to-manage company will operate in a robust way and that any professional managers who are appointed operate in a professional and honest manner. So there is a need for regulation in that regard.

I expect that amendments will be tabled in Committee to deal with some of the issues to which I have referred. I welcome the Bill but, like most Bills, it is capable of improvement.

9 pm

**Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): Thank you for calling me to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I wish you a happy new year.

I should start by declaring my interests. My wife and I own a leasehold flat in Ifield road. It is currently for sale, and would make an excellent starting point for anyone hoping to begin in commonhold. Also, my home in Fulham, which I bought as a freehold property, has a large advertising hoarding on one wall that was leased by the previous owner to a billboard company. About 89 years remain on that lease which, relatively speaking, depletes the value of the house.

My concern with the Bill stems from the good intentions with which the Government have set out to right perceived wrongs in earlier legislation. The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), for whom I have the highest regard, revealed the depth of passion and sense of injustice that people feel about the constrictions of a leasehold tenancy.

The debate has focused on many examples of constituents being horrified by the variety of costs that have emerged when they have lifted the lid on the legal details of the deals that they have cut with regard to their homes. The devil is in the detail, as the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) illustrated with his own sad tales about what happened when he sallied forth into the world of property development.

Therefore, when we set out to hammer out some of the problems involved in creating a better law, we must be careful that we are not overegging the pudding and making the current situation worse. That is possible with this Bill, which is 134 pages long. The helpful little handbook that comes with it comprises a further 75 pages. If the devil truly is in the detail, as hon. Members of all parties seem to agree is the case, we may find that a whole tribe of devils is lurking in the detail of this Bill.

All hon. Members have a horror of legislation that is hard to read and to explain. I draw the Minister's attention again to the 100 per cent. conversion criteria. The provision has the potential to inflict much misery, and will cause leaseholders to argue whether conversion is sensible or worthwhile, given the way in which property prices change. The need to understand the complexity of leasehold law will shift as a result. Although it is entirely laudable and worthy to support an increase in home ownership, it is possible that property prices will be affected and will benefit one party at the expense of the other.

The Bill is a knife that cuts both ways. It belies the Government's soft tones, and leads me to believe that it will become just another method of wealth redistribution. That is in the finest traditions of old Labour, as Labour Members have described. I therefore have the gravest doubts about the Bill's ability to succeed, especially in view of its size. The principles of home ownership set out in the Bill and the destruction of so many unfair practices that it promises are a good start, but they are typical of the good intentions with which we know that the road to hell is paved.

The concept of commonhold flats may well be the holy grail for housing in London. I hope that it is, but what a shame that the Bill is to be rushed through with a programme motion. What a shame that no provision was made for homes over shops. Such homes are often the

first to be left empty when areas start to decline. That offers a challenge to legislators. If an area begins to decline, home owners are left with negative equity, irrespective of whether they are freeholders or leaseholders.

The Bill misses the chance to incentivise in the case of homes over shops. It misses the chance to consolidate current leasehold law. It misses the chance to pave the minefield of legislation that lessees currently have to consider and which simply increases their costs.

What a shame about the bulging Bill. What a shame that it was not more concise. What a shame that there is so much leasehold law that it was necessary to introduce such a plump measure.

What a shame about the programme motion. After listening to the heartfelt and sensible suggestions made on both sides of the House, what a shame that there is a programme motion to push through a Bill that is supported by so many good intentions. However, once again, good intentions are no substitute for informed debate.

9.6 pm

**David Wright** (Telford): I do not want to detain the House for too long. I shall focus my comments on the broad details of the Bill, while also drawing out specific points that need to be considered in detail. When my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions winds up the debate, I hope that she can give us some reassurance on the detailed issues. I shall return to them in a few moments.

In general, the strength of the Bill is that it provides new ownership solutions that can be comprehensively applied. We should acknowledge that for most people their home is a statement of their personal identity and, importantly, it is a tool that ensures that they have a stake in the future of their community. The Bill enables people to take a more effective stake in the environment around their homes and, through the ensuing legal structures, will—I hope—provoke the creation of more proactive communities.

One of the key issues raised with me as I travelled about Telford knocking on doors during the general election was the condition and continuing maintenance of communal areas in many blocks of accommodation. Such buildings were not owned exclusively by one landlord. They were not exclusively non-local authority or privately owned. There was a general malaise in the condition of property in the town—as there is throughout the country. The Bill provides us with a platform and an opportunity to start to make comprehensive investment in a partnership between landlords and local communities.

I hope that we shall see a greater commitment from residents to improving the general condition of their environment. That point has been drawn out in the debate so far.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) focused on the key question at the centre of the debate and the main priority to be considered in Committee: why should people be beholden to absentee private landlords who are often unwilling to invest in their asset at the expense of lessees? That is the main problem with the current structure and it should be addressed in the Bill. Too often, we hear horror stories about communities where people genuinely want their living space to be changed and improved, but the landlord lives many miles away and does not care.

A couple of years ago I visited Budapest in the post-communist era, where there was a terrible system. Local authorities and indeed the state seemed to have no capacity to deal with the problems encountered by people living in large blocks. I do not suggest that the situation in this country is similar, but that system threw into stark relief the problems of people suffering from underinvestment in large accommodation blocks.

In relation to commonhold, part 1 gives a new solution that aims to provide people with a greater stake in their homes, along with a positive approach to the management of common areas. It is important to note that commonhold does not reduce the scale of disrepair in properties. It does not deal with disrepair; it is not a short cut for lower maintenance bills.

In the United Kingdom, we already spend far too little on general day-to-day maintenance of accommodation. The Bill will in general make people feel that they have an opportunity to invest and a stake in their property. However, it will not mean that their repair bills are reduced or that general disrepair will be resolved. I am fearful that many people will try to take the opportunity of employing the commonhold solution as a means of reducing their repair bills. That could pose a serious problem in the long term when it comes to housing investment.

The Bill is a challenge to housing, legal and development sector professionals to ensure that fair practices are employed in the initial disposal and continuing management of property. Importantly, I hope that it will also begin to impact on the design and planning of housing development projects. It will be important for developers and their architects to engage with their project managers and legal teams at the stage when buildings are conceived and designed, not as an afterthought. A more comprehensive approach to the concept of sustainable development in every sense needs to be provoked when the Bill is implemented.

It is important to think through the implications of scheme designs, with greater care taken in relation to areas intended for collective use and enjoyment. We are trying to encourager higher density urban living in our large towns and cities, with a focus on quality design. The use of commonhold in such new developments will be important and should help us, through a genuine feeling of ownership, to avoid some of the problems of the past. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) that we should at least look at getting commonhold principles adopted for all new developments. That would be key in encouraging developers to move forward.

On the need to secure 100 per cent. consent for conversion to commonhold, some have argued that it will be virtually impossible to secure that scale of involvement. Clearly, that will depend on the number of units involved. However, I accept the Minister's point that we could end up with a twin-track problem in terms of people managing blocks. That needs to be considered in Committee.

I believe that commonhold will probably start to be deployed in new developments. However, I hope that we can return to this point. There seems to have been a

*[David Wright]*

consensus in the Chamber today about the need to consider the 100 per cent. barrier and think about mechanisms to provoke commonhold as a new form of tenure.

In conclusion, I wish to comment on the procedures to ensure that the costs of proposed works to blocks are laid out clearly and logically to leaseholders. The current exclusion of improvement costs from the service charge definition is confusing for leaseholders. The change proposed in the Bill which, as I understand it, will mean that such costs must be disclosed and people will have a right to challenge their reasonableness, will have a bigger impact than has been recognised during this debate. Once again, tenants and landlords must work in partnership to define what investment is needed in the fabric of buildings to ensure their longevity.

I welcome the Bill. I hope that it progresses rapidly through the House and that it is implemented as soon as possible.

9.13 pm

**Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): I am not a housing expert, and I represent a rural constituency where problems with leasehold are rare, as is demand for leasehold reform or commonhold. However, I have followed this issue in the past. I start by declaring an interest: I am a director and shareholder in a property company that owns mainly commercial but some residential property. However, none of it is let on a long lease.

Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have said how complicated, technical and detailed much of the Bill is. Why, then, is there a programme motion? There is so much agreement between the parties; everyone is agreed that we need to get on with considering the Bill and that it is vital to get the technical detail right. I should have thought that this was the last Bill to be timetabled. I shall certainly vote against the programme motion this evening because it is a disgrace to curtail debate on this important Bill.

Obviously, there have been several Bills on leasehold reform in the past, and I well remember the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, which was passed during the last Parliament of which I was a Member. At the time, I had serious reservations about the way in which the Act disrupted contracts that had been freely entered into. I was sympathetic to the argument that several large London estates were able to provide absolutely first-class planning and management policies that were beneficial to the wider environment and positive in terms of planning generally.

I entirely accept that, although the best landlords in London and other cities were excellent, the worst were quite appalling. That point has been made by several hon. Members, especially by Labour Members. In particular, in a very detailed and expert speech, the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) outlined many of his concerns about some of the antics and behaviour of the worst landlords in this country. However, the world has obviously moved on, and the large landlords in London have certainly adjusted their strategy to accommodate the current legislative framework.

I welcome the fact that the Government are moving forward cautiously on the leasehold reform front. Without doing anything too dramatic, they are building on the previous Government's reforms. I also welcome the fact that leasehold will not be abolished. Like the Lord Chancellor, I very much hope that leasehold will wither on the vine and that the vast majority of new developments will indeed use commonhold.

I welcome the commonhold provisions. To allow those who occupy property the right to own it absolutely and to manage the common parts through a common association must make sense. That reform is long overdue, and it obviously draws on patterns of land ownership in the United States, New Zealand and Australia. Perhaps one of the advantages of the lengthy delays in introducing the Bill is that we have been able to draw on the best of breed elsewhere.

I also welcome, with one reservation, the right to manage. It makes sense for tenants to be given the right to manage their buildings. They will not have to prove any shortcoming on the part of the landlord, and they will be given a chance perhaps to do a better job of managing their block or building. That is why the Opposition support the right-to-manage proposals, although some of the detail needs to be considered very closely.

I am sorry that the right-to-manage provisions exclude council premises, where the landlord is the local authority. Some 12 per cent. of right-to-buy sales have involved leasehold flats, and it is a great pity that public sector tenants should be excluded from the right-to-manage provisions. We need a new framework so that people can get on and manage the premises in which they live. That will always be a difficult job.

A great deal of research has shown that, very often, when people collectively buy the freehold of their flats and manage the building, many problems set in, a lot of disillusionment arises and many disputes take place. As one Lord said, we cannot legislate for people to love their neighbours, but we can legislate to make it easier for them to get on and co-operate. I very much hope that those provisions and especially the regulations and the manual of guidance will allow that to happen.

My final point is technical and relates to mixed developments. There is obviously a tendency for planning consent to be granted for new developments on condition that they include social housing. Great emphasis has rightly been placed on including affordable housing, housing association homes and council housing in housing developments. Planners often rightly insist on mixed tenure, which helps key workers in some cases. How much more preferable that is to the old-fashioned segregation of council housing from owner-occupied housing, which all too often led to the growth of large council estates, concrete jungles and the resulting social polarisation.

Mixed tenure presents a big challenge for the commonhold and right-to-manage legislation. Traditional tenants—they are not long leaseholders or commonholders—may live in blocks of flats or dense developments that are made up predominantly of owner-occupied housing and they will also have views on how the block or housing development should be managed. Those tenants will have priorities and ideas, but their views cannot be taken on board under the Bill as it currently stands. I hope that the Minister will consider that point and accept the crucial need to develop sustainable forms of governance. If we can develop them, commonhold and the right to manage will play an important part in the urban renewal in which the Government believe.

I believe strongly in urban regeneration and I do not want any more greenfield sites to be developed than is strictly necessary. I want much more development to take place on brownfield inner-city sites such as the Nar-Ouse regeneration area scheme—the NORA scheme—in my constituency and the Anglia Canners scheme in King's Lynn. However, we need a framework for regeneration and, if the Bill goes some way to creating it, it might do a good job and more development might take place on brownfield sites.

9.21 pm

**Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): Given the time available, I shall concentrate on one aspect of the Bill that has not been explored in the debate—its proposals on leasehold houses. There has been much discussion about commonhold and flats, but half the leasehold properties in this country are houses that are completely different from the flats on the market in London. Such houses are often in industrial areas where property values are very low.

Very few clauses in the Bill will change the legislation for houses, but I hope that we shall be able to consider those changes in more detail in Committee. However, I am pleased that the period for the residence test is being reduced from three to two years.

When a leaseholder passed away, the right of the family to purchase the freehold did not exist, so I welcome the changes that the Bill will make to allow families to enfranchise. In many cases in my constituency, families lost the home in which they grew up when the parent who was the leaseholder passed away.

The extension of the lease by 50 years is probably one of the most pertinent issues in the Grimsby and Cleethorpes area, where thousands of leasehold houses were built in the early 20th century. Given the nature of the area, many elderly people cannot afford to buy the freehold of their property. I have said to Ministers on previous occasions that many of the prices quoted are incorrect, but many people simply say, "I can't afford that." They therefore extend the lease not realising that they are like tenants and the house goes out of the family when the leaseholder passes away. I welcome the fact that people will be able to enfranchise when they extend the lease for 50 years.

I understand from my inquiries that the cost of enfranchising will be assessed on the special valuation basis and will include marriage value for lease extensions for houses. In effect, that may mean that the landlord will win yet again, so I would like that issue to be considered in detail. The original valuation basis could be used, but it might also be possible to have a lease extension of 99 years because that would take marriage value out of the equation.

I want briefly to mention the costs that are quoted in my area when people apply to buy the freehold of their houses. Such people have often paid their mortgages and everything else that the properties have required over the years. Leasehold houses are different from leasehold flats in that there is no obligation on the freeholder to do anything to such properties.

An average three-bedroom terrace house in north Cleethorpes can be bought for £20,000 to £25,000. I know that that is very different from the situation in the south-east. People in my area are being quoted prices for conversion that are almost the value of the property. I came across one case in which the leaseholders were quoted £20,000 to buy the freehold of a property worth £30,000.

I have been told that special valuation basis and marriage value should not apply to small Victorian terraced properties in my constituency. However, they are being quoted by freeholders time and again. The complexity of the mathematics, which other hon. Members touched on, in working out the prices means that leaseholders do not realise that they are being taken to the cleaners. As going to a leasehold valuation tribunal is daunting and expensive, no one in my area has been to one to establish a price. Unscrupulous landowners and landlords keep fleecing people. They simply open the cash tills, and that has to end.

We have to remember that leaseholders are home owners. That is how they perceive themselves. I hate using the word "tenant" for people who have paid a mortgage, funded all the home improvements and paid every bill over the years. In the recent census, such people put themselves down as home owners, not tenants. In any other legal form that they fill in, they are home owners. They have paid for everything and it is simply wrong that the law will still make them pay a bounty to remain living in their own homes. The freeholder has already benefited. I am afraid to say that the Bill will allow freeholders of leasehold houses to continue to benefit when all the money has been paid by the home owner, not the person who owns the freehold. That has to change. We have to stop people being fleeced. They have a right to live in a home for which they have paid.

9.27 pm

**Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): First, I want to take issue with the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), who popped into the Chamber, made a brief speech and then left. Unfortunately, he is not present now. He said that leasehold is a choice. I want him to consider the situation in my constituency, where it is difficult to find a freehold house to purchase. Large landowners such as Bridgewater Estates have rented, not sold, huge tracts of land. In most north-west towns such as Bolton and Bury, the choice is leasehold, leasehold, leasehold

Secondly, Estate Management Ltd., which my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) mentioned only briefly, has sent out thousands of letters in my constituency demanding ground rents of £1.50 and £2.50, but charging anything between £45 and £110 administration fees for doing so. I have even caught it sending them to the odd constituent who has no legal connection to it. Is it a statutory duty for the people who graze ground rents to write to every householder whose freeholds they are purchasing? If it is not, it ought to be and, if it is, leaseholders should know about it.

I turn now to the Compton Group, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) has already referred. As hon. Members have heard, that company has written letters to hundreds of people throughout Bolton, demanding that leaseholders take out insurance policies with AXA Insurance. That subject has been well covered, but I took the trouble to look at one of these ancient deeds. As my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) said earlier, many of them are

*[Dr. Brian Iddon]*

difficult to read, where indeed they exist at all, because they are handwritten. One set of deeds concerning which AXA, through the Compton Group, is demanding money says that buildings insurance should be

"in some insurance office to be reasonably approved by the company to the full value thereof."

I do not know a great deal about the law, but to me that means that one can use whichever insurance company one likes. People who have been insured with the same company for 25 or 40 years are being forced to choose another insurer. I ask the Minister to stop that practice.

Finally, I am against leasehold. Its time is up, and we should ban it.

9.31 pm

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): This has been a long, complex debate. We have heard 15 speakers, and I pay tribute to them all, but I am sure that you will understand, Mr. Speaker, if I am unable to deal with every speech in detail.

Before I go any further, I should declare my interests. I own one long leasehold flat in London. I have various freehold properties, to which I do not think the Bill will apply, and I am one of only four members of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in the House, who will undoubtedly have some work as a result of the Bill.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department gave the Bill a balanced, worthwhile introduction and, by contrast, it was interesting to hear some Labour Members talking about that old dinosaur the wicked landlord. Anybody who thought, like me, that old Labour was dead would have reassessed that view this evening.

There were some excellent speeches from hon. Members on the Opposition Benches, and I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor). He is a lawyer and I am a valuer, and I have full sympathy with his comments about the difficulties concerning valuations under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 and the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, which were complemented by the right to manage introduced in the Housing Act 1996. That point was emphasised by the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), who is not in her seat at the moment, although she opposed the idea of the marriage value, whereas my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull commended the Bill for introducing some simplicity to the marriage value provisions. I agree that for too long the marriage value has been a stumbling block to leasehold enfranchisement and the creation of commonholds.

We must not forget that 1 million flats and 1 million leasehold houses may be subject to the Bill's provisions, so some 4 million people may be affected by it. It is therefore an important Bill. It is also a complex one, with 174 clauses and 14 schedules. On the whole, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) said in his excellent, comprehensive speech, the Opposition welcome it, although there are a number of shortcomings that I should like to address in the very short time available.

**Roger Casale** (Wimbledon) *rose—*

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I shall give way only once because I do not have much time.

**Roger Casale:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the Bill and his understanding of the practical need for reform, but does he not understand that there are important democratic principles underlying the Bill, which will empower leaseholders and help to renew our communities and entrench the important principles of openness, transparency and accountability in a more modern society?

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I agree entirely. In welcoming the introduction of the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Stone made it clear that the system of leasehold was designed in another age and that things had moved on. We welcome the concept of commonhold and consider it especially appropriate for new developments. However, the Bill must address the important issue of developments that have not yet been built and so cannot be subject to its provisions. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that in relation to the increasing tendency to buy residential properties from plan, before they are built. It would be a pity if the Bill could not be made to apply to buildings that have not yet been built. I welcome the intervention from the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale). Over time, the Opposition expect leasehold to die out—although I expect that to take some time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone made some important points that were echoed by other speakers. I was especially impressed by the speech of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), who movingly described his experiences of trying to purchase a leasehold flat. We all hope that the Bill will make it easier for those who want to enfranchise their leasehold property to do so. Like many speakers, I suspect that the no-fault right to manage introduced under part 2 will prove to be a more popular course of action. Perhaps people will start with right to manage and then decide to enfranchise. We welcome that.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders), who I suspect is a professional accountant, criticised the right-to-manage provisions. He asked about how individual companies would be organised, the provisions of the Companies Acts, the treatment of defaulters, and mechanisms to deal with people involved in management companies who default. The latter is an important subject and was mentioned by several speakers. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the possibility of using existing provisions for debt collection through the county courts, which might be a good mechanism, although others are possible. I have no doubt that the matter will be debated in Committee.

The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) made an impassioned speech about rogue landlords and excessive insurance premiums. My hon. Friend the Member for North–East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) also mentioned rogue landlords, and several other speakers referred to forfeiture. Forfeiture is an extreme provision of the

current Landlord and Tenant Acts and is used sparingly. I accept that it is a blunt weapon, and I am sure that the Committee will discuss other ways of dealing with defaulting members of commonhold associations. As I said in an intervention, a defaulting member of a commonhold association places an additional burden on all the other members, so there must be a swift and sharp method of dealing with defaulters.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) also mentioned insurance and forfeiture. I want a provision to be inserted into the Bill that allows lessees to insure with an insurance company approved by the landlord, thus giving them control over insurance, and enabling the landlord to ensure that the property has been insured properly merely by inspecting the insurance policy. That strikes me as providing good protection for existing lessees. In no-fault right-to-management companies, the commonhold community statement will lay down the powers of insurance.

In my own block of flats, residents used the provisions of the Housing Act 1996 to take over the management in part because all the long leaseholders were vexed by issues of insurance and cost of management. Now, we are able to obtain far cheaper insurance; in addition, rebates that did not come back to us before are now coming back to the long leaseholders. No doubt, with the increasing use of the no-fault right-to-manage companies, people will get a better deal on the management of their property. I agree with the hon. Member for Telford (David Wright) that people might think that the Bill is an excuse to reduce property management costs. That may well happen; but the job of the commonhold association and any management consultants appointed to help them will be to point out realistic management charges.

My hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) rightly pointed out, in contrast to some of the old Labour dinosaurs who are not private rental landlords, the importance of getting institutional investment into the residential sector. Unless we get such investment, we will not meet the Government's target of an affordable and decent home for all by 2020, or anything like it. Labour Members need to consider that very carefully indeed when they knock the role of private landlords.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) emphasised the length of the Bill and the difficulty of converting, in the Government's wording, the 100 per cent. requirement to commonhold. Many Members spoke about that, especially my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire. Somebody with a relatively minor financial interest in a leasehold property—my hon. Friend mentioned cautioners; I mention people with a lien or mortgage on a property or someone with a minor interest—could block the whole commonhold application on a block of properties. Many Members mentioned that; I hope that in Committee the Parliamentary Secretary will consider it very carefully indeed. As the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors made clear, that is effectively a wrecking provision because in virtually every case it will be impossible to get 100 per cent. agreement. Both the Parliamentary Secretary and the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) will have heard the widespread concern of Government Back Benchers and Opposition Members about the provisions of the Bill as drafted.

It is curious that there is a 100 per cent. threshold for the requirement for commonhold agreement, yet there is only an 80 per cent. threshold when a commonhold community statement is to be terminated. Those two different thresholds make an interesting contrast in the Bill. A threshold nearer the termination provisions for CCS may be more correct, but no doubt we shall have some interesting debates, and probably votes, on the matter in Committee, on Third Reading and on Report. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary can be flexible, as that seems to be a major lacuna in the Bill.

We need to return to a number of more minor matters in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), who has great knowledge of the whole subject, made an excellent and rapid speech towards the end of our debate. Like me, he was involved in introducing the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. Sadly, he was not involved in introducing the Housing Act 1996, but we are delighted that he is back in the House today; long may he remain here. He, too, commented on the welcome introduction of commonhold and said that hopefully over a period it would become the more likely form of tenure for all non-freehold residential properties in this country.

There are one or two things that I should like to mention in summing up. It is particularly unfortunate that a Bill of this size and complexity, which has received a general welcome throughout the House, should be subject to the timetable set out in the Order Paper. For a Bill of 174 clauses to have a Committee timetable of just two weeks is inadequate; it does no service either to our constituents or to democracy. The Government should be ashamed of themselves, and I hope that on future occasions they will think about whether it is necessary to have a timetable of that sort. I have now been involved in two Bills on which there was no timetabling whatever, the last of which was the Homelessness Bill. The Under-Secretary, who is to make the winding-up speech tonight, led the Committee that considered that Bill. It was conducted perfectly satisfactorily, just as the Bill that is before us could be conducted satisfactorily. A number of weaknesses on which all-party agreement has been evident could easily have been sorted out in Committee.

This has been a comprehensive debate and this is a welcome Bill. Many people in this country will welcome what we are doing tonight. They will not welcome it, however, if the Bill that is put on to the statute book is wrong, inadequate, has shortcomings and imposes increased costs for leaseholders and commonholders because it has flaws. I hope that, in future, when we consider such Bills, we will not have a timetable such as that which is on the Order Paper today.

9.45 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble):** I am grateful to the many hon. Members who contributed to this detailed and interesting debate. Like many other hon. Members, I must first declare an interest, as my husband and I own a leasehold house in London.

We have heard a good deal about the difficulties of long leasehold tenure and the imperfections of the remedies that are available under the law as it stands. The debate has been well informed and technical. I accept that

*[Ms Sally Keeble]*

the Bill is a complicated and technical measure, but its underlying objective is very simple: to give people more security in their own homes. It will achieve that in two ways. First, it introduces a new form of tenure—commonhold—which will eliminate the problems inherent in the leasehold system. Secondly, it will bring the leasehold system into the 21st century by giving more rights and choices to leaseholders, so that they can enjoy the same degree of security and control over their homes as other home owners.

I shall turn shortly to some of the specific points that have been made. I am sorry that there will not be time to deal with them all or indeed to deal with them as fully as I would have liked. However, I am sure that we will return to many of them in Committee. I shall also be happy to deal with some issues in correspondence if hon. Members wish me to. Underneath criticisms of the detail of the Bill, I believe that there is general sympathy in all parts of the House for what we are seeking to achieve. Indeed, the principles have been welcomed on both sides of the House.

First, there has been great support for the principle of leasehold reform, although I recognise that many would argue that we should have gone further. Secondly, there seems to be general agreement that it is high time to introduce a new tenure that is purpose-built to the requirements of multi-unit development, taking into account the experience of the many other countries that have already introduced their own particular variations on the commonhold theme.

Let me deal with some of the issues that were raised. The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) recognised the benefits that the Bill will bring to people from all walks of society, as he put it. He is absolutely right about that. In particular, the Bill will protect some of the most vulnerable householders. Similar points were made by many of my hon. Friends. The hon. Gentleman also spoke about the rocky path that it has been necessary to take to get the legislation even to this point. Given the history that he set out, I urge the House to get a move on and to accept that the issues have been repeatedly aired and discussed. The programme motion is wholly appropriate. I should point out that it provides not two, but three weeks.

The hon. Gentleman raised many technical issues that will also be discussed in Committee, including the requirement for 100 per cent. support for conversion. The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), repeated the commitment given by the Lord Chancellor to listen and consider any well-judged amendment on the 100 per cent. rule. As he said, however, any such amendment must tackle the problems that he mentioned, including that of running two systems in one development.

The hon. Member for Stone also raised issues about remedies for non-payment. Such issues were mentioned by other hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) and for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald). The hon. Member for Stone argued that the remedies available under commonhold in respect of service charges, for example, are not adequate. Like several other hon. Members, he argued in favour of some variety of charge over the commonhold unit. That would be a complicating and limiting factor. It would also run the risk of bringing in forfeiture by the back door—something that many hon. Members on both sides of the House have opposed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) set out some of the practical problems of leasehold owners and opposed the 100 per cent. rule for conversion to commonhold, as did my hon. Friends the Members for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) and for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas). I am sure that that issue will be revisited at a later stage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley also mentioned valuation and marriage values, as did many hon. Members on both sides of the House. The Government have carefully considered the forceful representations of leaseholders on marriage value. However, we remain of the view that in a compulsory purchase situation, landlords should receive compensation for the loss of their interest similar to what they would have received in a sale between willing parties. The Bill reflects that principle and, in our view, strikes a correct balance between the competing interests of landlords and leaseholders.

We have taken action to remove scope for unnecessary and costly arguments over the determination of marriage value. At present, landlords are guaranteed a minimum 50 per cent. share, but they can and do argue for more. The Bill will provide that that is shared equally in all cases. It also provides that no marriage value will be payable when the unexpired term of the lease exceeds 80 years. It has been argued that the cut-off point is too high. People will always argue about where the point should be applied and those who fall just outside it will feel aggrieved. Some people have argued that it should be 90 or 100 years. We have chosen 80 as a point above which some experienced valuers have told us that any marriage value is likely to be marginal.

The hon. Member for Torbay committed the Liberal Democrat party to support for the introduction of commonhold and reform of leasehold, which we certainly welcome. He asked about voting methods. The details of the commonhold association will be in the regulations. As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary said, they will be put in the Library before the commencement of the Standing Committee.

The hon. Member for Torbay also mentioned limited liability partnership and asked why we were opting for a commonhold association that would be a company limited by guarantee. As such a company, a commonhold association will be firmly rooted in company law, with adjustments to take account of the objects of the association. Both limited liability partnership companies and commonhold associations have the same origins—they are in the same family tree, but occupy different branches. If a limited liability structure were used, it would steer the provision back towards aspects of the Companies Act 1985 that are vital to commonhold. That is not the only problem that we perceive if commonhold associations are set up as limited liability partnerships. There are many others and I am sure that that matter will be raised in Committee.

**Mr. Bellingham:** Will the Minister give way?

**Ms Keeble:** No, I will not. I will deal with as many of the points made as I can in the limited time available.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) pointed out the different positions of leaseholders in the north and in London. One matter that he highlighted was insurance—

**Mr. Bellingham:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Keeble:** No. The hon. Gentleman made a point in his speech, which I will deal with later.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) also dealt with insurance and spelled out clearly the nature of some of the scams. We are well aware of concerns about anti-competitive practice. He is one hon. Member who has been vociferous in pressing that point. I can assure him and other hon. Members that we will carefully consider the strong representations that have been made on the issue to find out what more we can do to help leaseholders, although it is not possible to give a definite commitment on that this evening.

**Mr. Bellingham** *rose—*

**Ms Keeble:** I made it clear that time is limited. I will deal with as many of the arguments as possible, including those of the hon. Gentleman.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East also mentioned forfeiture, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North, who has been a leading opponent of what he terms the "ground rent grazers" for a number of years. I appreciate that many leaseholders consider forfeiture a draconian measure, but the law on this issue is complex and we have not been able to provide for more comprehensive reform in this Bill. The Law Commission is continuing to work on broader reforms in this area.

The hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) raised the possibility of a formula for the cost of enfranchisement. We commissioned research to find out whether there was a fair way of dealing with some of the key factors involved but, sadly, it did not prove fruitful. The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire welcomed the Bill and made the point that the right to manage should apply to local authority leaseholders. A broad range of options is already open to all local authority tenants, and we do not believe that it would be right to overlap those with a further right that could be exercised only by local authority leaseholders. That would lead to competition, and probably conflict, between different groups of tenants and between the existing broader rights and the narrow one proposed by him. Such competition or conflict would not be to anyone's advantage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate gave welcome support to the Bill. She also raised issues about meetings, and those will be dealt with in the regulations. She said that she still felt that she would be buying a pig in a poke. In fact, she would be buying the individual ownership of the freehold of her unit, and the corporate management of the commonhold part.

The hon. Members for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), for Poole (Mr. Syms), for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) and for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) all welcomed the Bill, but with reservations. The hon. Members for Poole, for Leominster and for North-West Norfolk also said that we were rushing the Bill, although the evidence from the speeches all around the House is that the changes are long overdue and that people want to see them on the statute book.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) raised issues about security of tenure for high-rental properties, but we cannot deal with them within in the scope of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North made an impassioned speech that has been recognised on both sides of the House as important. He dealt in particular with a requirement for developers to offer management responsibility or a share of the freehold from the outset. Many already do so.

The hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) raised a number of technical issues based on his constituents' experiences, including that of positive covenants. That is another issue that the Law Commission is reviewing. My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) has been consistent in arguing the case of his constituents on a number of issues, and mentioned the need for sunset clauses. We would be prepared to consider that in more detail in Committee if a workable amendment were tabled.

The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) made a welcome contribution, as did my hon. Friends the Members for Clwyd, West, for Telford (David Wright) and for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac). My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes raised a number of important issues about leasehold houses, and I can assure her that the provision of clear public information, especially to protect very vulnerable leaseholders, is very much one of our priorities.

The Bill is the careful culmination of years of effort and consultation. It will build on the best of the overseas experience of producing commonhold, and make some important amendments to the law on leasehold. Those include introducing the right to manage, opening up the right to collective enfranchisement, improving the right to a new lease, strengthening the protection for leaseholders, introducing more effective arrangements for consulting leaseholders and many other measures that will benefit millions of people up and down the country. Those changes will bring our system of land tenure into the 21st century and ensure that all home owners of houses or flats have the same security. I commend the proposals to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

## COMMONHOLD AND LEASEHOLD REFORM BILL (PROGRAMME)

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],*

That the following provisions shall apply to the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]:*

*Committal*

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

*Programming of proceedings*

(2) All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) shall be programmed.

*Proceedings in Standing Committee*

(3) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 31st January 2002.

(4) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

*Consideration and Third Reading*

(5) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock on that day.

(6) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(7) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

*The House proceeded to a Division.*

**Mr. Speaker:** I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.

*The House having divided:* Ayes 324, Noes 172.

**Division No. 123]** **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter

Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Angela Smith and Dan Norris.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and Dr. Julian Lewis.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

## COMMONHOLD AND LEASEHOLD REFORM BILL [LORDS] [MONEY]

*Queen's Recommendation having been signified—*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),*

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) financial assistance given by the Lord Chancellor in relation to the provision of advice, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which under any other Act are payable out of money provided by Parliament, and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## DEREGULATION AND REGULATORY REFORM

*Ordered,*

That Dr. Ashok Kumar be discharged from the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee and Mr. Mark Lazarowicz be added.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Ordered,*

That the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) (Amendment) Order 2001, (S.I., 2001, No. 3561), dated 4th November 2001, which was laid before this House on 5th November, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

## PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

*Ordered,*

That, Standing Order No. 147 (Procedure Committee) be amended as follows:

Line 10, at end insert,

'and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available, or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference.'.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

## HUMAN RIGHTS (JOINT COMMITTEE) (POWERS TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE UNITED KINGDOM)

*Ordered,*

That Standing Order No. 152B (Human rights (joint committee)) be amended as follows:

Line 47, leave out from second 'place' to 'and' in line 50.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

# Postal Services

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

10.20 pm

**Mr. Colin Challen** (Morley and Rothwell): I begin by thanking you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to raise the important issue of competition in postal services. This is the first Adjournment debate of 2002 in this Chamber, and it could not be more opportune.

We have just come through a record-breaking Christmas period, in which the Royal Mail delivered 50 million more items than in the same period of the previous year. That took the total number of cards and letters delivered to well over 2 billion. The tens of thousands of post men and women achieved that in all weathers, generally without any significant hitches and generally on time. They should be congratulated.

However, it is also important to raise this matter in the House now because alarming reports—subsequently denied—have emerged in recent weeks that tens of thousands of post men and women were to be sacked. There has also been the ongoing Postcomm consultation on competition in postal services, the responses to which were published on 28 November. Notwithstanding that consultation, I note the concern of the Communications Workers Union that Postcomm had pre-empted the conclusions by beginning the process of issuing licences to competitors. Some consultation that is turning out to be.

Since the general election, there have also been two early-day motions—one in my name—supporting a universal postal service. They have attracted widespread support. Last but not least, there are continuing and disturbing reports that, although Consignia's postal business has been granted a 15-year licence, it is being considered by some as ripe territory for that worst of all privatisations—dismemberment by outsourcing.

Before I look at some of those issues, I want to acknowledge the support that the Government have given to the Post Office. Although I shall be talking primarily about postal services, I confess that I shall use the shorthand term "Post Office" instead of Royal Mail, Parcelforce or Consignia, as that is how my constituents recognise and refer to the business. Perhaps I and they are being old fashioned but, if so, I offer no apology. Some of the standards that we expect from the Post Office are decidedly old fashioned—if that means quality as opposed to mission statements, mail delivered on time as opposed to value-added services, or a universal postal service as opposed to a system based on "you pays your money and takes your choice".

For the first time, the Government have enshrined in law the principle that there should be something called the universal postal service. I admit that the proposal is not that the universal postal service should be publicly owned, nor that it should necessarily be delivered by one business.

I share the concerns of Age Concern, which have also been expressed by Postwatch. Age Concern sought clarification of what Postcomm meant when it used the term "universal postal service" in its consultation document. The minimum definition provided by the Postal Services Act 2000 seems clear enough, but the fear is evident that the universal service could merely become

what some people might call the "bog standard" service and that it could be, as Postcomm suggests, in need of subsidy. A minimum level of service is just that—a minimum—like a speed limit, it is not necessarily a target to be worked towards.

Thankfully, the Government have kept faith with the British people by rejecting the Tories' proposal for outright privatisation of the Post Office. It comes as no surprise that the Conservatives want to sell off a service that has been part of the fabric of our country for more than 350 years, and it will come as no surprise when they return with the same policy in a couple of years' time, as they no doubt will. I understand that the Centre for Policy Studies is working on it already.

The Government can be congratulated too on maintaining the current licensed area—that is, the limits on competition for items under £1 in value, or under 350 g in weight. They are also to be congratulated on lifting some of the borrowing constraints on the Post Office and on lifting the external finance limit, which had effectively prevented the Post Office from investing in new machinery, buildings and information technology.

Giving the Post Office more financial freedom was the biggest step forward in allowing it further to develop and enhance its services. For too long, it had been a milch cow for the Treasury, delivering billions in revenue. Since the 1970s, we had been beholden to the idea that somehow the Post Office had to pay back earlier subsidies from the taxpayer from the time when it was, in effect, a Department and run like one.

Everyone is content that Post Office has moved on from that mindset, but the question we face at present is whether we must say goodbye to the public service ethos altogether, or say hello to the service industry ethos that is, in my experience, something very different. The Post Office's competitors certainly want what they describe as a level playing field across Europe, allowing only minimum state intervention but maximum competition. That is the view of the CBI, trade bodies and others. For them, the liberalisation of trading services is a holy grail. Perhaps the only thing preventing the progress of so-called competition in postal services is that those bodies have not yet quite figured out how to dismantle the necessarily large national postal services into pieces small enough for them to digest. They also know that throughout Europe politicians—let me rephrase that: European citizens—do not want myriad services at different prices, from different outlets and with different delivery mechanisms to complicate their lives further. If they wanted such services, why have postal volumes stagnated in Sweden, where there is a fully liberalised market?

The universal postal service is as natural a monopoly as they come. That should not be seen as a failing but as a strength—suitably regulated, of course. What do we face at present? Partly in response to single-market pressures—which I acknowledge are genuine, as cross-border trade and postal volumes are increasing—and partly, no doubt, due to behind the scenes lobbying in Brussels by such bodies as the LOTIS—liberalisation of trade in services—Committee, predatory campaigns are being mounted to top slice some types of postal business and give them up to so-called competition.

My use of the phrase "so-called competition" is a reference to the type of revenue-generating business that can be handled without large overheads: urban, big-city business mail as opposed to rural, domestic mail. The arguments are well known and I do not want to go over them again; nor, it seems, does Postcomm, which clearly feels compelled to give licences to so-called competitive services, thereby denying yet more of that profitable work to the Post Office.

There is a big question that must be answered urgently: how far down that road do the Government think it possible to travel before we end up with a basket case postal service for everybody else? The loss of such revenue to the Post Office will have a disproportionately large impact on its profits.

We seem to have decided that we want a Post Office, but I am not sure that current trends would permit it to be a profitable one—unless, of course, we take the route of back-door privatisation, which is sometimes known by the euphemism "outsourcing". For example, given a full head of steam and, presumably, without any need for intervention from the Post Office's single shareholder, the management of the Post Office could choose to outsource the fleet management of their 30,000 Royal Mail vehicles and their 10,000 Parcelforce vehicles.

I am sure that it would look good on paper to create a stand-alone fleet management business, with staff sent across to the new business clutching their TUPE fig leaves. Eventually, of course, such a business would start employing new staff at lower rates of pay, with worse terms and conditions and worse outcomes. For example, that is what happened under many hospital cleaning contracts.

I have no doubt that, eventually, it would be necessary to wait longer and longer for work to be done, because the whole business philosophy of just-in-time delivery—the effort to reduce overheads—would inevitably take its toll.

Fleet management is one sector that appears to be in contention for outsourcing. Sortation might be more contentious. The manufacturer of sortation equipment might be asked to lease the equipment to the Post Office on the basis of a private finance initiative, complete with staff to run the whole process in an area. The staff, naturally, would not be Post Office employees. They would not necessarily be on the same terms or conditions or even working exclusively on the Post Office contract. That would certainly reduce the Post Office's overheads, and what a marvellous entrée it would make for competitors which might contract to use the same equipment for their own services. Is there any way of preventing that from happening, except by saying that what we mean by a universal postal service includes the word monopoly?

What I have described is not such a far-fetched proposition. Already the name of Siemens, which manufactures such equipment, has been linked with something like this scenario, except I have read that postal delivery staff may be asked to wear Siemens logos as part of a sponsorship deal.

What else could be outsourced? Everything, in reality. We could have partnership deals, sponsorship deals, holding companies—indeed, that is all that Consignia actually is. A few years down the road—15, perhaps—we would have a Post Office that was unrecognisable and could easily be 50 or 75 per cent. privatised in effect. The staff would notice the change, of course. They—those that remain after natural wastage—will not have very

*[Mr. Colin Challen]*

encouraging prospects. Let me quote from a report called "The Impact of Competition in the Postal Sector" by the Association of International Couriers and Express Services. In consultant-style speak, it addresses the impact of market features which need to be considered:

"Hiring qualified delivery staff and establishing a network which provides a suitable service quality can be a very time consuming exercise. Furthermore, without substantial volumes the ability to recruit full time employees is often too risky for a market entrant. Flexible working conditions are, therefore, an important factor in affecting market entry."

That is the problem in a nutshell. However, I would say to the author of that piece that it does not apply simply to new entrants. Look at the way in which Post Office staff are increasingly employed. Flexible working is the order of the day and I suppose we must call a spade a spade. "Flexible" generally refers to part-time work and the very nature of such work means more casualisation and the necessity for working men and women to take on other part-time jobs to secure a reasonable standard of living, not to mention having to rely on the working families tax credit to top up their earnings.

None of that features in my vision of what a modern Post Office should look like. I realise that we may no longer be employing postmen and women who had to sign the Official Secrets Acts before they could start work or had to sign for their brass security badges, along with their uniforms. Those requirements were designed to reassure the public about the security of their mail. The idea was, I believe, that they were people who could be trusted and respected. They were not transient employees, demotivated and anonymous.

In my vision of what we should be seeking, the notion of the public service ethos still looms large. Why, when we talk about community safety, do we never assume a role for the largest uniformed service in the country, whose members walk every street in every town and every village and pass every letter box of every house every morning six days a week? Has the public service ethos of the Post Office become so invisible in this competitive age that we cannot harness sufficient imagination to see what a gem we possess?

In all my reading in preparation for this debate, I have seen no lateral thinking about how we can develop our publicly owned universal postal service. If we do not, I fear that we could witness a disaster of Railtrack proportions—a disaster for which we never intended to legislate.

10.33 pm

**The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander):** I begin by paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen) for securing this debate. I know of his interest and long-standing commitment to our postal services. He has raised a number of important issues, and I shall endeavour to address each of them. Let me begin my response by setting the debate in context and explaining the Government's approach to this important issue.

When the Government took office in 1997, one of our first priorities was to address the failure of the previous Administration to give the Post Office the greater commercial freedom called for by Post Office management and unions and deemed vital if it was to invest in new services and address the needs of its customers. In January 2000, the Postal Services Bill was introduced. Derek Hodgson, then general secretary of the Communication Workers Union, said of the Bill:

"It secures the union's major objective of securing a long-term future in the public sector for the post office, and offers the business commercial freedom we believe it needs."

In March 2001, Consignia therefore became a plc, with a newly redefined relationship with Government as the sole shareholder, no longer operating as a statutory monopoly, but in a regulated postal market. Other elements of the freedom include the right to retain a greater share of the profits to reinvest in its core business and the ability to borrow to finance strategic investments.

In addition, regulatory reforms introduced under the Postal Services Act 2000 were specifically designed to promote the interests of consumers in a framework that will ensure that the universal service, of which my hon. Friend spoke at such length, is safeguarded. In recognition of its social and economic importance, the Government have for the first time, as my hon. Friend kindly acknowledged, enshrined the universal service obligation in primary legislation.

The Postal Services Act states that the universal service consists of a postal service provided at an affordable price, determined by a public tariff, which is uniform throughout the United Kingdom and includes daily delivery to the home or premises of every individual in the United Kingdom and daily collection from access points. The Act established an independent regulator, known as Postcomm, to oversee the postal market and a consumer council, known as Postwatch, to protect the interests of consumers.

Postcomm is an independent body responsible for regulating the United Kingdom postal market. It operates through a licensing regime for the area of the market broadly equivalent to the Post Office's former statutory monopoly. Within those limits, some exceptions—for example, document exchange services—are excluded from the licensing regime. Above the limits, there is a deregulated market fully open to competition.

I emphasise that Postcomm's primary duty is to ensure the provision of the universal service. It is the regulator's responsibility to determine how the universal service obligation is implemented in the interests of consumers. It is also responsible for promoting the interests of consumers, where appropriate, through the introduction of more competition.

Postcomm has met its duty to ensure that a universal service is provided throughout the United Kingdom by issuing its first licence to Consignia. Under the terms of that licence, Consignia has to provide a range of services in the context of a general obligation to provide a universal postal service at an affordable uniform tariff.

Postcomm has indeed initiated early consideration of the controls that should apply to Consignia's prices from April 2003. In November last year, it issued a public consultation document to invite initial reaction to the appropriate objectives and approach that Postcomm ought to have in mind when formulating revised price control arrangements. The document outlines a number of options relating to the structure, form and duration of the revised price control, while highlighting the importance of

safeguarding the quality of service. Postcomm aims to publish initial proposals for Consignia's revised price control in the summer this year.

Subject to Postcomm's primary duty to ensure the provision of the universal service, it is also under a duty to further the interests of users of postal services, wherever appropriate, by promoting effective competition between postal operators. Postcomm can therefore consider applications for other licences, provided that it is satisfied that the universal service can be maintained.

While considering how more competition might be introduced to the market, Postcomm initially published a statement of its interim licensing policy in April 2001. In its document, "Interim Approach to Licensing", Postcomm outlined that the licence applications most likely to succeed in the interim period, until it has formalised its long-term approach to the introduction of competition, are those to certain niche services, provided that they do not affect the maintenance of the universal postal service. When issuing new licences, Postcomm must be satisfied that the universal service can be maintained.

Six very specific interim licences have been issued while Postcomm consults on the framework for a longer-term policy on the introduction of competition. Postcomm has also undertaken a wide-ranging consultation on competition based on the consultation document it issued in June last year. It is expected to produce its proposals early in 2002. Those proposals should be viewed in the context of a likely European agreement progressively to reduce the price-weight limits to reservation. In developing its longer-term policy on competition, Postcomm will consider whether there is scope for the United Kingdom to open up the market further.

The proposals will be subject to a further period of consultation, with the aim of finalising a longer-term competition and licensing policy by April 2002.

As my hon. Friend said, however, competition cannot just be seen in a United Kingdom context. In 1997, in response to the developments in the wider European postal market, the European Union established a framework for the regulation of postal services that allowed certain letter services to be reserved to universal service providers, but only to the extent necessary to ensure the provision of the universal service. The EU agreed on maximum limits for the services that could be reserved, but made explicit provision for those limits to be reduced and for competition to increase.

In considering the scope and timing of further reductions, the Council has reached political agreement on a framework systematically to lower the price and weight levels. This is now being considered by the European Parliament. The framework envisages a reduction in services that may be reserved from 350g to 100g in 2003 and to 50g in 2006. Following a review in 2006 that will focus on the impact of further reductions on the universal service, the European Commission may then propose either to phase out reservation in 2009 or to take other appropriate steps. This final stage will be subject to co-decision between the European Parliament and the European Council.

As a Government, we support the European Council agreement to establish a timetable for progressive liberalisation in Europe that is consistent with maintaining the universal service. We believe that it is important to move quickly to reach agreement to provide market certainty and to allow companies to prepare and to adjust to market changes. In the absence of any agreement, the current EU postal directive will lapse in 2004 with resulting market uncertainties.

It is important that, as the UK market becomes more open to competition, the wider European market also opens up. That will provide opportunities for British companies, including Consignia. The larger European post offices, such as Deutsche Post and La Poste, are active competitors in this market. Postal services are not only a domestic interest particularly for business. Indeed, the international mail market is one of the fastest growing parts of the sector.

I shall now try to place those policy developments in context. The postal market is, in general, becoming more and more diverse. "Post" does not just mean the personal letters, greetings cards or postcards that we all send and receive as individuals. In addition to the letters market, there are thriving markets for packets and parcels and for express services and for logistics. If the market is diverse, so are postal users. Businesses—large and small—are the main generators of mail, but many of their customers are individual consumers who not only receive but generate mail in response.

Customers are becoming more discerning and demanding about the services that they want and most particularly about business mail services. Therefore, there is increasing demand for more targeted, faster, more reliable and better quality services and for new postal services such as through the development of hybrid mail services using other communication technologies, time delivery services and track and trace so that it is possible to know where an item is at any stage of the delivery process. There is also demand for other products that facilitate business contact with customers.

Customers increasingly have a choice. Companies make greater use of electronic services, but individuals have access to a wider range of options, whether it is to send their greetings cards electronically or to pay their bills online. Sending things by post is no longer the only option for both individuals and business consumers and postal services have to compete for their place in the market.

As well as competition from new communication services and new technologies, outside the regulated letter market in the United Kingdom there is a thriving competitive market of 4,000 companies that operate in the wider distribution market. They offer a range of courier, express and logistics services and they range from the large international carriers to small local dispatch companies. They all compete to offer the services that customers want. Many of the larger competing companies are owned by or are in partnership with Post Office companies.

As customers have more choice—whether from direct competition from other service providers or from alternative means of communication—Consignia must make rapid progress to improve its performance and to give customers what they want, namely a better range of high-quality, reliable and well-priced services. Current poor performance is the result of its failure to resolve these problems in previous years when, as my hon. Friend acknowledged, the future of the Post Office was placed

*[Mr. Douglas Alexander]*

in limbo following the Conservative's failed proposals. However, as a result of recent reforms, Consignia now has the greater commercial freedom sought by management and, indeed, by unions to respond to a more competitive environment.

As shareholder, the Government are obviously disappointed by Consignia's present financial performance. It is clear that the company urgently needs to improve its performance and we are taking steps actively to strengthen its management.

Early last year, a new finance director, Marisa Cassoni, joined the board. That was followed by the appointment of Allan Leighton to the non-executive team to take a special interest in the post office network. A new chief executive of Post Office Counters Ltd. is being recruited and arrangements are in hand to appoint a new chairman of the company.

Consignia clearly needs to stem its losses and improve its performance. Its proposals on cost cutting are still at an initial stage. It will be vital, therefore, that as they are developed management works effectively with the work force to achieve the necessary changes. The Government were encouraged to see that Consignia and the Communication Workers Union have reached agreement on the basis for developing a framework for handling job reductions in the company. Although industrial relations and the resolution of disputes are, of course, a matter for the management of the company and the unions, the Government have consistently encouraged both sides to work in partnership.

Since the publication of the Sawyer report in July last year, which highlighted the real problems on both sides within Royal Mail's service delivery operation and made recommendations to try to resolve them, progress in developing a partnership approach to industrial relations within the company has been encouraging and should be used as the foundation of a long-term solution to the difficulties that have dogged it for so many years. A more efficient company, providing high-quality competitive services, is in the strong interests of consumers and the taxpayer. The postal market will not stand still and it is necessary to have a framework to allow consumers the benefits of competition while ensuring that the universal service is maintained at an affordable uniform tariff.

It is for the consumer that services are provided and it is the consumer who will look elsewhere if those services do not provide the quality and reliability required. We want consumers to benefit from the choice afforded by competition, but they will also benefit from a strong postal service as represented by a competitive and efficient Consignia that is able to provide not only the traditional universal postal service that we all value, but a wide range of competitive products and services.

The reforms that the Government have put in place include in particular the introduction of a new regulatory framework to provide the benefits of competition, with the universal service at its core, the establishment of an independent regulator and a new council for consumers, and the provision of a new framework of support for the post office network. We have also given Consignia the commercial freedom that it wants and needs to develop the company. All those initiatives together provide the necessary framework for a customer-focused approach and ensure that there is a strong postal services market for the benefit of all.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Wednesday 9 January 2002*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

*The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State was asked—*

### Public Appointments (Women)

1. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): What progress has been made in increasing the number of women in public appointments. [23441]

**The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche):** The Government are committed to increasing diversity in public appointments. We are determined that women should hold half of all public appointments. I shall host a series of seminars across the country to encourage more women to apply for such appointments. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will attend the seminar in Tyneside.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** I thank the Minister for that reply, but does she share my disappointment that Dame Rennie Fritchie's last report showed that we had moved backwards in the participation of women in public appointments? Will the Minister ask Departments to undertake equality audits of the criteria that they use for making public appointments so that we can ensure that women's experience of using public services and of voluntary participation are properly counted when public appointments are being made?

**Mrs. Roche:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Some Departments—for example, the Department of Health—have recently done well with regard to appointments. When we consider public appointments, of course we need to look at experience across the whole range. That is why voluntary work is so important—as is the presence of so many women as school governors.

The forms will be revised. The new format asks for examples of relevant skills gained within any field, such as voluntary work. Furthermore, the form will no longer feature an honours section—an aspect that may have deterred some people from applying.

**Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Given the need to encourage women to apply for public appointments, might not women be influenced by the fate of women who hold such appointments, such as Elizabeth France, the information commissioner, who has indicated that she is not seeking reappointment, as her four-year term of office would not have enabled her at any stage to use the freedom of information powers due to the Government's delay? Do not the Government need to be seen to support those women who take on public appointments?

**Mrs. Roche:** It is a great pity that the right hon. Gentleman has gone down that track. As he knows, Elizabeth France leaves her position with a great deal of good will for her tremendous work, and the Government—and everybody—have the highest regard for her. It is well recognised that after two terms the usual practice is to hold an open competition. That is what is taking place in this case.

**Ms Joan Walley** (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I say how much I welcome all the work that the Government are doing to encourage more women into public life? I welcome the series of seminars. When my hon. Friend organises where they are to be held, will she look closely at holding one in north Staffordshire, in order that we can encourage more women—especially young women—to take up public office?

**Mrs. Roche:** It is not possible to cover everywhere, but of course we shall consider where we are holding the seminars, and we shall also try to ensure that the participants invited to them come from the widest possible area.

**Angela Watkinson** (Upminster): Is the hon. Lady aware that women applying for public appointments in health authorities have to declare their political affiliation? Does she agree that Conservative women are thus at a double disadvantage?

**Mrs. Roche:** I reject that completely. The hon. Lady should look at the record of the previous Conservative Government, whom she supported.

**Mr. Piara S. Khabra** (Ealing, Southall): What is the overall position of ethnic minority women as regards public appointments?

**Mrs. Roche:** We want to look at that aspect. We shall try to publish some targets in the near future.

### British-Irish Council

2. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): If he will make a statement on his role in relation to the British-Irish Council. [23443]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott):** I carry ministerial responsibility for the British-Irish Council and deputise for the Prime Minister at summit meetings when he is not able to attend.

**Mr. Amess:** Why, before the Belfast agreement had been implemented, did the Government start making concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA—concessions that were not required and have not been reciprocated—in terms of

special arrangements for their Members of Parliament to have offices in the House and an amnesty for on-the-run terrorists?

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** Those matters have been addressed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the House has been informed of the Government's position. It did not affect the decisions at the summit meetings.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): The British-Irish Council is an executive body, but there is a de facto shadow parliamentary body: the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. Unfortunately, Ulster Unionists will not attend its meetings because they see it as having come out of the Anglo-Irish agreement. Would not it be a good idea to move towards establishing it as a parliamentary wing of the British-Irish Council under the provisions of the Belfast agreement? Ulster Unionists could then join without a problem.

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** My hon. Friend has expressed that view on a number of occasions. I personally take the view that the British-Irish Council is the best way to deal with those difficulties in Northern Ireland. That is the Government's position, and it is what we intend to do.

**Mr. Tim Collins** (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for what he has said on this important topic. May I remind him that, as the Prime Minister and many other Ministers on all sides have rightly said, the Belfast agreement must be seen to be operating in all its particulars simultaneously? He will know that it was envisaged that the Council of the Isles would meet twice a year at summit level, but it has not yet been possible for it to do so. Is his aim and hope that it will meet twice at summit level this year?

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very fair point. It was the intention, as originally set out in the agreement, to meet twice a year. There have been certain difficulties: one of the meetings was cancelled because it would have taken place on the day of the sad death of the First Minister in Scotland. Of course, the difficulties of the discussions in Northern Ireland also meant that we could not hold the council meeting. It is our intention to hold meetings twice a year; the next meeting will be held in Jersey.

## Social Exclusion

3. **Roger Casale** (Wimbledon): What steps he is taking to promote better co-ordination between Government Departments in relation to combating social exclusion. [23444]

**The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche):** The social exclusion unit works with all other relevant Departments in developing policy to combat social exclusion. Part of the unit's implementation strategy includes establishing units in other Departments that can co-ordinate activity across Whitehall.

**Roger Casale:** I thank the Minister for that reply. Does she agree with Churches Together in Wimbledon and many other voluntary and charitable organisations in my constituency that we should continue to strengthen the role of the Government in tackling the plight of homelessness and rough sleepers in major cities, such as London, and that a joined-up approach to government, involving many Departments working together, may be essential to achieve lasting success in relation to those issues?

**Mrs. Roche:** Yes. I congratulate the rough sleepers unit, led by Louise Casey, on its remarkable achievement—a 62 per cent. reduction in numbers. By March 2002, the unit will have provided more than 1,000 additional places in hostels. The joined-up approach has been achieved because different Departments—for example, the Ministry of Defence, which has done some very good work in this area—are working with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health to ensure that people engage in prevention work as well.

**Virginia Bottomley** (South-West Surrey): Does the Minister agree that one of the factors that leads to social exclusion is inadequate mental health services for children and young people? Will she personally examine the system of funding young people's mental health services? Does she believe that there should be education, social services and health care, or it is that, at the lower end, the burden is placed on the Home Office because the young people become subject to prison sentences? In particular, will she reply to me about the funding of Young Minds—an excellent organisation that is unable to get funding from any of those different joined-up Departments?

**Mrs. Roche:** The right hon. Lady makes a very serious point about the fact that this issue involves not just one Department; it goes across several Departments, which is why she may well be interested in several of the social exclusion unit's current projects, which range from the educational achievement of young people in care to ex-offenders. I undertake to write to her about the details of the funding issue that she raises, but a number of Departments have worked together to address the subject of young people, especially children at risk.

**Mr. Roy Beggs** (East Antrim): What methodology is used to target social need and overcome social exclusion? Do the Government plan to revise the means by which social need is targeted?

**Mrs. Roche:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important subject. There are many reasons why people go in and out of poverty. Of course, income levels are part of that, so the most frequently used measure is that of households below 60 per cent. of median income, but there are other causes. For example, lack of skills or qualifications and poor health can have an effect, which is why a co-ordinated approach is needed.

**Mr. Tim Collins** (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I applaud the Government on their wish to tackle social exclusion. It is a noble objective but, as the Minister will recognise, it is important to judge it by results rather than by rhetoric. Will she reconfirm the commitment made by the Prime Minister in 1996

"to end the waste of families sleeping in bed and breakfast accommodation"?

If she reconfirms that as a Government objective, will she share my disappointment that, in fact, the number of families sleeping in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has increased by 152 per cent. since 1997 to an all-time high?

**Mrs. Roche:** I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman raises this issue given the position that his Government took on dealing with housing and homelessness. Of course, there is an obligation not only to tackle rough sleeping but to examine the number of families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and to see what can be done about them. That is why the Government are engaging in a programme with social landlords to make sure that much more social housing is available.

## Broadband Networks

4. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): What progress has been made in centralised procurement of broadband networks for Government use. [23445]

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie):** Broadband is a faster "always on" internet system that offers significant new benefits for individuals, businesses and users of public services. The public sector is the largest single consumer of broadband technology, so the Government are actively examining how that purchasing power might lever growth in the market more widely.

**Mr. Connarty:** I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He will have no doubt read in the *Financial Times* today that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who was speaking in South Korea, has commended the South Korean Government for their programme. They have invested £600 million in constructing a broadband network that is used by 8 million people. In Britain, only 600,000 people use broadband at present. Surely, the Government, who spend £2 billion through their various Departments to procure broadband services, should be getting together to make one procurement order that would, because of their purchasing power, drive up quality and spread the use of broadband. Can the Government not see themselves as a driving force for broadband initiatives if the private sector will not come to our rescue?

**Mr. Leslie:** My hon. Friend makes entirely the right point. The Government are important not only as a regulator of this industry but as a consumer. A number of different infrastructure sharing opportunities exist, not least the academic networks and the investment that is being made in schools. Broadband is extremely important not because of the technology itself but because of what it can deliver in terms of new opportunities for learning and technology in the internet age.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): The Minister is absolutely right to point out the importance of broadband. However, with the devolution of government to regions outside London, is he aware that broadband is not available widely throughout the United Kingdom? What are the Government going to do about that? Does he recall that the Prime Minister boasted in 1997 that broadband would be available to all throughout the United Kingdom by 1999? That has not happened. Is that yet another gimmicky promise not met?

**Mr. Leslie:** Much as the hon. Gentleman might want the telecommunications industry to be wholly owned by the Government, the broadband capital investment network is led by industry itself. Although a significant proportion of rural areas in particular are not covered at present, 60 per cent. of the population have potential access to broadband even though only 1 per cent. sign up to it at present.

## Civil Emergencies

5. **Joan Ryan** (Enfield, North): What the role of his Department is in responding to civil emergencies. [23446]

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie):** The role of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Cabinet Office is to co-ordinate efforts across government to improve the effectiveness of civil contingency and emergency planning.

**Joan Ryan:** I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he comment on the role of local authorities in dealing with civil emergencies and tell us whether he has had any contact with them on this issue since the tragic events of 11 September? Furthermore, will he comment on the resource issue that would face a local authority dealing with a civil emergency?

**Mr. Leslie:** This is a useful opportunity to pay tribute to the many emergency planning officers who work extremely hard in local authorities throughout the country to make sure that our emergency plans are up to date and are regularly exercised. They do a fantastic job. In the light of the events of 11 September, we have updated our guidance and are making sure that we are in regular discussions with local authorities and, in particular, with the Local Government Association.

**Mr. Gary Streeter** (South-West Devon): For those of us living in Devon, the foot and mouth crisis in the past year came pretty close to a civil emergency. Will the Minister today agree to the Government holding a full public inquiry into the disease so that lessons can be learned for the future, and if not, why not?

**Mr. Leslie:** As the hon. Gentleman well knows, a number of inquiries are under way into foot and mouth. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat seeks to ensure that all the different Departments that take a lead in tackling such emergencies have improved co-ordination so that we can be more effective in future.

**Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will my hon. Friend look carefully at the advice that the Civil Aviation Authority has given on overfly zones, in particular on the incidence of aircraft that have been held

in holding patterns over high-risk sites? I am sure my hon. Friend will agree that there are more appropriate places to hold aircraft, even though our airspace is very crowded.

**Mr. Leslie:** I shall certainly discuss with officials the point that my hon. Friend makes. I know that the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has been considering the issue of aviation and the possible vulnerability of key sites, especially major chemical sites, for example. We have to be vigilant and ensure that we reduce vulnerability wherever possible.

**Alistair Burt** (North-East Bedfordshire): The Minister may not be aware of a recent incident in Sandy in my constituency when a package that was suspected of containing anthrax caused a full-scale public emergency—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. There is far too much noise.

**Alistair Burt:** In the course of dealing with the necessary decontamination and the obvious personal aspects of that, no woman officer was available in the emergency team, which caused understandable distress. Will the Minister liaise with his colleagues in the Home Office to ensure that there is a solution to that problem, so that women officers are present whenever possible to deal with women who have been evacuated and need decontamination?

**Mr. Le[illegible]:** This is an extremely important point. The guidance issued to reflect the chemical and biological risk that was perceived to be a problem in respect of postal services needs to include the way in which emergency services respond. There is no specific credible threat at present to the postal service in general, but the Cabinet Office is always reviewing the adequacy of our advice to the authorities on such matters.

## Global Poverty

6. **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): What recent visits he has made to promote an international approach to tackling global poverty. [23448]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott):** Tackling global poverty will be a key focus of the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg later this year, better known as the Rio 10 conference. I discussed preparations for the summit on my recent visit to the United States, New Zealand, Australia, Malaysia and Vietnam.

**Linda Gilroy:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that environmental issues are closely related to tackling poverty, especially with regard to the implementation of the Kyoto protocol? Will he assure the House that he will continue to work on those issues, which are as important to tackling poverty as they are to sustainability issues at home?

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** My hon. Friend rightly highlights the global problems that require global solutions and global travel—*[Interruption.]*—whether Opposition Members like that or not. I think that the global travels of the Prime Minister, especially in respect of Afghanistan, have been to the benefit of world peace and prosperity.

The conference on sustainability is not only about the environment, which follows on from the Rio conference, but about how we deal with poverty. Frankly, if we gave as much priority and commitment to dealing with poverty and prosperity as we have rightly given to combating terrorism, the world would be a better place.

**Tony Baldry** (Banbury): Is it not a sad fact that according to the latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development statistics, the wealthier nations of the world collectively are now spending less in real terms on international development than they were 10 years ago? If we are determined to tackle global poverty, could not the Government at least give a lead by setting a clear date by which they will meet the 0.7 per cent. target of Government wealth to be allocated to international development?

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** The hon. Gentleman's point about average spending on aid by all countries is right, but this country's spending has increased. We are showing leadership in that respect. The proportion of spending on aid decreased under the previous Administration. The resources necessary to deal with poverty amount to about £50 billion. At the Monterrey conference in March, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be closely involved in efforts to marshal such support in a new trust fund, which he suggested, so that we can make dealing with poverty a priority, as we have done in respect of terrorism.

**Mr. John Hume** (Foyle): Does the Minister agree that although it is essential and correct to give humanitarian aid to countries suffering from severe poverty, if we want to give them long-term and permanent assistance so that they can rely on themselves, the best way to assist them is to help them set up permanent education systems for the whole community? Does he agree that the point is strongly exemplified by Afghanistan, where 85 per cent. of women cannot read or write because they have not been allowed to go to school, and 65 per cent. of men cannot read or write because going to school is not permanent? Education will create societies where people can provide for themselves.

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Indeed, the objectives that have been set by the United Nations identify education as well as poverty relief as important millennium objectives. We have set targets; we are discussing finance on a global scale to enable us to achieve them.

## Ministers' Code of Conduct

7. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): When the code of conduct for Ministers was last revised. [23449]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott):** A revised ministerial code was issued in July 2001, which took into account the recommendations of the Select Committee on Public Administration and the Committee on Standards in Public

Life. Since then, in response to a recommendation from the Public Administration Committee, the Government have agreed to amend paragraph 27 of the code, which now requires that all announcements of Government policy should be made in the first instance in Parliament. I am sure that the House will welcome that.

**Mr. Turner:** When, then, will the rest of the code be enforced? We had Ministers with houses paid for by colleagues, Ministers with houses belonging to their wives, and Ministers with flats belonging to railwaymen's unions. If hon. Members have an independent Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, is it not even more important that Ministers, who have executive responsibility, should have an independent commissioner for the standards that they are supposed to uphold?

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** We heard lots of allegations, without a great deal of substance.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): There was in *The Guardian*.

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** It being in *The Guardian* is hardly the highest of recommendations. That is me finished again tomorrow. We have Select Committees that make recommendations, and they made recommendations about how the code should apply. I am glad that in a recent statement the Select Committee welcomed a number of changes that we have made to the code of conduct. For example, the code should be a framework for decisions. The seven principles of public life that are applied to public servants should now apply to Ministers. Further recommendations were welcomed. There was a gap, as the Select Committee pointed out—for example, we rejected the recommendation that the Prime Minister should appear before the Select Committee, and that there should be a separate ombudsman. We have made clear in our reports the matters on which we disagree with the Committee.

**Mr. Tim Collins** (Westmorland and Lonsdale): On the enforcement of the code of conduct for Ministers, the Deputy Prime Minister will recall that the code contains a reference to the requirement for Ministers to comply in full with the Register of Members' Interests. Is it not regrettable that the Deputy Prime Minister himself has still failed to comply with the finding of the Standards and Privileges Committee that he should register his RMT property connection? Will not many commuters believe that the Government's spineless refusal to take action against this week's shameful rail strikes is connected with that link at the highest level to the RMT?

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** The hon. Gentleman has been geed up to be a little more aggressive in his questioning, but he is not consistent with the facts. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I am going to answer. The allegations made by Opposition Members were investigated by the Committee and rejected. All three accusations investigated by Mrs. Filkin and put before the Committee were rejected. In those circumstances, I was not required to register the interest. The Committee invited me to do so and I talked to the Chairman about the matter, but since I had not committed an offence, why should I register the interest?

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [23470] **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 9 January.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair):** This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

**Mr. Carmichael:** Will the Prime Minister give a commitment today to pay the Scottish Executive the estimated £20 million that will be saved by the Department for Work and Pensions in payments of attendance allowance as a result of the Scottish Executive's decision to introduce free personal care for the elderly in Scotland? Is it not deeply ironic that the political courage shown by the Labour party in Scotland, along with Liberal Democrat colleagues in the Executive, should be met with such cynical swindling by none other than the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling)?

**The Prime Minister:** First, let me point out to the hon. Gentleman that we are increasing enormously the amount of health service and social care spending in Scotland, as elsewhere. That is of course a vast increase over anything that the Liberal Democrats have ever asked for. Secondly, let me assure him that as part of devolution it is of course possible for Scotland to take a different view of the best way in which to spend the resources that we have.

We believe that the best way is to put money into free nursing care, which we are doing, but to use the rest of the money to build up the social service infrastructure in England, which we are doing also. We do not, however, believe that the way that the Scottish Executive have taken is right for England. That surely is a consequence of devolution. In both Scotland and England, however, the amount of resources going into social care and the national health service is increasing massively.

**Mr. Kevin Barron** (Rother Valley): The Prime Minister will be familiar with the tragic killing in Macedonia of paratrooper Ian Collins in August last year while on a NATO peacekeeping mission. My right hon. Friend will have seen in the national press today that Ian Collins' mother, father and girlfriend are out in Macedonia at the moment seeking justice from the Macedonian judicial system. According to the Ministry of Defence, they are being escorted by Mr. John Mitchell, the vice-consul out there. I ask my right hon. Friend to do

all in his power to ensure that my constituents receive justice for the tragic death that occurred on such a gallant mission.

**The Prime Minister:** I totally share the concern of my hon. Friend and of his constituents at the way in which the issue has been handled and at the present outcome. We are in close contact with the family and also in close touch with the Macedonian authorities, and we will do everything we possibly can to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

**Mr. Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green): Who is in charge of transport policy?

**The Prime Minister:** The Secretary of State for Transport.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** I know that the Prime Minister has been away for a long time, but while he has been away, his transport policy has descended into farce. He has Lord Birt, with all his great expertise on railways, in charge of long-term transport policy; he has a management consultant in charge of short-term transport policy; and today we read that his Deputy Chief Whip is in charge of negotiating with striking rail unions. Just what is the purpose of the Transport Secretary?

**The Prime Minister:** First, in relation to John Birt, it was announced back in September that he would undertake a lot of work for the policy unit in Downing street about long-term trends in the transport industry. Since Governments have had policy units, as far as I am aware, for decades, quite why that is inconsistent with having a Transport Secretary I do not know. Secondly, what the Transport Secretary does is provide the long-term investment for the railways—and also sort out the appalling mess that was left by railway privatisation.

We on this side of the House are in favour of that long-term extra investment in our railways and we believe that Railtrack could not go on as it was, getting billions and billions of pounds of public money and not delivering a decent service to passengers. Now, perhaps on those two issues—the extra investment and what should happen to Railtrack—the right hon. Gentleman will give us his views.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** The one thing that is absolutely clear about this Transport Secretary is that he is not there to make the trains run on time. The figures that are now available, which he stopped publishing, show before the strike, Connex South Eastern delays up 50 per cent., South West Trains delays up 70 per cent. and First Great Eastern Railways delays up 95 per cent. Yesterday, the Secretary of State said that he was going to be in post for years and years. Surely, the Prime Minister knows that the only certainty is that, under him, the chaos on the railways will be in place for years and years.

**The Prime Minister** *rose—*

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** Oh no. I do not want the Prime Minister to miss this point. Is not it time that he sacked his Transport Secretary?

**The Prime Minister:** First, it is absolutely correct that after the Hatfield rail disaster—yes, it is true—reliability went down very considerably. That happened for a very simple reason. After Hatfield, it became clear that the state of the railway infrastructure was far worse than anyone had ever imagined. That is the result of cumulated under-investment going back many years. Let me give Opposition Members the figures on investment. In the first 10 years of the last Conservative Government—this is at constant prices—there was investment of about £940 million a year. In the next eight years, there was £1.4 billion investment. In the first term of this Government, that rose to £2.2 billion. However, under the comprehensive spending review, for the next three years, it will be £4.4 billion, or three times the amount that the last Conservative Government put in.

The difference between us, very simply, is that we believe that putting this extra investment into the railways is important. Let me read to the House, however, the policy of the Conservative party. The shadow Chancellor said:

"I believe our aim should . . . be to reduce the proportion of national output taken towards the state by 35 per cent."

The shadow Home Secretary said:

"We would like to head downwards to 35 per cent. of GDP."

The leader of the Conservative party said that

"our target must . . . be the mid-30s as an overall percentage of public expenditure".—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1096.]

If we had 35 per cent. of gross domestic product as the public spending target, it would mean £60 billion worth of cuts in investment—cuts that would wipe out the entirety of the extra investment in the railways. We believe in putting that investment in. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members can try to shout me down, but let us understand the difference between the two parties. We believe that this extra investment should go in; let them state their position.

**Hon. Members:** More!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): Will the Prime Minister acknowledge the success of the British Institute for Brain Injured Children, the Disabilities Trust and my constituents, Ivan and Charika Corea, in getting 2002 declared as autism awareness year? Will he ensure that the national and local bodies that are responsible for health, social services and education co-operate in the joined-up provision of services that autistic people and their families desperately need?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I certainly congratulate my hon. Friend's constituents and the organisations concerned. Autism awareness year should give us the opportunity to raise the awareness of this condition, which is very debilitating and is distressing for families; in addition, it should ensure that we can learn more about what causes autism. She will be pleased to know that, in addition to the measures being taken by the voluntary sector, the Government are putting more resources and research into exactly how autism occurs and how we should deal with it.

**Mr. Charles Kennedy** (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I acknowledge the Government's shambolic

inheritance in terms of transport policy, but does the Prime Minister not feel the need to explain to people across the country why today, in year five of a Labour Government, with a generally benign economic scenario over that period and a three-figure Commons majority throughout, our transport policy is still a shambles?

**The Prime Minister:** There are two reasons why the problems on the railways have arisen. The first is related to privatisation, which is generally accepted to have been a disaster. That is now being sorted out, with the new company being restructured, the new Strategic Rail Authority director and the new management in the company all in place now. It will be sorted out in the next few months. Secondly, under-investment in the railways went on for a considerable period, but that is now being made good. On Monday, the new Strategic Rail Authority director, Richard Bowker, will publish the forward investment plans for the railways.

As I said a moment or two ago, after the Hatfield rail disaster it became obvious that the condition of the railways was far worse than people had thought. It could have been said that post-1997, the moment that we came to power, we should have realised that that privatisation could not work in any shape or form—*[Interruption.]* "Yes," one of the Conservatives says. Whoever we take criticism from about rail privatisation, I hope that we will not hear any from the Conservative party. We believed that it was better at least to give the system a chance to work, because of the upheaval that would be caused if we had to change it, as we are now having to, once it became clear that Railtrack was unsustainable. The extra investment will go in, the company will be restructured and it will be focused on improvements in the railways alone. I believe that those will happen in time.

**Mr. Kennedy:** The whole country will share the Prime Minister's sense of entertainment about where the Conservatives come from on this issue; there is no doubt about that. In response to my question, however, he said two things. First, he said that in the next few months the problems would be sorted out once and for all. Last February, in reply to me during Prime Minister's questions, he said that rail services would be back to normal by Easter—one wonders which Easter he was referring to. Secondly, the Prime Minister talks about persistent under-investment, and he is correct—but what about the under-investment during the first four years of this Labour Government?

**The Prime Minister:** I am afraid that I cannot agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the first four years of this Government. As I have just pointed out, the figures show that even in our first term we were spending—in investment, which of course means long lead times for new equipment and so on to kick in—about double what the Conservative Government were spending. Over the next three years that sum will rise to about three times what they were spending. I simply point out to the right hon. Gentleman that not merely are we spending far more than the Conservatives ever spent, and are due to spend more, but we are spending far more than the Liberal Democrats ever asked us to.

**Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews** (Medway): In anticipation of tomorrow's important debate, will the Prime Minister consider what is the point of replacing a second Chamber that was rotten because of inherited patronage with a second Chamber that is rotten because of contemporary patronage?

**The Prime Minister:** First, the independent Members of the House of Lords will be appointed by the independent commission. Secondly, the political appointments can be made in one of two ways. Those Members could be wholly elected—some people here in the House agree with that—or they could be appointed through the political parties. In either event, those would obviously be political appointments. That is a matter for the House to debate, and of course we will listen carefully to the House's views about the right way to proceed with House of Lords reform. However, I have to say to my hon. and learned Friend and other hon. Members that, listening to those views, it is clear that there are almost as many different views about what should happen with the House of Lords as there are Members of Parliament.

Q2. [23471] **Mr. Michael Fallon** (Sevenoaks): Is the Prime Minister aware that all his talk of billions of pounds, of percentages and of investment on the railways will be of little comfort to commuters in my constituency, whose service has deteriorated and is continuing to deteriorate? He has been in charge for five years. Why does he think that Labour is so bad at improving public transport?

**The Prime Minister:** As I pointed out a moment ago, the real fall-down in reliability came after the Hatfield rail disaster, when it was discovered that the state of the track was far worse than anyone had ever thought. At present, we also have the issue of strikes on the railways. I have to say that this is a totally unacceptable way to resolve disputes in this day and age. There exists in the agreement between the management and the unions the power for this matter to be referred to arbitration. I would have thought that that, rather than strike action, was a far better way to resolve this issue. In any event, the long-term future of the railways depends on extra investment and the sorting out of Railtrack, which we found, after Hatfield, was a company that simply could not go on in the same way as before. Both those things have to be done if the railways are to be put in order.

Q3. [23472] **Andy Burnham** (Leigh): Does the Prime Minister agree that there is a growing problem in Leigh, and many towns like it, with gangs of youths who feel that they are above the law, damaging property and generally making people's lives a misery? Is he aware of the new policy being tested in my constituency by Greater Manchester police, in which calls from the public are prioritised and patrols are no longer sent in response to problems with teenage gangs of this kind? Does he share my concern that this sends out the wrong message to the public, and does he agree that our constituents want to see firm action against this type of behaviour remaining a high priority for the police?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure that my hon. Friend is right in saying that people want a high priority to be given to tackling street violence and antisocial crime. I know that the Home Secretary has asked for a report from the Greater Manchester police about the change in policy that

my hon. Friend has just outlined. However, extra measures are now proposed for youth justice and there will be an increase in police numbers coming about as a result of extra investment. I think that the Greater Manchester police will, in the end, have more police than ever before under this investment proposal, and I am sure that there will be measures on the way to tackle this problem. But in the end, my hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the whole community must be engaged in rooting out this behaviour.

**Mr. Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Minister with responsibility for crime reduction has been quoted as saying:

"I feel anxious about my family's safety and my own with growing street crime."

Is the Minister right to be anxious?

**The Prime Minister:** That will be overtaken by a letter from the Minister to the newspaper concerned, saying that he said no such thing.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** If, apparently, the Minister said no such thing, was he not, in reality, in saying no such thing, correct in what he apparently did not say?

Muggings are up by 40 per cent. The Home Office's own figures show that. Assaults are up by 20 per cent. and mobile phone thefts—about which the Minister apparently did not say anything—are up by a staggering 371 per cent. Is not the reality for the Prime Minister and his Government that they are failing to tackle violent crime and breaking their pledge to be tough on crime?

**The Prime Minister:** No. The British crime survey figures show that crime is down overall. Indeed, crime is down very substantially since this Government came to office. Some of us remember that, under the last Conservative Government, crime doubled. Violent crime is down, and so is burglary and vehicle theft. There is a particular problem at the moment with street violence, especially in relation to mobile phones, and it is precisely for that reason that the Government are going to work with the industry and the police to make sure that we tackle the problem.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** Only someone who has become so isolated from the general public could say that violent crime is down, when his own figures show that it is up. People feel the kind of fear about walking in their streets at night, which the Prime Minister no doubt does not understand. The figures also show that Londoners are five times more likely to suffer attacks of violent crime than those who live in New York, and three times more likely than those who live in Los Angeles. Now that the Prime Minister is back home, should he not stay home and get a grip?

**The Prime Minister:** First, in relation to New York and so on, I think that those figures are wrong. In New York, the murder rate is about five times as high as in London. Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman is wrong in relation to the overall statistics for crime. The British crime survey—which the Conservatives have always said is the most accurate survey—shows that crime is down. *[Interruption.]* Those are the Home Office figures.

The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, however, to draw attention to a problem that the Government have also drawn attention to, which is the problem of street violence, particularly that involving youngster upon youngster in relation to mobile phones. We believe that there should be tougher sentences in respect of such crime, and more secure places. We are putting in the investment to provide those secure places. We are halving the time it takes to get persistent juvenile offenders to court, and that measure has now been completed.

The new criminal justice legislation will consider the issue of bail in relation to such offences and more action against antisocial behaviour. There is more investment in closed circuit television, because that is proven to have an effect on reducing this type of crime. As a result of the extra investment, which was opposed by the Conservative party, there will be more police on our streets. That is a sensible way to deal with the problem.

Q4. [23473] **Dr. Doug Naysmith** (Bristol, North-West): I know that the Prime Minister is aware of the current difficulties facing the aerospace industry, which are due, at least in part, to the events of 11 September. Can he assure me that the Government are doing everything possible to assist that crucial industry with what we all hope will be short-term difficulties? In particular, will he have discussions with Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry and Ministry of Defence about the possibility of bringing forward projects that are already agreed, and awarding training grants, which would be very welcome?

**The Prime Minister:** It is important that we do two things. First, we must make provision to help the industry through the particular impact of 11 September. In so far as we are able, we are doing that. Some £40 million has gone to help the industry. I know that my hon. Friend has a particular interest in the aerospace and aviation industry in his constituency. We should try to bring forward some of the large contracts that are being placed abroad. I am pleased to say that we are doing well in that regard, but we will try to do more. The aerospace and aviation industry is an important part of this country's manufacturing base. It is highly skilled and highly sensitive to new technology, and we shall do everything we can to build on it.

Q5. [23474] **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): During the Prime Minister's current visit to the United Kingdom, would he turn his attention to the case of my constituent, Mr. Gavin Burns, of which I have given him notice? The eye hospital in Manchester could save Mr. Burns's sight only by using photodynamic therapy at a cost to him of £7,500. Conventional laser treatment available on the NHS would have destroyed the centre of his one remaining good eye, leaving him unable to see the faces of his grandchildren. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that it is unacceptable that Mr. Burns and others like him should be forced to pay for treatment that is clearly and obviously necessary?

**The Prime Minister:** I believe that it is unacceptable that people are forced to pay for their treatment in that way, which is precisely why it is so important that we get the extra investment into the national health service and build up its capacity. I have to say to the hon. Gentleman

that, as the position of the Conservative party is to force people into private insurance, criticism from Conservative Members simply will not wash.

**Mr. Brady:** What is the Prime Minister doing about the case of Mr. Burns?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman asks what we are doing about it. We are putting extra investment into the national health service. I am afraid that, whatever he feels for his constituent, the position of the Conservative party is to take that investment back out again.

**Joan Ryan** (Enfield, North): Just four weeks ago, on 12 December, 13-year-old Martin Lamparter, who lived and went to school in my constituency, died in a tragic accident involving fireworks. His family are absolutely devastated. In the light of that terrible loss of a young life and the almost 1,000 firework-related injuries that occur each year, would the Prime Minister look again at whether the legislation that allows the retail sale of fireworks is adequate, and whether further measures could be taken to protect the public, especially young people, from the dangers that fireworks present?

**The Prime Minister:** The risks associated with fireworks are very clear, as my hon. Friend says. Once the Government have the full statistics and the results of the survey of firework accidents that have occurred this year, we will certainly consider whether any changes are necessary. As a result of action that has been taken over many years, we have succeeded in reducing the number of accidents significantly, but if something remains to be done, once we have completed the survey and done the analysis of what changes need to be put in place, we will change the system even further.

## Congestion Charges

Q6. [23475] **Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): If he will make a statement on the Government's action to consult on the introduction of congestion charges.

**The Prime Minister:** The Government require local authorities to undertake full and effective consultation before seeking approval for any local congestion-charging scheme in England outside London. Consultations about London schemes are a matter for the Mayor.

**Richard Ottaway:** Does the Prime Minister recall, during the London mayoral and Assembly elections, campaigning on a manifesto featuring his photograph and signature on the first page and, on the front, the words "New Labour, new London, no congestion charges"? What exactly does he mean by that?

**The Prime Minister:** What I mean is that the decision is obviously for the Mayor to make. It will be for him to decide whether to introduce congestion charging. The Government's role is to ensure that any money used for congestion charging is put back into public transport. That, we believe, is the sensible way in which to proceed.

## Engagements

Q8. [23477] **Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): Now that the whole country is free of foot and mouth disease, what plans has my right hon. Friend to restore and support the tourism industry—particularly in my constituency and in north-west Wales, where tourism is vital to the lives of many citizens?

**The Prime Minister:** We are trying to ensure, by means of funds for the tourist boards not just in Wales but throughout the country, that we give a significant boost to British tourism. Spending on the advertising campaign will run into millions of pounds. It is having an impact, and I understand that the Welsh Assembly is making a further £2 million available to the Welsh tourist board to boost the industry specifically in Wales.

Q9. [23478] **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): Having recently seen deprivation abroad, the Prime Minister knows that the European Union's overseas aid package is motivated by politics. Poland receives twice as much aid as the whole of Latin America and Asia combined. When will the Prime Minister stop the EU from playing petty politics with the poor of the world?

**The Prime Minister:** The negotiations that are taking place with Poland about accession to the European Union will deal with many of those issues. We are in favour of European enlargement, and in favour of Poland's coming into the European Union. As for European policy as a whole, if we can make changes in the European Union's aid and development policy, it will be only because we have some influence within the European Union itself. The worst course that we could follow, in having that influence, would be to pursue the policies of isolationism that are exhibited constantly by the Conservative party, not least at this Question Time.

Q10. [23479] **Mr. Michael Foster** (Worcester): My right hon. Friend will be well aware of the economic test currently faced by flood prevention schemes, and will know that many argue that it fails residents and businesses affected by flooding. Will he consider modernising the formula to take account of the huge social costs incurred by those affected, and to make it easier to establish flood defence schemes for residents and businesses in such places as Worcester?

**The Prime Minister:** I understand my hon. Friend's concern. We are looking at ways in which we can improve the effectiveness of the resources that we put in for protection against flooding, but we are increasing those resources significantly, by some £100 million or more. I will certainly look into my hon. Friend's point, but I must tell him that in the end the important thing is for the Government to make the investment, and for local people to make the final decision on how that investment can best be used.

**Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): Will the Prime Minister assure the House that no Minister in his Government played any part, through pressure or influence of any kind, in the effective dismissal of Elizabeth Filkin, and that her findings against the Deputy Prime Minister and other Ministers in his Government

played no part in it either? When will he force the Deputy Prime Minister to abide by his ministerial code, and register his pecuniary interest in the RMT?

**The Prime Minister:** As I heard just before the beginning of Prime Minister's Question Time, the Deputy Prime Minister dealt very comprehensively with the usual rubbish from the Conservative party on this issue. In respect of Mrs. Filkin, if the hon. Gentleman has any such evidence he should present it to the proper authorities rather than engaging in the usual Conservative party smear.

Q11. [23480] **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster** (Hastings and Rye): It was great to see my right hon. Friend in Afghanistan earlier this week—*[Laughter.]*—encouraging our very brave troops, but is it possible to employ our peacekeeping troops in an aid programme? I understand that many of our aid programmes are being hampered by bandits. It would be extremely helpful if particular use could be made of our troops' expertise.

**The Prime Minister:** It is important that the troops reduce the possibilities of instability. However, I was fascinated by Conservative Members shouting at my hon. Friend for saying that we should support the British troops in Afghanistan and what they are doing. Of course, that is part of the Conservative party's new policy. It is against us being part of the security force in Afghanistan. It is against us being in Sierra Leone. It is against us being in Macedonia. It is against us being anywhere near India and Pakistan, so it appears. It is against us being in Europe. It is the Howard Hughes school of diplomacy, but it is not very effective.

## Points of Order

3.30 pm

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I know that you give special allowance to the Prime Minister, but you have ruled on previous occasions that it is not the role of those on the Government Front Bench to talk about Conservative party policy, or at least their version of it. Earlier in Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister spoke for over one minute giving his incorrect version of Conservative party policy, and he repeated it for the final 30 seconds of the session. Surely there must be a limit to which he can abuse Prime Minister's Question Time.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. If the hon. Gentleman will let the Speaker run Prime Minister's Question Time, that will be very helpful indeed.

**Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I raised with the Prime Minister a question of constituency significance, of which I had given him prior notice, relating to a particular constituent. Is it not the usual courtesy in the House that when a Member has given notice of such a specific case, that Member has a right to expect a response on it? The Prime Minister did not even allude to the case of my constituent. I give you notice, Mr. Speaker, that I am greatly dissatisfied with the Prime Minister's response and that I will seek leave to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

**Mr. Speaker:** I note what the hon. Gentleman has said.

## Right to Self-employment

3.32 pm

**Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about self-employment.

The Bill, which particularly creates the right to self-employment, is supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House, including the chairman and both vice-chairmen of the all-party small business group. I take the opportunity to thank the many Members who have offered their support.

The self-employed are vital to our economy both nationally and locally. Numbering in excess of 4 million people, they comprise of owner-managers of shops, factories and farms as well as freelances working in the media, information technology and the creative industries. Indeed, it could be said that Members of the House can technically be included among their ranks, so I guess I should declare an interest. Together, those 4 million people are leading creators of this country's wealth. They provide most of the local services that we use and employ approximately half of those working in the private sector.

At the same time, because the nature of work is changing, self-employment is becoming an increasingly popular option. The days of working from nine to five are gone, and the impact of technology means that when and where we work is constantly changing. Self-employment has the flexibility to respond to those changes, which is why it is increasingly the first option for many people at work.

A good example of that is the recent huge rise in the number of self-employed women, who have set up their own businesses and in the process smashed the glass ceiling. That is a wonderful market example of challenging discrimination. However, self-employed people matter not merely for their economic work. For me, the self-employed embody a value, which is one of the reasons why I came into the House in the first place: it is the simple idea that, no matter who one is and what one's background, if one has the ability, the ambition and the will to work, one can be one's own boss and make one's way in the world.

Sadly, in this country we do not seem to realise that full potential. Despite the excellent work of organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses, the self-employed continue to be discriminated against, whether it is by high street banks unfairly refusing mortgages or by the state handing out inferior benefits. The root of that negative attitude lies in the very status of self-employment. The onus lies with an individual wishing to become self-employed to prove his status. That is not, as it may seem, a simple process, because the regulations are based not on consistently applied criteria but on ever-changing case law.

Thus many self-employed people have to prove and re-prove their status every year. Indeed, some have to do so for each contract. The House will recognise that that is an unreasonable requirement. After all, why should a fisherman or, for that matter, a freelance writer, have closely to follow the legal ins and outs and the latest verdicts, and then try to determine whether those apply to him or her now or in the future? Accumulatively,

*[Mr. Mark Prisk]*

that reliance on changing case law represents an appalling waste of time and money. For example, if only half of the 4 million self-employed lose two hours a month in dealing with that problem, that represents more than 3 million working days lost to the economy every year.

In short, the current approach is confusing, wasteful and adversarial. It is also inherently unfair, because it bases the burden of proof not on the state but on the individual. The purpose of my Bill is to reverse that situation by creating a right to become self-employed, removing the confusion of ever-changing rules, and switching the burden of proof from the individual to the state. In practical terms, my Bill would achieve that by requiring individuals to register as self-employed, with Government agencies then being entitled to challenge that registration for a period of up to, say, six months.

By registering, an individual would make an informed and positive choice, and registration itself would remove the need to continue to rely on ever-changing case law, with all the uncertainty and waste that that creates. Equally, by registering, an individual would recognise both the freedom and the responsibility that self-employment brings. Rights must balance benefits with burdens.

Let me offer two examples, one of a burden and one of a benefit. First, when an individual registers, he or she will be required to have insurance cover appropriate to the nature of their work. That would be particularly relevant to those working in a hazardous environment, such as road haulage or agriculture. Conversely, registration could allow people to opt out of paying class 4 national insurance contributions, especially given that state benefits are fully paid for by class 2 contributions.

That right to self-employment would be enormously beneficial. It would give people a real freedom of choice while emphasising their responsibilities; it would bring relative certainty for most small enterprises—an essential ingredient for good business; it would save millions of productive working days, and thereby millions of pounds in lost revenue for the Government; and it would significantly reduce the need for the Government constantly to redefine self-employment in order to regulate and tax that activity. There could be wider benefits from registration in the workplace, which Ministers may wish to consider, such as trying to define a worker and an employee.

The self-employed lie at the heart of our economic life. They are the source of most private sector jobs; they provide the services upon which most of us rely; and they represent a vital source of innovation. Equally, social and economic changes are likely to increase the demand for self-employment. As a recent survey by the Prince's Trust has shown, record numbers of school leavers now want to be their own boss when they enter work. They know that in a highly competitive, global economy, in which footloose multinationals regularly downsize—as the term has it—it is perhaps self-employment that will give them some measure of control over their working lives. For many of them, as the next generation of workers, it is the way ahead. That is why it is now time to update how the state interacts with the self-employed.

We need to move away from a confusing, unfair and adversarial approach and towards giving people the right to choose how they work and the freedom and responsibility of that choice. The purpose of the Bill is to provide that right. It would not solve all of the problems in the relationship between Government and the self-employed. However, it represents a vital first step in overhauling how we treat the self-employed and I therefore commend it to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Mark Prisk, Mr. Richard Bacon, Mr. John Baron, Mr. Peter Duncan, Brian Cotter, Mr. Mark Francois, Michael Fabricant, Mr. Adrian Flook, Angela Watkinson, Mr. Kerry Pollard, Mr. George Osborne and Mr. Alistair Burt.

RIGHT TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Mark Prisk accordingly presented a Bill to make provision about self-employment: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 12 April, and to be printed [Bill 79].

# Orders of the Day

## Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning (Amendment) Bill

*Considered in Committee.*

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

### Clause 1

EXTENSION OF AMNESTY PERIOD

3.42 pm

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Grantham and Stamford): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 6, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

'(3) Subsections (2)(b) and (3) are omitted.'.

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 6, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

'(3A) Subsections (2)(b) and (3) shall continue to have effect in respect of offences listed in the Schedule to the 1997 Act relating to the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, with the words "later than 27th February 2005" substituted for the words "more than five years after the day on which this Act is passed".

(3B) In respect of other offences listed in the Schedule to the 1997 Act, subsections (2)(b) and (3) are omitted.'.

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid):** Happy new year.

**Mr. Davies:** I wish the Secretary of State and his colleagues a happy new year also, and we all hope that the people of Northern Ireland will have a happy new year. They certainly deserve a good new year after many years of difficulties and sacrifices, as well as continued disappointments in the implementation of the Belfast agreement, which is one of the matters with which we shall deal this afternoon.

I welcome the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, to the Front Bench today and I am glad that she will conduct the case for the Government. She is a competent and experienced parliamentarian, although she will find that her pitch has been somewhat queered by a most extraordinarily and no doubt inadvertently frank statement on the subject of deadlines by the Secretary of State on Second Reading. I shall have occasion to refer to that point later.

It is common ground between the Opposition and the Government that the Belfast agreement should be upheld and implemented urgently. Of course, it is not common ground that the Government should have chosen to go beyond the Belfast agreement and, before it is even implemented, to make a whole raft of new unilateral, gratuitous concessions. We are concerned that, by so doing, the Government have moved away from the basis of bipartisanship in Northern Ireland to which we are much attached. It is common ground that the Belfast agreement must be supported, and we wish to do everything possible to ensure that it is implemented.

3.45 pm

I believe totally in the Government's sincerity in wanting to bring about the implementation of the Belfast agreement. However, it is very much a matter of judgment as to whether they have conducted themselves in a very intelligent way in seeking to ensure that their influence maximised the chance that the Belfast agreement was implemented earlier rather than later. Moreover, if decommissioning was going to come about within the two-year time scale laid down in the Belfast agreement, was it sensible to release all the terrorist prisoners before even a start had been made on decommissioning? That too is a matter of judgment.

We have been over that ground already, and will return to it. I think that history will be much less kind to the Government in that regard than they like to be to themselves. Nevertheless, it is very much common ground that decommissioning is essential, and it is one of the pillars of the Belfast agreement. All those who want peace and normalisation in that part of our country are obliged to do everything possible to ensure that decommissioning comes about, and that it does so earlier rather than later.

The amendment goes to the heart of the Bill. If we want the rapid implementation of the Belfast agreement and the completion of decommissioning, is it more sensible to bring forward a Bill now that extends by five years the special regime of amnesty for decommissioning, or should the extension be for a lesser amount of time? We suggest that the extension should be for one year.

The amendment turns on that question, as does the whole debate in this House about the Bill, as there is no argument about the fundamental necessity of achieving decommissioning. Although our approaches and methods may differ, I am sure that the willingness to complete the difficult but vital process of decommissioning is sincere among hon. Members of all parties.

However, is it more sensible to set a deadline of five years rather than of one, and will that five-year deadline make the best possible contribution to rapid progress? Those questions must be asked, as the matter is somewhat counter-intuitive. One can never be certain of achieving anything in this life, least of all in Northern Irish politics at the present time. I shall therefore go through the only possible justifications for the course adopted by the Government in bringing to the House a Bill that extends the amnesty regime for five years, even though some of those justifications are merely theoretical.

I should not be at all surprised to discover that the Minister of State, when she reads the briefing notes for her speech in response to this debate, will say that the Government are obliged to extend the deadline and that it is not realistic to suppose that decommissioning will be completed by 27 February. We concur with that, even though the Belfast agreement specified that decommissioning should have been completed more than a year and a half ago. I expect too that the Minister will say that the Bill that established the regime to enable decommissioning to take place—by providing the necessary amnesties and so forth—was also designed to last for five years. I expect that she will ask why the Government should make a change and renew those provisions for a shorter length of time.

It seems to me extraordinarily naive to look at matters in that way, but the explanation may well be that the Government are merely taking out of the drawer the Bill

*[Mr. Davies]*

that was introduced at the end of the previous Conservative Administration and carrying it forward for another five years and that they have given no thought as to whether five years is an appropriate length of time. I find it hard to believe that anyone could take that argument seriously, but it needs to be dealt with. As I doubt that I shall catch your eye later in the debate, Sir Alan, I shall deal with it now, pre-emptively.

The answer is very simple. Five years ago, we were right at the beginning of the decommissioning and peace process. Indeed, the Belfast agreement had not been secured at that time, nor anything like it. The Bill that became the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997 was introduced, probably more in hope than in expectation, by the previous Conservative Administration, and was supported by the then Labour Opposition. The idea was to create a framework so that if it were possible to get an agreement, decommissioning could take place and the modalities, the international commission and the appropriate legal regime could be established.

If a Bill is introduced in that way—more in hope than in expectation—to provide a framework for a process that had not even begun or led to an initial agreement on decommissioning, quite a long time has to be provided. It was sensible and responsible to provide a framework for five years, renewable on an annual basis. I do not think that anyone would have quarrelled with that approach at the time, and I certainly have no quarrel with it in retrospect. However, the situation today is profoundly different.

The Belfast agreement, now in place, provided for the whole process of decommissioning to be completed within two years, by July 2000. Yet we are now a year and a half away from that deadline and more than three and a half years away from the Belfast agreement itself. There has been only one small act of decommissioning by Sinn Fein-IRA and one small act, right at the beginning, by one of the loyalist paramilitary organisations. There has been nothing else to show for it in three and a half years.

In those circumstances, to come back to the House with a Bill that provides a deadline of five years seems extraordinary. The Government seem to be saying, "We don't mind that no progress has been made over the past five years. Let's simply start again." That is an extraordinary approach, which would not be taken seriously by anybody who looked at the matter objectively to decide whether the Government were acting in a business-like and sensible fashion.

The second argument for the Bill has been put forward in the media. The Government have used it in their background briefings, as did the Secretary of State, at least by implication, in his introductory remarks on Second Reading. The argument is that this is not a five-year deadline but a one-year deadline, renewable up to five years. To make that statement would be to risk not being taken seriously in the House, when we know that the procedure for dealing with statutory instruments is an unedifying farce. When the Government, with their large majority, introduce a Bill that provides for a new regime for five years and say that it will be renewed at the end of every year and could theoretically be thrown out by Parliament under the statutory instrument procedure, that is a fundamentally bogus statement. When the Government give a five-year deadline, they mean it to be for five years.

Even more important than the credibility of such a measure in the House is its credibility outside the House. In Northern Ireland, specifically among the paramilitary organisations that need to take part in and complete the decommissioning process, only one conclusion can be drawn from the signals that the Government are sending by the way in which they have drafted the Bill: they are setting a final deadline of five years. We started with a five-year regime, which is now being renewed for a further five years. As I said on Second Reading, that sends the paramilitary organisations the simple message that there is no great urgency about decommissioning, that they can take their time about it and that the Government do not expect them to make rapid progress.

It seems thoroughly regrettable and reprehensible that the Government should be sending such signals. It is deeply disappointing to all those in Northern Ireland, in both communities, who have been told ever since the Belfast agreement that the sacrifices they made would at least mean that the gun, the bullet and the arsenals of Semtex and weapons would be taken out of the system within a specific time. That is not happening and the deadline for that to happen is being extended.

There is a third possible explanation for what the Government are doing and why they are insisting on a time scale of five years, although I hope that they will change their mind during the debate.

If that explanation is true, and I am increasingly fearful that it is, it is extremely depressing: the five-year deadline the perverse signal that is being sent to the paramilitaries—did not come about owing to a fit of absence of mind or to naivety, but is part and parcel of a process that the Government were, perhaps involuntarily, sucked into during their negotiations, especially with Sinn Fein-IRA.

Before Christmas, I did what I could to draw the attention of the House to part of that lamentable process whereby, even though the Belfast agreement has not been implemented and so little progress on decommissioning has been made, the Government decided that it is sensible to start offering a whole new set of unreciprocated, unilateral concessions to republicanism in Northern Ireland, and to Sinn Fein-IRA in particular. One of those concessions is the award of special status for Sinn Fein-IRA MPs to come to this place and enjoy some of the facilities of the Palace of Westminster as well as public money, without taking their seats. Other concessions were set out in the Weston Park agreement: for example, the promise of new inquiries and of amnesties for on-the-run terrorists.

Against that background, it was decided—because the general policy is to go soft on Sinn Fein-IRA—that it would not be nice to tell them to hurry up with decommissioning, and that that would be unfriendly and hostile. It would actually make a demand of them rather than giving them a concession. It is part and parcel of that policy of appeasement—a word I use advisedly, as I fear that is indeed what the policy is—that the Bill sets out a five-year deadline that is difficult to explain on any rational basis.

**Mr. Hugo Swire** (East Devon): Just before Christmas, we were informed by the Secretary of State that, in the

mind of General de Chastelain, decommissioning to date was significant—although we were never told what "significant" actually meant, for reasons that I can understand. If decommissioning to date really has been significant, why do we need to discuss extensions to the process of one, two or five years?

**Mr. Davies:** My hon. Friend's logic is irrefutable. If "significant" actually meant large progress—*[Interruption.]* If the Under-Secretary of State wants to intervene, I shall be happy to give way.

If "significant" means that progress has been so great that a substantial proportion of the ground has already been covered during the past five years—or rather the three and three quarter years since the Belfast agreement—why do we need a further five years? If it is logical to suppose that "significant" means that 50 per cent., 60 per cent. or 70 per cent. of the ground has been covered, we should hardly need five more years to complete the process.

My hon. Friend touches on an important matter that goes to the heart of the confidence of the people of Northern Ireland in the whole process: the transparency of the process and the extent to which people can follow what is going on. If I catch your eye when we discuss new clause 1, Sir Alan, I hope that we can go into that matter in more detail.

**Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire): Will the hon. Gentleman explain whether he and his party object to the extension on principle, or is a limited extension acceptable? In that case, we are simply discussing how long the IRA should be given.

**Mr. Davies:** Strictly speaking, the argument is one of practicality and pragmatism rather than of principle. I tried to make it clear when I began my remarks that there is no difference between us and the Government on the principle that decommissioning is required. It is a good thing and it should be advanced as much as possible. However, there are important differences of judgment between us as to how we can maximise its progress. Those are important issues of practical judgment.

There is no difference between us as to the desirability of decommissioning or, as I have already made clear, as to support for the Belfast agreement and for the process itself. Decommissioning is an essential part of that. So if the hon. Gentleman has in mind the analogy of Bernard Shaw and the actress, we are just talking about amounts. We are talking about a year or five years, which is the purpose of debating the amendment, but that may make a material difference to the incentives applied to the paramilitary organisations that need to decommission, in relation to the amount of time that they take to carry out that process.

4 pm

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for leading me naturally to the heart of the argument—there is such a difference of judgment between us, and Conservative Members believe that deadlines are important and that they can influence people. That is true generally; it is true of the way in which the European Union, businesses and many human institutions work. It is certainly true of Northern Ireland's history. No one with even a passing familiarity with its history could deny that deadlines have played an enormously important part in the progress that has been made there—including, of course, in negotiating the Belfast agreement.

We believe that deadlines are in themselves very important factors, but of course they are not the whole story. Other influences, pressures, incentives and disincentives will apply to people, but all other things being equal, we have no doubt that whether deadlines exist and what those deadlines are make a difference. I notice that no Labour Member has sought to intervene to dispute that proposition.

Let me make a second proposition, to which the Conservative party also holds. It is very simple: shorter deadlines tend to concentrate people's minds. Shorter deadlines tend to make the implementation process shorter; longer deadlines do the opposite. They tend to dissolve any sense of urgency, and they tend to extend the time that people take to complete the tasks to which they are committed. Again, that sounds like a simple proposition, and no Labour Member has sought to catch my eye to contradict it.

The remarkable thing is that the Secretary of State agrees precisely with the logic of what I am saying. He acknowledged that, perhaps inadvertently, in the House on 17 December. I shall observe the normal courtesy by citing the *Hansard* column reference. He said:

"I recognise that some say that we need to have deadlines and that without pressure the Provisionals will not move. Some people will point to occasions in the past few years when we have achieved progress only by taking matters right to the wire."

This is the important part of the quotation. He continued:

"I understand that argument, although I have to say that the Provisionals are not the only people in Northern Ireland who regularly take matters to the wire."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 49.]

So the Secretary of State accepts that the Provisionals and other people in Northern Ireland take matters to the wire. I shall give way to him if he contests this interpretation of his words, but it is blatantly clear that the phrase "taking matters to the wire" simply means that people take advantage of whatever deadlines exist. It follows inexorably that if a deadline is extended, the time people take to complete the task for which the deadline has been set is extended; and if a deadline is reduced—all other things being equal—the time they take is reduced.

**The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy):** The hon. Gentleman keeps regretting the fact that no Labour Member has leapt up to intervene on the specific points that he makes, but does he accept that I am listening very carefully to him developing his argument, and I hope to address some of those points in responding to this debate? He said earlier that, in principle, there is nothing between us and that we are debating the practicalities of the proposals. Does he also accept that the practicality and usefulness of deadlines per se divide us?

**Mr. Davies:** I am grateful to the Minister for that point, and I shall listen with equal attention to her remarks. I have already said—I totally accept this—that we are talking about practicalities, but judgment about practicalities is absolutely at the heart of competence and effectiveness in government. It is at the heart of what we should be discussing in the Chamber. We cannot allow

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the Government unthinkingly to renew the Bill with a five-year deadline because, as I have suggested, there was a five-year deadline before. It is clear to us that a deadline of five years is utterly inappropriate to a process that is already overdue by more than a year and a half.

In response to the Minister's point, I repeat that we are talking about practicalities and about a judgment as to what is a sensible, businesslike and responsible approach to a vitally important problem. There is the practical issue, which is vital, of the rate of progress of decommissioning and the date on which decommissioning will be complete. I hope that we shall have an opportunity later to focus a little more on that subject. However, there is also the issue of the confidence that is created in the meantime on both sides of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland—confidence in the reality, integrity and transparency of the process and in the extent to which people can take seriously the prospect of moving to a democracy free from the threat of the gun and Semtex.

Although such issues are practical, they are enormously important to the peace process as a whole. All the policies that may be devised to achieve peace in Northern Ireland can be brought to naught if we are not extremely careful each time we deal with such a delicate matter as decommissioning and the regime to bring it about. We must be careful to structure the pattern of incentives and disincentives that will be applied to all who have to take part in the most rational and effective fashion.

I have made it clear that we believe that deadlines are important, and the Government have not contested that. I have made it plain that they have got it quite wrong in allowing another five years and, so far, we have not heard any justification for that. The Minister promises that there will be some justification, and let us hope that that is so. We will listen to what she says. However, at the moment, we are extremely concerned about the whole drift of Government policies and about what we think is an important misjudgment that has been expressed on the face of the Bill. However, it can be corrected and I hope that it will be corrected by the Committee accepting our amendments.

I have already carefully said that deadlines are important, but they are only one aspect of the process. They are only one—although an important one—of the pressures that can be applied to ensure that we have earlier and more certain decommissioning and that it is less probable that it will never be completed or will take longer.

As I said on Second Reading, I believe that it is likely that there will be further acts of decommissioning. I said on that occasion—I stand by my judgment—that there is a reasonable expectation that Sinn Fein, for reasons connected entirely with its prospects in the Irish elections in May, may feel it necessary to make at least a symbolic further act of decommissioning between now and then. There is no doubt that the Americans played an absolutely critical part in securing the act of decommissioning that took place at the end of October, and the timely application of pressure from that quarter may bring about another act of decommissioning at some time.

Of course, other instruments can be applied—and not necessarily by us. The two instruments that I have just mentioned are a function either of Irish domestic politics or of the policies of the United States Administration. However, it is our responsibility to make sure that the instruments that are in the hands of the British Government and the British Parliament are used most effectively. That is where our concern lies.

I wish to make a final point about a matter that has concerned me the more in that I think that the Government have not sufficiently recognised a certain danger. It is sensible in life to put oneself in the shoes or, as far as possible, in the mind of a particular opponent or counterpart in any negotiating process. I wonder whether the Government have done that effectively because, in the case of Sinn Fein-IRA, if they had they would realise that there might be reasons for them to decommission, some of which I have mentioned. However, one strong reason, which unfortunately has been greatly strengthened by the Government's recent conduct, for spinning out the process and not completing decommissioning until the Greek calends is that that tactic is an effective way of securing concessions.

Lamentable though the situation is, far from the British Government being able to put pressure on Sinn Fein-IRA, the fact is that Sinn Fein-IRA sit on their weapons and do not implement their obligations under the Belfast agreement. The Government then go to them and say, "Look. There is no progress on Belfast. We are very worried about that. What can we do to increase momentum and help you?" Naturally, Sinn Fein-IRA ask for concessions, which the Government give.

Sinn Fein-IRA still do not decommission, however, or, if they do, it is a minimal act. They wait the maximum amount of time before doing anything else because they expect the Government to offer more concessions. That is the history of the past few months—of Weston Park and of the lamentable concessions that we made to Sinn Fein-IRA MPs to come here on the basis of special status. I repeat that I would be only too glad if they took their seats on the same basis as everyone else, but that is not want they want to do and not what is happening.

The Government have sadly got themselves into a position in which they are negotiating in the wrong direction. Instead of using the instruments that are available to them to put pressure on Sinn Fein-IRA, they throw them away, in the same way as they release prisoners willy-nilly despite no progress in decommissioning. The Government then allow Sinn Fein-IRA to turn the tables on them and say, "Right. You want more decommissioning? You think that you've already paid for that in the Belfast agreement, but no: we both accept that you've got to make more concessions on top of Belfast. So we would like the next one please." That has been the history of the subterranean negotiations over the past few months between Sinn Fein-IRA and the Government.

All the public manifestations of those negotiations are regrettable and some of them are discreditable. We have debated them in the House, especially in the two debates before Christmas. I beg the Government, in the interests of Northern Ireland, the peace process and any value that they share with me, to think again and stop this nonsense. They need to start saying to Sinn Fein-IRA, "We are sorry. We have an agreement. You must implement it in full before any further concessions are made or before we are prepared to talk about making any further moves on our side."

I put it to the Government most forcefully, and believe that I am right to do so, that there is no purpose in having an agreement with anyone if the other side is not going to implement it and asks for more concessions before it carries out its share, as outlined in the initial agreement. That is a hopeless way to conduct a negotiation in any context of life. It is especially regrettable and irresponsible when so many important things are at stake, such as people's lives and peace and democracy in a part of our country.

The matter is not technical, but practical. It relates to a practical judgment about how to conduct a negotiation in such circumstances. It has enormous consequences that will concern everyone in the country and it is important that we get it right. The debate is crucial. We shall all listen with bated breath to the Minister and I hope that even at this eleventh hour she may have had a slight change of mind.

**Lembit Öpik:** I am grateful for the opportunity to consider the issues raised by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies). I listened with great interest. His crucial point, which he kindly confirmed in response to my intervention, is that we are considering something that is a matter not of principle, but of practicality. That is a tremendously important and helpful clarification. However, let us bear in mind the fact that the Conservatives pulled out of the cross-party agreement not on a matter of principle, as we now find out, but on a matter of practicality. I find that surprising. In my judgment, a matter of practicality alone does not warrant a response of such enormity.

4.15 pm

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** I must intervene, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for taking my intervention. He has made two important errors. First, the Opposition did not pull out of bipartisanship: the Government walked away from the basis of bipartisanship. That basis was the Belfast agreement and its implementation. When the Government went beyond that and, even before Belfast had been implemented, said that they would start throwing out new unilateral concessions, we said, "Wait a moment. You have left the territory on which we stood together. You have withdrawn from Belfast."

Secondly, as I tried to make clear in my earlier remarks, the matter might be a practical one, but it has the profoundest consequences for the future of the entire process. It is not, therefore, a minor issue, and it would be extremely regrettable if it were considered in that light.

**Lembit Öpik:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and invite him to intervene again if he feels that I have misrepresented his remarks. He says that, in the view of the Conservatives, the Government walked away from the Belfast agreement. Let us be grown up about the matter. It was the hon. Gentleman himself who made an absolutely clear statement that the Conservatives were taking the proactive decision to walk away from the cross-party consensus.

We had a substantial debate about the way in which that had been reported in the press at the time, but at that time I did not hear the hon. Gentleman questioning my interpretation that the Conservatives were indeed pulling out of the cross-party consensus. If I have misunderstood that, I should be grateful for the hon. Gentleman's clarification. I should be delighted to hear that I have misunderstood, and perhaps that the Minister has also misunderstood the position, and that the Conservatives remain committed to a cross-party consensus.

**Mr. Davies:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. He has indeed misunderstood. I shall therefore try again. Our position has not changed. We support the Belfast agreement; we have always supported the Belfast agreement. We believe that it should be implemented. We believe that it is quite wrong, before it has been implemented and before all sides have fulfilled their undertakings under it, to consider further moves—further concessions—going beyond it in favour of any parties to the Belfast agreement.

When the Government decided to take that course, we said that we could no longer support them. The Government have an opportunity in the debate this afternoon to pull back from that position. I sincerely hope that they will do so and say in future that the Belfast agreement must be implemented, decommissioning must be completed, and only then can we consider any further concessions to any parties to the Belfast agreement which have yet to implement it.

I cannot make our position clearer than that. It has been clear since the Weston Park agreement, which has never been debated in the House, that the Government were launched on a new course. The first measures that the Government introduced in accordance with their new strategy were those that we debated before Christmas. I made it plain then that we could not support them in that new and irresponsible departure.

I continue to reiterate that position. I have said the same thing—in different ways, admittedly—three or four times in the debate this afternoon. When the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) reads *Hansard* tomorrow morning, he will know unambiguously where the Opposition stand.

**The Chairman:** Order. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) has managed to provoke two very long interventions. Perhaps we might now narrow in on the specifics of the amendment before the Committee.

**Lembit Öpik:** I certainly wish to focus on the amendments, Sir Alan, and I am grateful for your forbearance as we clarified that point. I believe that it is relevant to the debate, because understanding the Conservatives' motives in supporting the amendments will help me to provide a response to them. However, I shall not dwell on the matter. I shall do as the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford says and study *Hansard* in great detail. I shall conclude from what he said that it was only a partial withdrawal from the cross-party consensus. I am encouraged by that. The hon. Gentleman also said that the amendments had been tabled on a matter of judgment, not on—

**Mr. Davies:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Lembit Öpik:** I will give way, as the point is so important, but then I must move on.

**Mr. Davies:** I know that the hon. Gentleman does not want to use words disingenuously, but when he talks

*[Mr. Davies]*

about the Conservative party withdrawing or pulling out, he is implying that the movement or change was made by us—far from it. We have stayed in the same place; it is the Government who have moved.

**Lembit Öpik:** I shall not incur your wrath, Sir Alan, by pursuing that point, but I simply say that it sounds to me that one can be rather more optimistic that the hon. Gentleman, who is by nature a very pleasant and consensual man, is perhaps pulling back from what I incorrectly interpreted last year as withdrawal from the cross-party consensus. That is tremendously encouraging.

Returning to the issue of principle versus practicality, it strikes me that, as I hope we can agree the hon. Gentleman said, at the core of the debate there is a matter of judgment: whether the proposal in the Act is more or less appropriate than that in the Bill. It all boils down to how long we should enable the amnesty to continue.

I should from the outset say that the Liberal Democrats feel on balance that it is likely that the Government's proposal will make sense. It is probably helpful to the peace process to extend the amnesty in the way described. Let us remember that even the provisions of the unamended legislation must be debated and approved every year; otherwise the amnesty will fall. Therefore, we are talking about a rather detailed point: whether the opportunity to renew the amnesty should be allowed to continue on an annual basis until 2007 or for a shorter period. For that reason, we need to look at some pragmatic considerations.

On several occasions when Conservatives have opposed relaxation of provisions and various steps forward, those steps have led to significant progress in the peace initiative. For example, there was great scepticism on the Conservative Benches and expressed by the hon. Gentleman's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), about the prospect of any decommissioning, yet it came about. Therefore, as one's judgment on Northern Ireland matters has evidently been flawed in the past, surely one needs to be cautious rather than vitriolic about the certainty with which one objects to the Government's proposals in the present.

The hon. Gentleman said that he felt short deadlines tended to concentrate the mind, but if they are too short they can become meaningless. For example, the Prime Minister made a mistake in saying that there was no plan B in the Northern Ireland peace process. In fact, when no result was achieved, there turned out to be a plan B and the Government's credibility was slightly harmed by the decision. I suspect that as long as the peace process is moving forward there will always be a plan B, a plan C or a plan D.

We are not dealing with idiots in northern Irish politics; we are dealing with some of the most sophisticated politicians anywhere in Europe. I am very aware of those sitting on the Benches behind me when I say that, and I hope that they are nodding. *[Interruption.]* I was of course referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green), as well as to those on the Unionist Benches and Democratic Unionist party Members. Let us not pretend that a deadline that is very likely to be extended by any Government who are making progress should be regarded as naive or superficial by those with whom we are dealing.

**Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): Would the hon. Gentleman care to mention how close it was to the deadline before the IRA took what has been described as a significant move towards decommissioning? I recall that it did so well beyond the deadline.

**Lembit Öpik:** The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me. There were four deadlines. Each of them was challenged and some fell, while some were exceeded. However, the fact of the matter is that the process continued not because of the deadlines or because those involved were frightened to break them. As he said, we went way past the original deadline. That happened because of internal matters relating to Northern Ireland and external matters relating to 11 September and the terrible own goal that the IRA scored in Colombia. Those matters were outside our control, but within our control was the provision of a sphere of opportunity in which initiatives could be taken if some external or internal matter might prompt them. Incidentally, I should say that Sinn Fein scored a remarkable triumph of public relations in turning that tremendous own goal in Colombia into a public relations success. That underlines the fact that we are dealing with very hard-nosed politicians who understand the game and will not be fooled by superficial deadlines that will be exceeded and have been in the past. There is a precedent of exceeding them not only under the existing Government, but under the previous one.

**Mr. Swire:** Will the hon. Gentleman clarify the remarks that he made in a press release in August last year? He said:

"There does need to be further clarification of the timetable for the decommissioning of IRA weapons."

Is it the official Liberal Democrat position that the party is satisfied or not satisfied?

**Lembit Öpik:** We are very satisfied that decommissioning has started. As I said, on judgment we conditionally feel satisfied that the Government are putting forward a reasonable agenda specifying a period during which we decide every year whether it is acceptable to proceed with the amnesty. I stress again that this is not a one-off debate between now and 2007. If I understand the Bill correctly, there will be another debate in 12 months, when we must return to the matter, assess what progress has been made and consider the reasonable concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford and his colleagues. We are arguing about the best process and various details in that respect.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): The hon. Gentleman spoke about hard-nosed politicians and the perception in Northern Ireland. Does he recognise that the slithering that has been going on has caused greater disillusionment among ordinary people in Northern Ireland? Is it not time that they were considered, as well as hard-nosed terrorists?

**Lembit Öpik:** The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed this matter previously on the Floor of the House. He is right, and I was going to deal later with

those very reasonable concerns. Unionist politicians in particular have expressed repeatedly in the Chamber and outside exactly the same concerns about disillusionment in the Unionist population. They have been described by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford, and no doubt they are shared by all colleagues on the Unionist Benches. The issue needs to be addressed, but I suspect that the Bill in its current form will not help to reassure the Unionist population. Can the Minister of State provide some sort of reassurance that this very salient point will be taken on board? Although I have been criticising the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford in respect of other matters, I know that he has consistently and correctly raised the issue in the Chamber and outside. It is reasonable for the Committee to expect some reassurance from the Minister.

In the context of a gradual step forward, let us remember what the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) said on 22 November 1999, which is a long time ago. Speaking about the Mitchell review, he said:

"The review has not produced a single text like the Good Friday agreement. Instead, it has concentrated on building trust and confidence by means of a number of important steps forward rather than waiting for one giant leap that might never be made."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1999; Vol. 339, c. 345.]

So, even two years ago we had a Secretary of State who made it clear that a gradual approach was the most likely solution to matters in hand, and I feel that we need to give ourselves the chance to enable that gradual process to move forward.

4.30 pm

I hope that the tragic events of 11 September do not have to be replicated for further movement on decommissioning, but a series of international or national initiatives relating to Northern Ireland either directly or indirectly, in the context of terrorism, may be needed to prompt the process to move forward. The Bill as it stands simply means that we have five years to do that.

Another point on which I take issue with the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford is whether we have already had a substantial time—whether five years is a substantial time for decommissioning. Let us remember that we are dealing with an issue that, depending on how we define it, has existed for decades, for almost a century, or for several centuries—one's historical perspective will determine which time scale one chooses. In that context, five years is not a long time. If we look at where we started and where we are now, we realise that those five years have generated more progress than the previous 30 years. That is a reasonable ground on which to give ourselves the space to allow the process to carry on.

When one thinks about such things, it is always appropriate to ask, "What would I do if I were in the position of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland?" *[Interruption.]* I hear cheers of approval from the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford. Clearly he is thinking of defecting, as others have recently done—the door is always open.

All of us, if we were in that position, would unquestionably start with the idea of outcomes. We would not focus on process, but would try to be clear what we were trying to do in the job—and surely that is to secure the peace and to stabilise and normalise the lives of the ordinary people in Northern Ireland. If one concentrates on outcomes, the process is simply a tool, not an end in itself, and I believe that one would end up making pragmatic decisions along the way, not always with everyone's support.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford talked about "subterranean goings on" at Weston Park. I share his suspicions, and I think, although I am not sure, that there probably have been some informal agreements—perhaps even some talk about extending the amnesty. However, even if those discussions did take place, if, ultimately, they stabilise Northern Ireland and make it a more peaceful place, surely it is the Government's responsibility to take those risks and make those decisions.

I remind Conservative Members that, to his great eternal credit, when John Major was Prime Minister he was negotiating with the IRA when it was not even on ceasefire. That was a much riskier and more dangerous thing to do in the political context, in terms of the potential for sending signals to terrorists that they could bomb and negotiate at the same time. We must not forget that that initiative, which I personally supported even at the time, was Conservative sponsored.

I am sure that the Committee is now clear about what the amendments are intended to do, and we all understand that this is simply a debate about timing—or rather, not even about timing as such, but about how many times we can come back and discuss whether to extend the 12-month amnesty period again. I would like to think that it will all be over by 2003 or 2005, but I am not confident enough about that to be sure that we do not need the leeway to come back again until 2007.

For those reasons, and although I respect others' right to differ—I also recognise the great pressures, to which I have already alluded, on Unionist and Democratic Unionist politicians in particular—I think that we have to bite the bullet and recognise that we have been here before, with two Governments of two different colours, and that every time we have made substantial breakthroughs, it has been because somebody on the Government Front Bench has taken a substantial risk.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): The amendment fails to recognise that things move on in politics, and that new positions are reached. If this were an amendment about a hard and specific deadline, in the context of the past situation, I would often have been associated with such a position. However, because we have passed a previous deadline—which, although it changed, was eventually met—we are now in an entirely different situation. There has been an event of considerable significance in the putting beyond use of a number of arms by the IRA. Aspects of a deadline have, therefore, already been met—not, I think, because of the deadline but because of other factors. That helps to change the position. The Government have not moved away from the deadline position, but they have wavered a bit in connection with it. They now support something that could be called a rolling deadline. That allows for avenues of manoeuvre, depending on future developments.

As the Conservative spokesperson said, the change that led to the putting beyond use of those arms did not come from the pressures of a deadline, but was the result of other political considerations by Sinn Fein and the

*[Mr. Harry Barnes]*

Provisional IRA. They were under tremendous pressure from America following the events in Colombia, and then the events of 11 September. They also clearly had in mind the political considerations concerning their standing in the Irish Republic, and whether they were going to be a political force at the coming general election. As the Conservative spokesperson also said, there could be further moves, because they have to try to accommodate themselves within that political situation. They are very hard nosed, politically, and are now willing to advance their own position entirely through the ballot box, if that avenue gives them the better chance, rather than by other means. These matters must be considered when we determine the deadline.

**Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): I would suggest to the hon. Gentleman that the Government have indeed moved away from the concept of deadlines, because here we are today, debating a Bill that will allow the deadline to be extended for a further five years. That will lessen the potency of any future deadline, because there is always the risk that if we do not meet that deadline, there will be others to follow. The hon. Gentleman is, therefore, completely wrong: the Government have significantly moved away from the concept of deadlines.

**Mr. Barnes:** I am not completely wrong, because I recognise part of the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. I said that the Government have moved to what I described as a rolling deadline. Instead of there being a hard, specific deadline, which might in any case have to be changed by subsequent measures, a measure is to be introduced to allow different stages at which the provisions could, perhaps by statutory instrument, be extended in line with the contents of the Bill.

That is a change, but it has been made because the situation has changed considerably and dramatically. At one time, those of us who were trying to press Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA into some response were desperate. There was nothing we could do except lay down a deadline and say to them, "You will see what will happen if you don't conform to that deadline." The Ulster Unionist party challenged them on a number of occasions in connection with that deadline.

Many of us who proposed that deadline were willing to chance the situation; we were that desperate. We were saying that the situation might break down entirely, and that the whole agreement might go, but we believed that the people who would fail in those circumstances would be Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA. They would be condemned for having operated in that way and for not having met the deadline.

Sinn Fein-IRA have now taken a dramatic step in their history by putting a certain number of arms beyond use. The traditionalist argument of the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein has been destroyed. Sinn Fein is involved in the Northern Ireland Assembly and in the Parliament in the Irish Republic, and it has taken up accommodation in this House. That is a dramatic change from its previous position. We must consider that situation. We should not jettison the notion of a deadline, but be a bit more accommodating, because other possibilities exist.

We have learned that the greatest chance of achieving full decommissioning will come from various political pressures being brought to bear. Pressures from the Government, the Irish Republic and the United States are dominant in achieving change. That is why we need the flexibility provided in the Bill, not the amendment, which takes us back to yesterday's position as if nothing had altered.

Ulster Unionists Members have made important points. There is massive disillusionment in Unionist communities; something must be done in response to those concerns. We must show that action is being taken as forcefully as possible to bring about the decommissioning that people want. Other steps need to be taken to calm the fears in those communities.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and I have tabled early-day motion 616, which refers to exiles. Paramilitaries on the run will not now be chased, but will be allowed to return. If that is on the agenda in the general framework, pressure should be brought to bear to get a response regarding the people who have been placed in exile by organisations such as the IRA and are not allowed in any circumstances to set foot in Northern Ireland for fear of their lives. That should end.

It is not correct to say that Sinn Fein and the IRA are always being placated. We recently discussed legislation that seeks to tackle the problem of electoral fraud by Sinn Fein: it was directed against that organisation.

Things change, and pressures can be brought to bear in different directions. I urge Ministers to deal with problems such as the return of exiles, and there are some signs that that is happening, which is welcome. We should not go back to the situation before this significant move took place, which was forced on the Provisional IRA. We should force on that organisation more changes and require it to make more concessions. It should get out of its paramilitary activities entirely and into purely political action. I do not support its present political objectives. We need to tackle the abuses that it is engaged in, such as having a record of where its money has come from when it stands in elections. The money has often come from the most obnoxious sources in America and elsewhere. At least the American Administration have finally come to terms with this issue, and are seeking change.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** I appreciate the hon. Gentleman graciously giving way on that point. The Government brought legislation before the House that let the IRA off the hook as regards declaring financial contributions from elsewhere. Is it not time that the Government and the House started to put pressure on the IRA, rather than leaving it to the Unionist politicians in Northern Ireland or to the American Government?

4.45 pm

**Mr. Barnes:** That is a valid point. When we discussed entry into the House and the use of its facilities by Sinn Fein Members, the question of the Register of Members' Interests arose. Should Sinn Fein Members have to adhere to the requirement for MPs to record the source of any substantial contributions they have received for electoral purposes? Perhaps that requirement could be tightened, and used in connection with checking particulars relating to Sinn Fein.

I am not opposed to the putting of many pressures on the Government to be tougher in many respects, but it should be borne in mind that that sometimes prompts favourable responses. We should accept the gains that are

made, and not complain all the time. The amendment returns us to a position that I occupied in the past, but have now departed from. My attitude has changed, because circumstances have changed. The Committee ought to recognise those changes, and I feel that such a recognition is reflected in the position of the Government rather than that of the Opposition.

**Mr. Andrew Hunter** (Basingstoke): I listened to the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) with great interest, as all Members always do, but I quarrel profoundly with the thesis on which he based his opposition to the amendments. He argued—I think I quote him correctly—that the decommissioning event of last autumn was a significant move forced on the IRA. In a limited sense, the timing was significant because of the significant 11 September dimension; but that, I think, is only part of the argument. We must understand the full argument to understand why the amendments should be supported.

The hon. Gentleman overlooks one of the consistent strains of the entire so-called peace process: the Provisionals' explanation that they will decommission one day, that decommissioning forms part of the final solution, and that decommissioning will come when the causes of the conflict have been removed. Far from decommissioning being the sort of significant event that the hon. Gentleman might have us consider it, the token event of last autumn was in fact an acknowledgement that so many concessions had been made that, to a significant extent, the causes of the conflict had indeed been removed.

That brings me to a point also made by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik). Of course the situation changes; of course there is movement, if we continually make concessions to the men of violence. But the movement that arises from a democracy's giving ground to terrorist intransigence is not, I suggest, a movement of which hon. Members should be particularly proud.

My speech will be short, as my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) has fully explored the salient points of the argument. I merely want to emphasise one or two of his observations, and I do so with some happiness. I do not always agree with my hon. Friend about the Belfast agreement, but here we are discussing practicalities rather than the fundamental principle, and I think he has analysed those practicalities correctly.

I believe that the Belfast agreement should have involved a firm decommissioning timetable all along, with consequences for non-observance. I also believe that it should have involved firm links between decommissioning and places on the Executive, and between decommissioning and prisoner release. I agree with my hon. Friend about that.

**David Burnside** (South Antrim): There was a clear agreement on the total completion of decommissioning by May 2000, strengthened by and linked to the Prime Minister's promise to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)—the leader of the Ulster Unionist party—on the day of the Good Friday agreement. That was the only reason why some of us supported the agreement, which would have excluded Sinn Fein from government without decommissioning. It is the failure of Her Majesty's Government to live up to their commitment that has disillusioned the Unionist people.

**Mr. Hunter:** I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. On previous occasions, we have found common ground on that point. It is a fact that the Prime Minister went to Northern Ireland during the referendum campaign and made pledges that plainly misled the people of Northern Ireland into believing that there was that linkage—the commitment that men of violence would not have a part to play in the future governance of the Province.

The most telling point that my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford made was that the potential extension of the amnesty for five years amounts to a surrendering of initiative to the Provisional IRA. The pressure should relentlessly be on the IRA to decommission. Extension of the amnesty period will mean that the pressure is potentially lifted. Instead of the pressure being on the IRA meaningfully to decommission, the Bill presents it with leverage to make further demands in return for more token decommissioning gestures.

I am reminded of a general prediction. Many commentators anticipate that the next phase of token-gesture decommissioning by the Provisionals may come in the run-up to the Irish general election. I do not know whether that is the case. We will find out in time but the Bill unamended will enable decommissioning before the Irish general election, if it is to happen, to be token, just as it was token last autumn. Pressure is being lifted from the IRA, allowing it leverage to bargain for more concessions in advance of further decommissioning.

Another point was made by several hon. Members during the Second Reading debate; my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford alluded to it. The Bill unamended gives out entirely the wrong signals. A strong argument for the inclusion of the amendments is that those false signals will be corrected. False signal number one goes to the terrorists. It confirms that they can buy more time through procrastination, deviousness and orchestrated delays. It is telling them that they need do nothing until February 2007. I recall the words of my hon. Friend on Second Reading, who said that it is as though we are saying,

"Relax. Take your time. You are not up against a deadline".—[*Official Report*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 53.]

The concept of extending a deadline to speed up decommissioning is manifestly absurd.

The second wrong signal goes out to the law-abiding majority of Northern Ireland. The Bill without these amendments is effectively saying that to all intents and purposes decommissioning is open ended. In particular, it is saying that decommissioning is being moved further and further down the agenda. Indeed, implicitly it is acknowledging that it may never happen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford said that he thought that the Government were being sucked into a modified position, retreating from such demands as there are in the Belfast agreement. I am not sure that I share that interpretation. Moving the decommissioning issue down the agenda has all along been the Government's intention. It appears to have been one of the assurances that the Prime Minister gave to the Provisionals soon after the 1997 general election, because

*[Mr. Hunter]*

it was one of their demands for imposing a second qualified ceasefire. According to some republican sources, the assurance that decommissioning would be pushed further down the agenda was given to Mr. McGuinness and Mr. Adams shortly before last month's Second Reading debate.

I argue, along with my hon. Friends, that it is wholly wrong for the Bill to be allowed to proceed with such a diluted, lax timetable and without a more demanding deadline. As my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford said, it is a fact of life that deadlines focus attention and clarify positions. The Government are surrendering a strong, almost moral high ground on decommissioning by not accepting the amendments. I strongly support the amendments.

**David Burnside:** I wish to support the amendments. This issue goes far wider than pragmatism and extending the deadline for a while because the legal requirement is that the terrorists must be allowed to decommission. That was the basis of the Good Friday agreement—to move the terrorists to democracy and, one hopes, some time in the future, even to this place.

I am totally disillusioned with this process and give the Government no credibility whatever because the word "deadline" should be banned from Northern Ireland political vocabulary.

**Jane Kennedy** *indicated assent.*

**David Burnside:** The Minister nods, but she nods for the wrong reason. The word should be banned because it is a joke in Northern Ireland political vocabulary. Politics should be about defeating the opposition. We must think about what is in the minds of Martin McGuinness, Gerry Adams, Gerry Kelly and the rest of the Army Council of the Provisional IRA. What do they want? What message do they want from this House today? I shall tell hon. Members what they want: they want the same message that they have received ever since the Good Friday agreement was signed—appeasement, appeasement, appeasement, and list after list of further concessions to republicans. That is what they have got and what they will get. Some concessions we know about and some we do not; some were made in Weston Park and some, perhaps, were not. What else is there?

The deadline is an important matter of principle and pragmatism. The two are wrapped up together. The reason why people like me, who supported the agreement within the Ulster Unionist party, are so disillusioned with that agreement and its implementation is that the deadlines mean nothing. As I said in an earlier intervention, the May deadline meant nothing; the Provos could get away with it. The loyalist paramilitaries are all up at Stormont and the electoral system was bent in the Assembly to allow more people to get elected—there are so many at Stormont that I do not even know how many there are.

Her Majesty's Government are bending the system, appeasing the terrorists—the men of violence, the gunmen and bombers who hold on to their arms and ammunition—and not putting deadlines on them. What sort of signal is coming from this House?

I do not really want to support the Opposition's amendment of a one-year deadline, because the deadline should have been May 2000 and sanctions should have been brought against those who were not adhering to the agreement. The Prime Minister promised my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that the terrorists would be excluded from government until they had totally decommissioned and we had reached the end of the process. Instead, we have had a token symbol to keep the United States on side or to get over the home goal of FARC in Colombia.

The Unionist people have been seriously let down. The Government had better think about symbols and the message that they are sending from this House. The Secretary of State should realise very soon that, because of the use of deadlines, the abuse of the English language and the fact that deadlines have not been adhered to, the Unionists—I was among the 50-plus per cent. who voted for the agreement—are disillusioned. It is one-side terrorism.

5 pm

**Mr. Roy Beggs** (East Antrim): Will my hon. Friend concede that while we have no reason to have any confidence in the deadlines set by the Government, who have been seen to roll over at every hurdle and make further concessions, we have good reason to have confidence in any deadlines set by the leader of the Ulster Unionist party?

**David Burnside:** That is a double-edged question for me. My hon. Friend makes a good point and the disillusionment is felt because of the lack of commitment and adherence to the promises. We thought that with a new Prime Minister those commitments would be adhered to, but they were not, and that was why my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) was forced into setting deadlines when that should have been the responsibility of the Government. It should be the Government against the terrorists in the United Kingdom.

**Mr. David Trimble** (Upper Bann): My hon. Friend will forgive me if I resort to my normal pettifogging and say that I am a little uncomfortable with the word "forced". I regrettably found it necessary to do something about setting deadlines and I may find it necessary again, but I am at pains to point out to my hon. Friend that I never felt forced to do it.

**David Burnside:** Within the Province, under the Mitchell principles, we still have a fully armed—we do not know what the first, token act of decommissioning consisted of—Provisional IRA, and the other republican organisations, and the loyalist paramilitary organisations, both front and back ones, under different names, remain fully armed. The Bill and the amendments are trying to achieve an admirable outcome—to take the illegal guns out of Ulster politics—but in the process and by having no deadlines, we are ending up with the opposite result.

All the concessions are being made, including those on the Royal Ulster Constabulary. We talk about law and order, but why are we running down the numbers in the RUC and reducing the effectiveness of the special branch? We will see in March what will happen to the RUC reserve, but Ulster needs to retain the men and women of the reserve, because of the increase in crime and the continuing threat of terrorism. We will see if pragmatism

or principle holds sway, but I suspect that another concession will be made and the RUC reserve will be given away.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** Does my hon. Friend recognise that even the discovery of the activities in Colombia stemmed from the work of the RUC special branch? It is time that those in the House and elsewhere recognised that the continued weakening of the special branch constitutes a danger to this nation and threatens the countering of international terrorism throughout the world.

**The Chairman:** Order. I hope that the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) will not pursue that matter further, because it is outside the scope of the amendment.

**David Burnside:** The deadline is a principle that sends out a message, and the symbol of the message is important in achieving the objective of decommissioning. If the Government say five years rather than one year, they might as well say to the end of time, because a five-year deadline puts no pressure on Provisional IRA-Sinn Fein. In the May elections, we can be sure that if pragmatic Fianna Fail and Bertie Ahern need the numbers to make up a coalition Government, they will do a deal with Sinn Fein, and forget about the Irish constitution and one army within a state. Bertie Ahern will do a deal because he wants power.

My argument is about the symbolism involved in not accepting the tighter deadlines in the amendments. More concessions to the republicans in Northern Ireland are coming up. They were promised inquiries at Weston Park. They have the Bloody Sunday inquiry, and even the Bloody Sunday movies are being financed out of public funds by the British state. That is a bloody disgrace.

The republicans will expect—and will receive—more concessions from the Government. I am very sceptical about the process and the agreement. The confidence of the Unionist people is being destroyed. It is no good having a process if it does not have the consent of both the majority and the minority in Northern Ireland. Unless the amendment is accepted, the symbolic message emanating from this House through this Bill will be that decommissioning does not matter and that people should forget about what has become just another a wee symbol. The general will be able to go back to Canada for a while, but perhaps he will return in the summer.

We will not be told about it, but security will be run down. There will be a further weakening in police morale, and a reduction in the security that we need to cope with the increase in crime and with the sectarian violence practised by both the loyalist paramilitaries—disgracefully—and the republican paramilitaries, some of whom masquerade under front organisations. That is the way of politics and terrorism in Northern Ireland.

The House must not send out the wrong message. The Government should take a stand. A five-year deadline means nothing, except that the deadline is a joke. I support the amendment wholeheartedly.

**Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): I rise to speak to amendment No. 2. It offers an alternative to amendment No. 1, and its purpose is to give the Government yet another opportunity to send out a signal to those who bear arms that is much more robust than the signal contained in the Bill.

Our problem is that amendment No. 1 is unlikely to be accepted by the Government, given the tone of their approach on Second Reading. It would be a wonderful surprise if the Minister, when she responds to the debate, were to say that she was going to accept amendment No. 1 and the message that that proposal would send out to those who illegally bear arms in Northern Ireland. However, it is just possible that the Government will not be convinced by our arguments on amendment No. 1, so we have tabled amendment No. 2 as an alternative strategy.

Amendment No. 2 is a probing amendment, and it deals with the signals being sent out by the Bill. It represents an attempt to deal with the problems already described by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) and others. The context for the debate is that the signals sent out to the Unionist community and Sinn Fein-IRA are contradictory. The treatment of the Royal Ulster Constabulary is also part of that context, as are the proposals in the already published Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill referring to the symbology of the Crown and the state in the future of Northern Ireland, and to the oaths that judges will take.

The Secretary of State has also spoken of there being a cold house for Unionists, so it is clear that one set of signals is being sent to the Unionist community, and quite another to Sinn Fein-IRA. Amendment No. 2 would offer the Government a mechanism for sending a more robust signal. The Government's signals about resistance to terrorism, as contained in the Bill, are distinctly uncertain, as are the signals from the Liberal Democrats. That is best summed up by the way in which Liberal Democrat Members voted on whether the House's facilities should be opened up to Sinn Fein Members. Fourteen Liberal Democrat Members voted for the measure, 14 voted against it, and 24 abstained.

**Lembit Öpik:** I am glad to have the chance to point out that Liberal Democrat Members enjoyed a genuinely free vote on that occasion. In contrast, the Conservatives, by their own admission, imposed a three-line Whip. That is the difference between Liberal Democrats and Conservatives.

**Mr. Blunt:** I have to correct the hon. Gentleman. We had a free vote—it just happened that the Conservative party was united in its attitude towards people who are associated with a terrorist organisation having special treatment in the House and whether there should be one rule for one type of MP and one for another. However, a most uncertain sound, as usual, issued forth from the Liberal Democrat Benches.

What a contrast there is between the signals sent to Sinn Fein by the Liberal Democrats and the Government and those sent by the Government of the Republic of Ireland. Only this weekend, the Justice Minister of the Republic, Mr. John O'Donoghue, one of the most senior figures in Mr. Ahern's coalition Cabinet, reinforced the Taoiseach's remarks about Sinn Fein. He said that Sinn Fein had links with "an illegal army" and stressed:

> "It is entirely inconceivable that one would have a party in government that has access to serious matters dealing with security and defence while they were associated with a private army.

There can be only one army and police in any sovereign democracy."

That is the attitude of Fianna Fail and the Irish Government toward Sinn Fein and any prospect of its being involved in a coalition.

The Irish establishment, in the form of *The Irish Times*, commented in forceful terms in an editorial yesterday about the questions that Mr. Martin Ferris, a would-be Sinn Fein Dail deputy, posed about possible Sinn Fein participation in the next Irish Government. *The Irish Times* says that Mr. Ferris's questions

"are largely rhetorical. The arrangements in the Executive would not be acceptable in the Republic. What Sinn Féin will have to understand is that they are not acceptable in the long term either in Northern Ireland. If IRA decommissioning is not completed and if the new police service is not accepted across the community, the Belfast Agreement will fall, in time. Sinn Féin will hold no ministries because Northern Ireland will have reverted to direct rule. Sinn Féin ministers will not sit on North-South ministerial councils because they will not exist.

If it is Mr. Ferris's hope or anticipation that the Government of this State will operate to the compromises which have been applied in order to allow Sinn Féin to participate in the Executive, he is profoundly mistaken. There will be some ambiguity in certain Fianna Fáil quarters about this. Fianna Fáil will be keenly seeking Sinn Féin transfers in certain constituencies. Meanwhile, the possibility of a Fianna Fáil-led Government supported externally by Sinn Féin—but without Sinn Féin participation—is not a mathematical impossibility and is quietly spoken of by some strategists."

*The Irish Times* concludes

"But Sinn Féin's ambivalence between democracy and violence would render even this an appalling and unacceptable vista. If Sinn Féin wants a share of power in this State, it has work to do. It has to choose finally, irrevocably and completely between the armed struggle—in any guise—and politics."

That is the message being sent in the Irish Republic. One would hope that the Government were sending this clear message in the Bill, but the reverse is true. It is in the hope of sending a more robust signal than the one being sent by Her Majesty's Government in the Bill that amendment No. 2 offers the Government a different approach.

The objective of amendment No. 2 is to enable the Government to distinguish between different classes of weapons in the amnesty legislation—the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997—in respect of the timetable that applies to the items listed in its schedule. The amendment distinguishes between firearms and explosives. It proposes a three-year extension of the amnesty in respect of firearms but only a one-year extension in respect of explosives and the other provisions referred to in the 1997 Act. That proposal is being made in the light of the amount of weapons and explosives held in Northern Ireland by the IRA and the loyalist terror groups.

5.15 pm

According to the best guess of informed commentators, the IRA holds about 1,000 assault rifles, mainly AK47s. It still has most of the 150 tonnes of weapons obtained from Libya between 1985 and 1986. That included six tonnes of Semtex explosive, of which about half appears to have been used or to have been seized by the security forces—leaving about three tonnes in the hands of the Provisional IRA or the Real IRA.

It is also possible that the IRA has surface-to-air missiles, as well as important electronic equipment and detonation devices to set off large explosives, such as main bombs, and incendiary devices. The IRA has the equipment for portable factories to make incendiary devices and the time-power units that enable those weapons to be effective. The IRA still has the capacity for, and probably still possesses, 17 types of mortar for use against different targets.

The inventory held by the IRA—Real and the Provisional—sits against the loyalist stock of weapons: 200 AK47s, 90 nine mm Browning pistols, 10 RPG7 rocket launchers and 150 warheads for them, and 450 grenades. Those details were put into the public domain by *The Irish Times* based on information about the hoard of weapons in loyalist hands in 1988. It is believed that loyalist terrorists subsequently came into the possession of Uzi submachine guns and more AK47s, handguns and grenades.

**Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): That is a pretty impressive arsenal by any standards. Can my hon. Friend confirm that those weapons can be directly traced to the IRA? Are there further weapons belonging to dissident republican groups?

**Mr. Blunt:** I have been attempting to point out that that information was published in newspapers whose journalists have followed those events for a long time. However, they do not know precisely who holds what—any more than I, or indeed the Government, know. What we know is that all the various terrorist organisations—loyalist and republican—hold large amounts of substantial weaponry.

The IRA is known to have obtained 150 tonnes of weapons from Colonel Gaddafi in the 1980s. Some of those weapons go far beyond the IRA's requirements for the low-level terrorism that it has been carrying out, so what sort of low-level artillery pieces—such as surface-to-air missiles or light artillery—are available to the IRA? We do not know.

**Hugh Robertson:** There is considerable evidence that in the late 1990s the dissident republican groups were actively touting for arms throughout the Balkans, especially in Croatia. Does my hon. Friend agree that the position—dire as it seems—could be even worse?

**Mr. Blunt:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I acknowledge his expertise in that matter. Like several of my hon. Friends, he served in Northern Ireland and the House should listen carefully to his comments.

It is important that we remove from circulation weapons such as M60 machine guns, 0.5 in calibre machine guns used to fire on helicopters, and surface-to-air missiles that do enormous damage and can take out aircraft and helicopters carrying large numbers of people. We must also take out of circulation, as soon as possible, the explosives held by the terrorist organisations. That is what the amendment would serve to do.

The amendment would give the Government a vehicle whereby they could make a distinction between small arms and explosives.

**Mr. Stephen Pound** (Ealing, North): I am grateful to the hon. and gallant Gentleman for giving way, especially

as he seemed to be about to mention a hypothetical air force, navy and possibly even submarine fleet. So to try to bring him back to earth a little, may I ask him whether he agrees about two facts—first, that Northern Ireland has the highest percentage of legally held weapons of any part of the United Kingdom and, secondly, that when lunatic terrorists tried to blow the heart out of my home borough, Ealing, in August 2001, they did not do so with RPG7s or kalashnikovs, but with fertiliser, sugar, diesel and a crude detonation device?

**Mr. Blunt:** The hon. Gentleman is quite right, but some of his remarks are unworthy. I was not about to suggest that the IRA has a navy or an air force. That is just absurd. We are trying to identify precisely what weapons the IRA has and what capability is available to it if it chooses to use it. Of course, the difficulty for the Government and all of us in approaching this issue is that the division between the Provisional IRA and the Real IRA, no doubt, alters, and people move, with their weapons and equipment, between the organisations, depending on the politics of the situation.

As the Secretary of State said on Second Reading, we must always remember that the Provisional IRA is a terrorist organisation that is on ceasefire. As soon as it ceases to be on ceasefire—a decision that it can take at any moment of its choosing—all those weapons will be available to it. If the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein, which are one and the same outfit, want to be taken seriously, they have to start taking all their weapons out of circulation as soon as conceivably possible. The purpose of amendment No. 2 is to give the Government a vehicle so that they can say that holding serious weapons is completely unacceptable and that there will not be an amnesty for ever and a day involving certain weapons.

I accept that amendment No. 2 can be improved. It represents an attempt to provide the Government with a set of ideas for a different way to approach this issue and to send out the signal, which we are anxious to do, that we must be robust with the people who illegally hold weapons. There may be difficulties with amendment No. 2, because it would extend the amnesty only in relation to the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, and a one-year deadline would be applied to the offences listed in the schedule to the 1997 Act.

One of the offences listed in the schedule is that included in section 10(1)(b) of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. I have a list of 322 possible offenders under that section, which is headed, "Contributions to resources of proscribed organisations" and states:

"A person is guilty of an offence if he . . . gives, lends or otherwise makes available . . . whether for consideration or not, any money or other property for the benefit of such an organisation".

Of course, the IRA is a proscribed organisation, and there is a pretty clear relationship between the IRA and Sinn Fein. I wonder what 322 Members were doing on 18 December, when they voted to give resources to Sinn Fein.

Section 10(2) of the 1989 Act states:

"In proceedings against a person for an offence under subsection (1)(b) above it is a defence to prove that he did not know and had no reasonable cause to suspect that the money or property was for the benefit of a proscribed organisation".

We had an interesting debate on Second Reading about the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA. At the conclusion of that debate, one can have been in no doubt at all that even the Government accepted that there was an inextricable link between Sinn Fein and the IRA. Hon. Members appear not to have made any declarations of interest today in proposing the amnesty in relation to this provision, given their record on 18 December. They will have to live with that, but I wonder whether they should have declared such an interest.

To summarise, the purpose of amendment No. 2 is to provide the Government with another method to send the message that democrats' toleration of terrorists is limited and that the existence of armed groups cannot be permanently tolerated. The more substantial the weaponry, the less should be our toleration and patience.

The amendment can no doubt be improved upon, and that is why it was tabled as a probing amendment. However, its approach would give the Government another chance to say to terrorist organisations that, as far as decommissioning is concerned, it must not be business as usual for ever and a day.

**Mr. Peter Robinson** (Belfast, East): I regret that I have to begin by dealing with some of the attempted revisionism of recent events by pro-agreement Unionists. I noticed particularly in interventions on the speech of the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) the suggestion that all the ills that now face our society and the necessity for a Bill such as the one before us have come about because, in some way, the Prime Minister deceived the people of Northern Ireland and because the IRA have not delivered on the deals into which it entered. However, politicians cannot use those reasons to explain sufficiently to the people of Northern Ireland the bad judgment that they exercised previously when they considered this issue.

We face the dilemma that we do with the Bill because the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) entered into a poor agreement with bad people. He should have known, as all the rest of us in Northern Ireland who opposed the agreement knew, that we could not trust the Provisional IRA. He should have known, as the rest of us in Northern Ireland who opposed the Belfast agreement knew, that we should not take the word of the Prime Minister on issues that could not clearly be substantiated in the text of the Belfast agreement. Let us therefore be clear that we face this dilemma because an agreement was reached that was never going to be delivered by the Provisional IRA and that it does not intend to deliver even now.

Let us stand back slightly from the technicalities that some on the Government Benches would have us address, and consider the wider issue involved. We could merely consider the legislation—and who could be against a Bill coming to the House to enable decommissioning to take place? The Government could rightly ask the House whether it wanted decommissioning in Northern Ireland to take place, and everyone would say, "Yes, of course we do." The Government would then be entitled to say, "If you want it, we must have provision in legislation to allow it to happen." The Government therefore introduced this Bill. However, when one stands back, one recognises that it is only part of the jigsaw and that decommissioning is an essential part of an overall process. Only then does one begin to address the key issue.

*[Mr. Peter Robinson]*

The facts are these. Irrespective of whether the Government accept the Conservative amendment or whether the Committee supports it, the reality is that the Provisional IRA will not decommission its weapons.

**Mr. Trimble:** You were wrong before.

**Mr. Robinson:** I have been right all along on this issue, and the right hon. Gentleman, who says that we were wrong before, is still incapable of telling the House what the IRA have decommissioned, where its programme for decommissioning is and when it will next decommission anything. He cannot do that because neither he nor anyone else knows if and when that will happen. If justice is to be done and is seen to be done, decommissioning needs to happen and needs to be seen to have happened. If the right hon. Gentleman is prepared to take the word of the Provisional IRA, I am not; nor, indeed, are the people of Northern Ireland whom I represent.

What is required is not simply a timetable but a sanction. However, there is no sanction in the Bill or in the amendment. The only sanction that is meaningful is the exclusion from government of the Provisional IRA's representatives. That sanction is in the hands not of the Committee nor of the Government, but in those of members of the Ulster Unionist party in the Government in the Northern Ireland Assembly. They have the sanction, but were prepared to act on it only temporarily when they had to face the people in an election.

5.30 pm

The Government are, of course, entitled to put whatever length of time they like in their legislation, but the Opposition are right: the deadline is a farce. The very fact that it is being extended shows that it is not a deadline. We have the strange concept, delivered with a straight face by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), of a rolling deadline. Has he really not considered his words? How on earth can we have a rolling deadline? It is a contradiction in terms. If it is rolling, it is not a deadline, but a rolling deadline is precisely what the Government have, and year by year it will go on. They will introduce another piece of legislation in five years' time and, with clean hands, say, "Well, we need to give the Provisional IRA the opportunity to decommission should it wish to do so."

The matter is not technical. It is important, and not simply for practical purposes, because it is a matter of principle. We are discussing whether it is proper for people who are to be part of the democratic process to have at their beck and call an army with a stockpile of weapons that they can use. That is the issue that we are to address. I guarantee that if I were to ask every individual in the Committee whether it is proper that the IRA should have such weaponry, they would say, "No. There should be decommissioning", and if there should be decommissioning, the obvious question is whether there should be consequences if it is not forthcoming.

**Jane Kennedy:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is not simply a question for the IRA? It is also a question for loyalist organisations and other republican organisations that retain illegal weapons. It is a question for all who are engaged in violence and the threat of violence. It is for all those organisations to consider their position and for all those engaged in the peace process to use their influence to bring about disarmament and decommissioning.

**Mr. Robinson:** Of course the issue of handing over illegal weaponry is relevant to any organisation that holds them. It is especially important in relation to the Provisional IRA because it, and it alone, can exercise authority in government. A member of the IRA's army council exercises authority as a Minister of Education in the Government of Northern Ireland. That does not happen in relation to the loyalist paramilitary organisations. However, the principle of handing over illegal weaponry applies to all organisations that hold them. They should do that and there should be consequences if they do not, whether republican or loyalist organisations.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) made one of his best speeches. I do not agree with his support for the Belfast agreement, but his reference to the Provisional IRA's likely attitude to deadlines is spot on. He understands that much better than the Government do. Were we to put legislation through the House and tell the IRA, "You've got five years to decommission", it would not do that next week or next year. It would wait until the deadline when it could extract concessions from the Government before making another contribution that was as meaningless and token, and as much of a stunt and a sham, as its previous gesture; and the Government would herald it as a great advance of the peace process. The Provisional IRA will do that, with the Government making a further open concession the day after, just as they have done before.

I have no stomach for the play acting on the number of days, weeks or years of any deadline, because the Provisional IRA will use and abuse any deadline it is offered. The Committee needs to exercise its mind on what sanction it has against those who do not decommission. The Secretary of State has the power under existing legislation to advance to the Northern Ireland Assembly a requirement for the Speaker of that Assembly to put a motion before it for the exclusion of Sinn Fein-IRA, on the basis that decommissioning has not taken place in accordance with the legislation. He should do that immediately. Only that kind of sanction is likely to work and bring about decommissioning by the Provisional IRA.

**Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): Just about everything that needs to be said about this group of amendments has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) and others of my hon. Friends, so I shall not detain the Committee unnecessarily long.

All of us have been faced, although we may not have known it, with a deadline of 31 January. That deadline is for our tax returns. I have been doing mine this week, and I hope that all hon. Members have submitted their tax returns, or that their accountants are preparing to do so; otherwise there is a sanction. The sanction is a £100 fine. It is automatic and we all know about it. Of course, £100 is not as much money as it used to be, but it is still a reasonable sum. For that reason, I was determined to send in my tax return on time.

That is the point about deadlines: they put on pressure. If one does not accept the deadline, there is a sanction. It is straightforward. If one does not submit a tax return by the end of February, I understand that 5 per cent. interest is charged on the sum owing. All hon. Members should note that, and more importantly, should note the lesson. It is vital that the point of a deadline be understood. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Frank Field** (Birkenhead): My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) is off to do his tax return.

**Mr. Robathan:** The hon. Gentleman is indeed rushing off to do his tax return, late.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford observed, the Bill completely changes the Belfast agreement. The Minister will be familiar with the paragraph in the agreement that allows two years for decommissioning, which ran out in May 2000, as I recall. The Bill reneges on the Belfast agreement. The Minister shakes her head. Perhaps she wishes to intervene to explain why that is not the case.

The Belfast agreement allowed two years, yet the Bill extends that period, possibly by another five years. What is that if not changing—reneging on—the Belfast agreement? Those of us who, with a certain amount of unhappiness, supported the Belfast agreement as the best way forward for peace are greatly saddened that the history of the agreement, particularly since May 2000 but before then as well, has been one of appeasement and concession after concession to one side.

The Minister should show a little embarrassment or even shame. It is a great tragedy. As we heard, people who did not want to support the Belfast agreement were encouraged to vote for it in Belfast. I know many Northern Ireland people who voted for it and who are now embarrassed that they encouraged others to do so. They are disenchanted and feel lost. Only this week, I received a letter from a great friend there who says that the position is appalling. The crime that is taking place in Northern Ireland is that we are conceding and appeasing. I tell the Minister, in sorrow rather than in anger, that the Bill is an embarrassment. The Government should be ashamed, as should the media, which do not report the matter sufficiently well.

**Mr. Swire:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government are consistently undermining the Belfast agreement by conceding time after time? In May 2000 the IRA said that it was ready to decommission its arms. Now that it has had concession after concession over the ensuing period, surely it is for the IRA to explain why it is not happy to do what it originally undertook to do. It is not for the Government to respond in advance and always on the back foot.

**Mr. Robathan:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The Government repeatedly give way, having received nothing in return, except a few arms which are described as significant and which were handed in or destroyed in some manner. We can discuss till the cows come home how important X number of Armalites is, but the truth is that there has been concession after concession. That is appeasement, in anyone's book.

Loyalist terrorists are also covered by the extension of the deadline. Loyalist terrorism is a serious problem. It is exactly as bad to be shot, knee-capped or beaten up by a loyalist terrorist as by a republican terrorist. The truth is, however, that they are less significant, and the Government know that.

First, loyalist terrorists do not form part of the Administration in Northern Ireland. Secondly, from when I was involved in such matters I know that they are pretty much infiltrated by intelligence and security forces in a way that, very understandably, the republicans are not. Thirdly, loyalist terrorism is essentially reactive. Loyalist terrorists exist because the IRA exists. They are just a bunch of unpleasant thugs who are probably more interested in criminality than politics. They are not significant players, and to keep harping on about loyalist terrorism is a diversion.

**Lembit Öpik:** Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that loyalist paramilitaries direct a huge amount of activity at the nationalist community, and that for that reason it is very much in our interests to give them the space to decommission as well—if only we can get them to do so?

**Mr. Robathan:** I disagree entirely with the hon. Gentleman, who made a speech with one foot on each side of the fence, as usual sitting neatly on it before jumping off and leaping to the Government's defence and then into bed with them. Loyalist terrorists, like everybody else, should have decommissioned their weapons already. That was the point of the Belfast agreement. The hon. Gentleman might care to read it. Indeed, half of them are not now even on ceasefire; the Government have said that it is not recognised. I want an equal crackdown on the thugs who are so-called loyalist terrorists and the thugs who are republican terrorists.

I turn to the subject of dissident republicans, who are also covered by the extension of the deadline, which raises a certain disingenuity. The IRA terrorist movement is fairly fluid. It would be interesting to know what information and intelligence the Government have about how many people in the so-called Real IRA or Continuity IRA drift in and out of Provisional IRA discussions. That is not as clear cut as anybody would try to pretend. It certainly seems to me that the groups are moving among each other.

I am certain that members of the IRA, including Martin McGuinness and others, will know the players in the Real/Continuity IRA and what they are doing. It would be extraordinary if they did not, having grown up and worked with them for 20 years. I am sure that Government intelligence would confirm that—even though we continue the fiction that dissident republicans are entirely separate and form organisations totally different from the Provisional IRA. Such groups may disagree with the Provisional IRA, but they are pretty close to them in many other ways.

The lack of a deadline has also led to a rise in support for more extreme parties. I do not want to upset the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), but he illustrates the fact that his view is much more "no surrender" than that we must reach some pragmatic agreement, which we must if we are to achieve peace—and God willing we will. Much more important than the rise of the Democratic Unionist party vote at the election

*[Mr. Robathan]*

at the expense of some of the official Ulster Unionists was the rise in the Sinn Fein vote at the expense of the sensible, moderate, nationalist Catholic—whatever one likes to call it—vote.

People turned from the Social Democratic and Labour party to Sinn Fein, which is inextricably linked to the IRA. Part of that is the Government's responsibility because Sinn Fein have shown that it can deliver, stand up to the British Government and get what it wants. It can stick with the fiction of being removed from violence but get what it wants, carrying an Armalite in one hand and a ballot box in the other.

I would have thought that everybody in the Committee, including the Minister, would be greatly distressed at the fact that an enormous number of perfectly decent people in Northern Ireland are now prepared to put a cross against Sinn Fein on the ballot paper. I am sure that most of them are perfectly decent and could explain why they did so were they here, but it is largely because the Government have given Sinn Fein such credibility.

I should like to ask one more thing about the extension of the amnesty, and perhaps the Minister might address it too. What further plans do the Government have to extend the amnesty to Irish terrorists who have committed crimes on the mainland but may not yet have been charged, identified, accused or convicted? Will the amnesty be extended to become all embracing in relation to all such people, including those who were responsible for the Canary Wharf and Bishopsgate bombs? I care about that and I think that most people in London care. Perhaps when the matter comes a bit closer to home, people in London and England as a whole might care a little more about what happens in Northern Ireland.

5.45 pm

I have spoken for quite long enough, but I should like to say that a deadline must be a deadline. One of my colleagues suggested that the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) was talking about a roll-over deadline. That is what it has been. Nothing has happened and it has meant nothing.

**Mr. Barnes:** Two comments have been made about the term "rolling deadline", which was obviously produced as a paradox and was part of the general analysis in which I was engaged. With regard to people who have only simple-minded, yah-boo views on the matter, what I was saying goes well beyond such views, as it does in respect of the two hon. Members who have referred to the issue.

**Mr. Robathan:** If one has a deadline, one has a deadline. One can roll it around as much as one likes. The hon. Gentleman is not a fool, but neither am I, and I reckoned that a deadline of two years up to May 2000 was exactly that: a deadline. We have now reached January 2002 and we are looking at five more years.

The lesson that the Government have not learned is that the end does not justify the means. We want to see peace in Northern Ireland, but extending the amnesty deadline will not ensure it and will only be further appeasement for the thugs and terrorists who do not want to see peace in Northern Ireland unless they are in charge of the place.

**Mr. Baron:** As one of those who has served in Northern Ireland—I did so as a platoon commander—and having seen at first hand the atrocities caused by terrorists, I firmly believe that the Bill in its unamended form is a big mistake. Nobody is keener than me for the peace process to succeed, but the Bill, which allows paramilitaries up to a further five years to meet their decommissioning obligations under the Belfast agreement, is completely wrong as it sends out the wrong signals to the various terrorist and paramilitary organisations.

Decommissioning is the one element of the Belfast agreement that is lagging behind very badly. To suggest through the Bill that terrorist organisations can take their time—indeed, it says that they can have another five years—will not help the agreement's chances of succeeding. I hold that view for two reasons. First, the Bill will reinforce the feeling among Unionists that this is a one-way process—a point to which the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) alluded—and will generate problems for the leadership of the Ulster Unionist party and the Assembly in general. Secondly, the Bill also does not help the Belfast agreement because it delays one of the key ingredients that is essential to its success—decommissioning. Rather than speeding up decommissioning, the Bill has the opposite effect and will slow it down.

The Secretary of State and the Minister will know that there is a habit in Northern Ireland of taking everything to the wire. In other words, as anyone who has been to Northern Ireland knows, giving terrorists another five years means that they will take another five years without thinking about it. Sinn Fein-IRA are dragging their feet because that increases pressure on the British Government. The Government are allowing that to happen, which is plain for the world to see—except, of course, the Government themselves.

Meanwhile, the people of the Province continue to suffer. Violent riots continue while the paramilitary beatings, maimings and murders carry on. We are even building new walls in Belfast, while there has been no further progress on decommissioning. All that puts a tremendous strain on the Army, which is caught in no man's land, where a peace process is allegedly making progress while the violence continues unabated. It is not as though the other parties to the agreement have not kept their side of the bargain. The UUP was prepared to share government with Sinn Fein-IRA; the Irish Government have changed their constitution; and the British Government have legislated for devolved government. Meanwhile, the terrorist prisoners were released within a two-year time frame, which was not part of the agreement, in the hope that decommissioning would also follow within two years.

The Conservatives tried to link prisoner releases with decommissioning, through amendments to the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill in 1998, but we were defeated by the Government.

Sinn Fein-IRA are now holding up the Belfast agreement by refusing to decommission totally, and all that the Government can do by way of response is to give them another five years. That is a shameful policy, and betrays both the good intentions of those who have served in Northern Ireland and, above all, the people themselves.

As a country, we send troops to Macedonia to disarm warring factions, yet we cannot disarm terrorists in our own country. We have, rightly, played a leading role in putting together a globally co-ordinated fight against terrorism following the atrocities of 11 September, yet we bend the knee to terrorists in our own back yard.

The time has now come for Sinn Fein-IRA to deliver on their promises about decommissioning, and for the Government to ensure that they do so. That is why I support the amendments.

**Jane Kennedy:** I would like to take the opportunity to offer my personal good wishes for the new year to you, Mrs. Heal, and to all hon. Members. Sadly, for hon. Members who are engaged in this debate, with their particular interest in Northern Ireland, the new year has not started as we would have wished, because I should report to the Committee that there has been further trouble, which I understand is still continuing, at the Holy Cross school in Ardoyne. Obviously, we in the Chamber do not have the full details, but I understand that so far two police officers have been injured.

May I test your patience, Mrs. Heal, and invite hon. Ladies and hon. Gentlemen to join me in appealing for calm, and saying that, as we have witnessed in the past, confrontation and violence do not help to resolve such problems? Dialogue is the only way of resolving the grievances felt on both sides of the community in Northern Ireland.

I pay tribute to the work that the officials of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister have put into resolving some of the grievances, and to my own officials, too. Let us not allow the children to be made victims again, and have to endure unnecessary trauma because of the failure of adults to live peacefully together. Those comments are entirely outwith the context of the debate, but they serve to remind us of the seriousness of the issues that we are dealing with.

This has been a good and interesting debate, which has centred on the principle of deadlines. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) rightly reminded us of the importance of the language that we use and how we use it, and at the beginning of the debate the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) quoted what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said on Second Reading. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I take us back to that debate, and quote from a different column of *Hansard*.

My right hon. Friend set out our view of the deadlines and what they mean. He acknowledged that, as many hon. Members who have taken part in the debate would accept,

"Several factors led to the act of decommissioning",

and then added:

"but I do not believe that the pressure of a 26 February deadline"—

the deadline that we are discussing today—

"was one of them."

My right hon. Friend said that pressure had come from several sources and he listed several of them, some of which have been referred to today. He continued:

"In my view, the most important factor, and the most important sanction on those engaged in the process"—

that is, the peace process—

"is the possibility of its failure."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 40.]

I would like to use that as my starting point in replying to this thoughtful and probing debate. I know that the amendments are not probing amendments in our usual sense of that term, but are a genuine representation of the views and feelings of the Opposition parties, and I hope to be able to deal with some of the concerns that hon. Members have raised.

The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) is not listening at the moment, but he and I have shared many debates and debated many issues for what, for me, is becoming far too many years in this House. I am disappointed to hear that he believes that we seek to be diversionist. In my view, he downplayed the importance of loyalist terrorism, and I was sorry to hear him suggest that I was being disingenuous in supporting the Government in introducing the Bill. That is not my intention, nor the Government's intention.

**Mr. Robathan:** I did not downplay the importance of loyalist terrorism, but its significance. It is just as important if someone has their leg blown off by a loyalist bomb as by a republican bomb, but the fact is that loyalist terrorism is not of the same significance and importance in the political debate. I think that the hon. Lady is aware of that.

**Jane Kennedy:** Obviously, the hon. Gentleman and I have often disagreed in the past, and I am sure that we shall not agree tonight.

Of course the Government accept the necessity of keeping the pressure on all paramilitaries to disarm, but we believe that that is best done through the political process. In order to be permanent, decommissioning must be voluntary, and our strong view is that imposing deadlines implies that it will be forced. Hon. Gentlemen have talked about sanctions, but I do not believe that a forced initiative will secure lasting peace, which is, I know, what we all seek to achieve.

**Mr. Trimble:** I find it a bit difficult to reconcile what the hon. Lady has just said with the Secretary of State's comments that she quoted earlier, in which he referred—and she endorsed the reference—to a series of pressures that had produced decommissioning. The decommissioning was not voluntary; it was a result of a series of pressures, and the Minister will know that underlying this debate is the concern about whether it will continue, as originally envisaged. It would do a lot of good if she would say exactly what the Government propose to do now, and in the forthcoming weeks and months, about that issue.

For example, the Government have a programme of normalisation measures. Will they continue that programme even if it is not matched by a programme of decommissioning? Will the normalisation programme proceed, so that pressure is not put on the terrorists? Will the Government not take the lesson that, as the Secretary of State himself said, a series of pressures is needed? One of those is, of course, the deadline, but others are actions that the Government can take—or will the Government do as they have done before, sit back and do nothing, and let other people do the work?

**Jane Kennedy:** The right hon. Gentleman has made a fair point—at least in the first part of what he said.

*[Jane Kennedy]*

Obviously, I do not accept his suggestion that we sit back and do nothing, and let other people put the pressure on. Working with him and with others, including the international community, we seek to maintain that pressure. Perhaps he made a fair point about my earlier comments, but the pressure that led to the act of decommissioning was precisely the combined pressure mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and others. It was a combination of, for example, international pressure to decommission, plus the right hon. Gentleman's own action in resigning. Working with all the others engaged in the process, we must maintain that pressure to take the process further.

**Mr. Trimble:** May I take the hon. Lady back to the specific point that I mentioned? The Government have a programme of normalisation measures; some of them have already been taken and some have not. Will she turn her mind to any future normalisation measures that are in the Government's mind? Could not the Government consider linking those with a decommissioning programme? That in itself would be an immediate pressure, although not a big pressure. The Minister might not find it politic to be too explicit about doing that, but may I urge the Government seriously to consider linking that programme to a decommissioning programme? That is immediate pressure that could be brought to bear.

6 pm

**Jane Kennedy:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. He probably will not like my reply, but this is not about deadlines, or about concessions. It is not even about bargaining our way through this process. It is about changing hearts and minds, and we can do that only by continuing with our objective of implementing the Belfast agreement.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford led on the issue of deadlines in moving the amendment, but at no point—apart from oblique references by other hon. Members to sanctions—have we been told what he would do if, regrettably, there were no progress over the next year, and the deadline that his amendment suggests were in place. We have not had a coherent argument from the hon. Gentleman about what he would do in those circumstances. That is a genuine question that he needs to consider when dealing with these issues, and when probing the Government on the question.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** It is my approach to opposition politics that one should always be prepared to answer such a question, and I believe that I have set a good example in doing so. I have stated clearly what I would do, and I shall return to that matter if I have the opportunity to do so on Third Reading. I have said that we should attempt to negotiate a programmed process, and that we should give no further concessions whatever to republicanism, except when the Belfast agreement has been fulfilled or in exchange for incremental specific acts of decommissioning. I would not have given away the prisoners. I endorse entirely the view of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that the normalisation and further measures now under consideration should be closely linked to progress on the vital question of decommissioning.

**Jane Kennedy:** That was useful, and I will look again at the hon. Gentleman's comments when they are published in *Hansard* and read them carefully. I shall look forward to debating them with him in the House. This debate will run on throughout this evening, and a number of points will be raised in relation to the amendments and the new clause, and again on Third Reading. I do not wish to go over the same ground too often.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that extending the deadline—that is the phrase that we are using today—for one year only would put more pressure on the paramilitaries, but I do not believe that that would be the case. He must remember that the Bill extends the legal amnesty for only one year, after which, if we need more time, we must come back to the House for the issue to be debated and voted on again. That is the actuality of the case. I know that hon. Members are not being disingenuous in tabling the amendment, but to suggest that we are putting in place a five-year deadline is profoundly wrong.

The hon. Gentleman said that the last Conservative Government introduced the existing decommissioning legislation in 1997 in hope rather than expectation, and that the context is now different. I wholeheartedly agree. The situation has changed. We have achieved a blueprint for permanent change in Northern Ireland—the Belfast agreement—and I acknowledge his continuing support for that. We have begun to implement every aspect of that agreement and, crucially, we have achieved a real and tangible start to decommissioning. We are, therefore, introducing this Bill in expectation rather than in hope—the opposite of what happened before—because we expect the Bill to play an essential part in the decommissioning process and feel that we have more reason than ever to provide a proper legal framework in which decommissioning can take place.

**Mr. Davies:** I hope that the hon. Lady will deal with the essential issue before she sits down. The Secretary of State has acknowledged that deadlines are taken full advantage of in Northern Ireland by all participants. In other words, if we extend a deadline, all other things being equal we extend the time available for the completion of the obligations that the deadline governs. The Secretary of State has already said that. Perhaps it was an involuntary slip, but it was an extremely significant one. Of course, there are many other factors involved, but our responsibility is to get the deadline right. The idea that having a longer deadline will produce a shorter period of implementation beggars belief. The Secretary of State does not believe that, and I do not believe that the Minister does either. How can she therefore defend resisting our amendment proposing a shorter deadline?

I hope that the Minister will not return to the idea that the Bill extends the regime for one year. She knows that that is entirely artificial and that the signal in the Bill comes from the headline date. The signal being sent is that the Government are extending the regime for five years. The wording is exactly the same as in the 1997 Act, which introduced the five-year regime that we are

now rolling forward, so there can be no doubt in anyone's mind that the Government are trying to extend the regime for five years. That is their fatal mistake.

**Jane Kennedy:** I am falling into the same bad habit as the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) in provoking interventions from hon. Members. I must try to refrain from doing that.

**Mr. Davies** *rose—*

**Jane Kennedy:** I shall answer the hon. Gentleman in my own time and in my own way, and I have a number of other points to make that might answer some of his questions.

The expiry date of this legislation to provide the legal framework for decommissioning has never been a factor in any discussions with Sinn Fein or any of the other parties. We have started to call it a deadline in this debate, but the question has never arisen before or been the subject of any discussions with Sinn Fein. I hope that I can reassure the hon. Gentleman on that point.

On the speech made by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire, I must be careful not to fall into the habit of constantly saying what a good, thoughtful, challenging and thought-provoking contribution he made, but that is what he did. My years of practising the dark arts as a Whip have led me to be more careful in responding to the provocation that Ministers get from time to time from hon. Members seeking to goad them into making what they hope will be unwise responses. I shall not, therefore, go down some of the avenues that the hon. Gentleman pursued, but he made an important point about the concerns of the Unionist community in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) also made a strong statement on that issue. I accept that we must reach out and listen to those concerns. The way in which they are articulated is also important.

We must bear it in mind that the process so far has been successful only because of the engagement of the Unionists. They have been instrumental in the establishment of the institutions and in putting pressure on all parties to participate in democracy. The peace process cannot succeed without their continued engagement. There is much for Unionism to draw comfort from in the progress that has been made in recent times. I could list some of the details, but I did so on Second Reading and I invite hon. Members to look at those comments.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire talked about exiles. That is a matter for another day and a different debate, and I shall not refer to it today. However, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his contribution, which was well informed and provocative—again! I listened carefully to his comments and I shall think about them.

**Mr. Baron:** If the Government are to hold out a hand to the Unionists on this issue, surely the best way is to ensure that deadlines are exactly that—deadlines. They should not be a rolling series of lines in the sand that continually get eroded. Every time the Government draw a fresh line, the potency of that line diminishes because it has no real effect. The best way of bringing all parties to the table on decommissioning is to ensure that a deadline means exactly that—a deadline.

**Jane Kennedy:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is right to say that had we done what Conservative Members are urging us to do and held to those deadlines, we would not have had the act of decommissioning that we have witnessed. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members laugh, but we have had a credible start to decommissioning from the IRA. Whatever hon. Members may think of that act—they may have their own views on it—the decommissioning process has begun.

**Mr. Robathan** *rose—*

**Mr. Swire** *rose—*

**Jane Kennedy:** No, I shall not give way at the moment.

The decommissioning process has begun, thus removing the final obstacle to the full implementation of the Belfast agreement. However, we must recognise that implementation is a long-term process, and full implementation may not be completed for some years. The Bill extends the immunity provisions for one year only. It provides for the possibility—nothing more—of further extensions beyond that, subject to the approval of the House. We consider that that is appropriate. Parliament will have the opportunity to examine this issue again after one year.

We consider that an extension of the order-making power of five years is appropriate. As was the case when the 1997 Act was brought into force by the Conservative Government, the five-year period does not represent a time frame for decommissioning; it is simply the usual period for time-limited Acts. It allows each Parliament the opportunity to consider the basic principles of the legislation, as this Parliament is doing now.

**David Burnside:** Will the hon. Lady, as an experienced Minister in Northern Ireland, inform the Committee whether she believes that the Provisional IRA, the republican groups and the loyalist paramilitaries would support the Bill or the Bill as amended?

**Jane Kennedy:** If I can spare the hon. Gentleman's blushes, may I say that I thought he made perhaps the best speech of this debate? He articulated passionately and coherently the concerns of his community. I acknowledge the profound disappointment of members of his party and other parties, including the Conservative party, who feel that progress has been painfully slow, and that these acts of decommissioning have had to be dragged out of the apparently unwilling organisations that hold the weapons.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the message that should go from the House. The message to those organisations is clear: decommissioning is a process and a start has been made. The most important thing about the Bill is that it shows that the Government are serious in their pursuit of decommissioning of all illegally held weapons, and that they intend the legal framework for that to happen to remain in place.

Amendment No. 2 deals with the offences in the schedule to the 1997 Act. We see no merit in enacting legislation that in our view would be calculated to make those in illegal possession of weapons less likely to decommission. That would surely be the effect of the amendment.

Various aspects of the schedule mostly relate to possession of weapons or explosives, but others concern offences that may stem from a person's participation in

*[Jane Kennedy]*

decommissioning—not necessarily centred on the weapons involved, but on the behaviour that may accompany participation, such as the withholding of information or making arrangements with terrorists. The amendment would leave someone in possession of explosives open to prosecution, and I cannot see how that would encourage decommissioning.

We shall return to some of these issues as we go on to debate the new clause and Third Reading. For the reasons that I have outlined, I ask the Committee to reject the amendment.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 144, Noes 374.

**Division No. 124]** **[6.15 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. David Wilshire and**
**Mr. Charles Hendry.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*

Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and**
**Mr. Graham Stringer.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## New Clause 1

COMMENCEMENT

'.—This Act shall not come into force until after the Commission established under section 7 of the 1997 Act shall have

laid a report before both Houses of Parliament on progress made in decommissioning since the coming into effect of the 1997 Act.'.— *[Mr. Quentin Davies.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause stands in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), and his colleagues the hon. Members for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) and for North Down (Lady Hermon).

As everyone can see, the object of the new clause is to ensure that, before the Bill comes into force, a report is made to Parliament by the international commission and General de Chastelain. I assume that, if a report is made to Parliament in those circumstances, one will also be made, if it so wishes, to the Dail. Decommissioning is clearly a joint matter. Indeed, we know that a lot of the arms concerned are south of the border.

When I drafted the new clause, I in no way wished to be discourteous to the Republic or the Dail—far from it. It would be discourteous to put before the Committee a new clause that assumed that anything particular should happen in Dublin. That is not our business, but for the avoidance of doubt I make it plain that if our Irish colleagues followed the same line of argument that I shall set out, the report would be made there. I do not wish to alter the essential balance of the decommissioning process as one involving both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Both sides are equally committed to its success.

I tabled the new clause because there is a general feeling across the parties and throughout Northern Ireland that one of the weaknesses of the structure set up in 1997 was the lack of provision, or the lack of clarity of such provision as there was, for reporting. I do not blame our predecessors in 1997 for any such shortcoming and certainly not General de Chastelain or his colleagues. If there are any shortcomings, they are in the arrangements that were made in 1997 and the provisions that were passed at that time.

No blame is directed towards our predecessors in 1997. We learn from experience. Indeed, it would be unnatural if, after five years—we are compelled to roll over the regime; the Government have defeated our amendment, so the regime will be rolled over for five years rather than one in the first instance—we could make no improvements or draw no lessons from the provisions that were put through the House five years ago.

The Bill introduced five years ago was the background for the agreement between the two Governments in August 1997. Article 4(d) of that agreement laid a duty on the commission

"to report periodically to both Governments and, through whatever mechanism they may establish for that purpose, the other participants in political negotiations in Northern Ireland."

What has been unsatisfactory is that it has not been absolutely clear whether the reports that have gone to the two Governments have been limited to those that have been published by the two Governments.

The agreement stated:

"through whatever mechanism they may establish for that purpose, the other participants in political negotiations in Northern Ireland."

Did that mean that the two Governments had direct responsibility for reporting to the participants in the agreement and not to the public as a whole? There is still a certain amount of ambiguity. We do not know whether General de Chastelain has told the Governments more than he has told the public in the series of very brief, bare press announcements that he has seen fit to make over the past five years. I would like to hear from the Minister. It would reassure many hon. Members if we felt that we knew a little more about what was going on, and whether the Government have had other reports from General de Chastelain, or have received only the documents that we have received.

Would the Minister be kind enough, if she has a moment, to note that question down either mentally or on a piece of paper? It would be very nice, if she catches your eye later, Mrs. Heal, to have an answer. Have the Government received any reports in addition to those that General de Chastelain has made public?

If the Government do have any information that has not been put in the public domain directly by General de Chastelain, has information been passed on selectively to any of the participants in the process? Such selective passing on would be consistent with the terms of the agreement that I read out, but it would be an undesirable way of proceeding. It would cause considerable concern if some participants had information that other participants did not. It is what we would have called in my City days a false market. It would have been the basis for all kinds of rumours and speculation and be very damaging to the process.

It would be nice to know that the Government know nothing other than what we all know as a result of the public statements, but that has not been said explicitly; perhaps it could be said by the Minister.

**Jane Kennedy:** It may help to clarify matters if I say at the outset that all of the reports that we have received from the international commission have been published in full. Therefore, we have no information that is not in the public domain.

**Mr. Davies:** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady for responding so promptly to my request and giving us that clear assurance. It is extremely helpful.

Let us focus on the kind of reporting that we have had from the international commission and General de Chastelain, and decide whether to take the opportunity to indicate to the commission or the general that, in future, we would like reporting to be conducted on a slightly different basis. Reporting is currently, formally at least, to the two Governments. The Minister has just said that the two Governments do not keep the information to themselves; they have passed on everything that they have available. She implies that the Government will continue with that procedure. If so, I very much welcome that.

In a debate such as this, it would be unnatural not to be frank about the fact that, in some quarters in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in this country, the feeling has been expressed that the reports have been so restrictive and discreet that it has been difficult to form a clear view of what is going on. I do not want to criticise General de Chastelain for that, because he must take the decisions himself. He bears responsibility for ensuring that the process is conducted as effectively as possible and that

anything that he does contributes to the progress of decommissioning and does not interrupt it. I therefore understand his nervousness, when he comes to put pen to paper, in deciding what kind of report to provide.

General de Chastelain would accept, however, that it would be unfortunate if his reports gave rise to widely differing interpretations of the situation that they sought to depict. To read some of his reports has been like divining the Delphic oracle: it has been difficult to be clear about the interpretation that one should place on the words used. One word that constantly comes up is "significant", which General de Chastelain used to describe the welcome but belated act of decommissioning by Sinn Fein-IRA at the end of October.

The uncertainty has been made worse because of the interventions of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) on Second Reading.

**Mr. Swire:** Earlier in our debate, the Minister of State said that the decommissioning that had occurred was "important", whereas the word that we have heard used to date is "significant". Does my hon. Friend agree that, given that words are so crucial—indeed, they are all that we have to go on because we do not know the details of General de Chastelain's findings—we must know whether the amount that has been decommissioned is important or whether there has been an important step in the decommissioning process?

**Mr. Davies:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention, because he bears out the danger of too restricted a use of words. If the only description given to an act of decommissioning is a simple adjective such as "significant" or "important", nobody knows whether significant differs from important, or whether important is more or less than significant. Nobody knows quite how to interpret those statements, and the statements themselves become the subject of an enormous amount of speculation. Rather than contributing to credibility and public confidence, they contribute to a sense of uncertainty and dispute. That is extremely regrettable.

**Jane Kennedy:** I do not want to be mischievous, but what I actually said was "credible".

**Mr. Davies:** Those words are all subjective. What is credible? What is significant? What is important?

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will assess how the Minister could deem it to have been "credible" without knowing the amount of weapons that have been decommissioned. One could say that the very fact that decommissioning occurred made the event significant, but to say that there has been a credible act of decommissioning surely requires the Government to know the amount of decommissioning.

**Mr. Davies:** The hon. Gentleman makes an irrefutable point. If all that the Government know is what General de Chastelain said in public—they have just told us that that is the case—which is that the event was significant, nobody in the Government can take responsibility for using any other adjective than "significant". To use any other adjective adds to the meaning in a way that is not based on knowledge of the facts. It is therefore a completely irresponsible use of language. I entirely endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments. If the Minister would like to intervene again, I shall give her the opportunity to do so.

6.45 pm

**Mr. Hunter:** On the word "significant", does my hon. Friend recall that General de Chastelain acknowledged that even one round of ammunition was significant? That suggests that the word "significant" is subject to a variety of interpretations.

**Mr. Davies:** Indeed.

When I took the first of that series of interventions I was interrupted from reaching for my copy of *Hansard*. I was about to read to the Committee some remarks that are enormously pertinent to the point that we have reached in our debate. The hon. Member for Belfast, East said:

"In the desire to know and to test what the general considers significant"—

he refers, of course, to General de Chastelain—

"my colleagues and I went to see him. We asked if the commission considered the amount of weaponry to be significant, or whether the fact that anything at all had occurred was significant. He replied that the fact that an event took place was, to him, significant. He said that he had seen written on the gable ends of walls in republican areas, 'Not a bullet; not an ounce'. In that context, what had happened was significant, he said.

I asked whether the general regarded his meeting with us that day as significant. He said that yes, it was. That might give the House some idea of how easily he is persuaded that any event is of significance."

The key point in the quotation is this:

"I then asked him whether, if the IRA had decommissioned one gun—just one—he would have considered that to be significant. He said, 'Yes, I would.'"—[*Official Report*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 84.]

That quotation from *Hansard* is, I fear, extremely—dare I use the word?—significant. It is also—advisedly, let me add a word of my own—extremely worrying, because that statement has cast a great deal of doubt on whether the act by Sinn Fein-IRA was meaningful, if "significant" carries the sense of meaningful.

**Lembit Öpik:** What specific proportion of guns and weapons would the hon. Gentleman regard as significant? He must have a benchmark in mind if we are to make sense of the points that he is making.

**Mr. Davies:** No, I do not. The drift of my argument is, and will be, that this is not a sensible way of conducting a reporting process. That is why the Opposition tabled the new clause, which seeks to improve the reporting process. I do not wish to be too prescriptive. It would not be right, having given the international commission the task of overseeing decommissioning, to be too prescriptive about what it does. I do not intend that Parliament should send the commission some kind of form to fill out every time there is an act of decommissioning. That would be absurd.

However, I take this opportunity to say that I believe that a major contribution could be made to the credibility of the whole exercise and to the confidence that people have in its completion if General de Chastelain could be given an opportunity to set out in writing, objectively and in his own hand, an account of the progress that he believes he has achieved over the past five years. I understand that he would be in an invidious position if he

*[Mr. Davies]*

simply made a public statement in response to the comments made by the hon. Member for Belfast, East. General de Chastelain probably feels that he could not possibly be in the business of responding to statements made by Westminster or Stormont politicians, or politicians who happen to be in both those Parliaments.

The new clause seeks to give the General the opportunity to give an account of the whole of the past five years and to set the record straight where necessary. I leave it to General de Chastelain to decide whether, in the light of the reported conversation that he had with the hon. Member for Belfast, East, he thinks that there is a need to set the record straight. I also leave it to him to use such language as he thinks is appropriate in such a report. However, I express the personal hope that if he does so—and if the Committee agrees the new clause, he will no doubt do so—his comments will be, as far as possible, factually based, if not to the extent of itemising every item of ammunition, ordnance or armaments that is handed over because I can see that there may be arguments for not doing that. In that way, people will be able to measure progress towards the shared aim of decommissioning.

**Mr. Barnes:** I wish to check the purpose of the new clause. The hon. Gentleman has just said that it is an attempt to obtain full reports from de Chastelain, but it says that the Act will not come into force until a report is produced. Therefore, one consequence of the new clause might be to delay the implementation of the legislation. How much is that a consideration? That would mean that if de Chastelain made a nil report, it could still be a mechanism under which the Act would be implemented.

**Mr. Davies:** The hon. Gentleman asks whether it is sensible to make our proposal in the form in which it is expressed in the new clause. I believe that it is. We have plenty of time before 26 February, if we act on an agreed basis here and in the other place, to make progress on the Bill and pass it into law so that we can continue the regime seamlessly beyond that date. If the Government accept the new clause, I see no problem. The Bill will go forward in its amended form, so that is not a practical problem.

The hon. Gentleman also asked what would happen if the general produced a nil report. That would be a depressing event, but the sooner we knew about it the better. There can be no merit in continuing with a false process, with everybody under the impression that progress has been made when it has not. Progress has been made apparently, in terms of the first Sinn Fein-IRA decommissioning in October. I greatly welcomed that at the time and regarded it as significant progress. If the hon. Gentleman tells me that I was wrong and that only one rusty old musket was handed over, or a single bullet—something insultingly small—that would be very worrying, but the sooner we knew that that was what had happened, the better. There can be no merit in brushing reality under the carpet, and it is certainly wrong to do so in a democracy. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the process is a facade is horrific, but if the effect of the new clause were to be to bring forward the publication of such bad news, it would be better than to continue to conceal it. I have explained the rationale behind the proposal and I assume that the hon. Gentleman is satisfied, as he is about to leave. *[Interruption.]* My comment may mean that he will delay his dinner by a few minutes.

I express the hope that if the new clause is accepted, General de Chastelain will say something about the criteria or circumstances that would enable him to determine that the process has been completed—as we all hope he will one day—because it would be helpful for the credibility of the exercise and have a positive effect on public confidence. There will never be a time when not a single illegal weapon exists in Northern Ireland, because that will never happen in any human community. There are illegal weapons in Lincolnshire, for example, but they are not a major problem and I trust that they never will be. However, it is not possible to state categorically that no illegal weapons exist in any one region of the earth. That is not a reasonable expectation.

What would constitute the end of the process? What would enable the general to make that determination? I hope that his answer will not be that he will never be able to say that. If so, by definition, the Belfast agreement will never be implemented and the peace process will never be concluded. Anyone who has made concessions—and the Government have made many more than were necessary—will have made them in vain. Public confidence would collapse if the exercise were to lead nowhere. The general is a man of great distinction in his profession, as are his colleagues, and I cannot believe that they would preside over such a process if they thought that they could not honestly and effectively make a determination that the process had been concluded.

What would be the criteria for determining that the process had concluded? Those who have studied natural sciences are used to the discipline that before launching an experiment one must state the thresholds that it must meet before it can be said that it has proved something. We similarly need to know what hurdles must be overcome before the final determination can be made, in the right circumstances and when all parties have made the requisite contribution to the decommissioning process. The general has not been asked to comment on that point and it would be wrong for him to have a casual conversation and throw out some informal suggestions on such a matter. It would be better to make a considered and objective statement, such as in a report to this Parliament. I assume that the report would be made in parallel to the Dail.

I have explained the intention behind the new clause, and I hope that the Minister will agree that nothing that I have said runs counter to the Government's objectives and hopes. I hope that the Government will not contract that dreadful old Whitehall disease of "not invented here" and use that excuse for not accepting the new clause. If they do accept it, it would be helpful in continuing the process and enhancing public confidence in it.

**Mrs. Patsy Calton** (Cheadle): I commend the comments made by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes). He demonstrated conclusively that the new clause has all the potential of a wrecking amendment that would halt the peace process. That should not be allowed to happen. We wish to make progress with the peace process as my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) said earlier when he quoted the words of the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) about the need for a series of small steps and an increase in the use of the democratic process.

I welcome the Minister's confirmation that the IICD reports are all in the public domain and will presumably remain so. We need to move forwards and it is useful to know what is happening, but the future of the Bill—or of the peace process—should not depend on that.

7 pm

If we were given a report that gave the impression that not much progress on decommissioning had been made, that could be used by the Opposition to reject the Bill, and by IRA and loyalist paramilitary groups to say that they need not do anything to further the process. We cannot allow that position to arise.

Most of the debate on decommissioning focuses on the IRA, as Sinn Fein members have positions in the Northern Ireland Executive. However, we cannot forget that loyalist paramilitary violence has been the most prevalent in recent months. At every stage, we must remind ourselves of loyalist violence. Those groups must also feel pressurised into decommissioning their weapons.

On behalf of my party, I oppose the new clause.

**Mr. Hunter:** I am amazed by the contribution from the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton). She began by saying that she objected to the new clause because it was a wrecking amendment. In fact, it is the very opposite. It is a strengthening measure, and an effort to breathe life into the decommissioning process. To present the new clause as an attempt to wreck the process of decommissioning beggars belief.

The hon. Member for Cheadle said that the decommissioning process should be a series of small steps. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), who moved new clause 1, would argue that the new clause is indeed one of those small steps. It is a way to inject confidence into the decommissioning process

**Mr. Beggs:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, for the overwhelming majority of Unionists in Northern Ireland, confidence will be found not in the presentation of reports but in the visual demonstration of the destruction of weapons and explosives? Does he also agree that the hope and confidence engendered initially when the Loyalist Volunteer Force first visibly destroyed illegal weapons is what is required? Unionists need to see something being decommissioned to believe that the process is going ahead. After all, nationalists see observation towers being demolished.

**Mr. Hunter:** I strongly agree. My hon. Friend is surely right to say that the real test of confidence ultimately will be the visible and practical process of on-going decommissioning. I do not quarrel with that argument at all. Indeed, I endorse it, but I ask my hon. Friend to bear with me while I develop my own argument, which is that, on the way to that ultimate objective, there is a place for reports that are more detailed and substantial than those submitted by the general.

The hon. Member for Cheadle opposed the new clause, and appeared to argue that it would be dreadful if a report were negative and indicated that not much progress had been made. However, do we want the process to continue on the basis of a lie, or of ignorance? If no substantial progress has been made with decommissioning, it is imperative that we know about it. I am appalled that a serious argument can be built on the basis that it is better to be ignorant than to know that something is going wrong.

**Lembit Öpik:** Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that the symbolism associated with the first step towards decommissioning is the core point here? I have heard Conservative Members say that they are satisfied that the IRA took a landmark decision to begin the decommissioning process. Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that that, more than the numbers of bullets or ounces of explosives involved, is the core point that we are discussing?

**Mr. Hunter:** I do not accept that argument, although I wish that I could. I might be able to accept it if I knew precisely what happened that day in the autumn when the decommissioning event took place. However, as I do not know that I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman's proposition. That is the heart of the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford was right to argue that a defect in the 1997 Act is that it imposed insufficient specific requirements on the person whose role in due course was taken over by General de Chastelain.

I remember the deliberations, when the 1997 Act was going through the House, about what should be included in it. At the time, it was believed that the provisions of the Act would prove sufficient. The advantage of hindsight and the experience of the intervening four years show that the provisions were inadequate.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) makes my argument for me. If we knew in detail what the IRA had done in the autumn, we could join the Government in saying that it had been a credible event. I think that "credible" was the word that we finally homed in on, but other words that might apply would be "significant" and "important". Yet we do not know what happened, so I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford that it is essential that fuller and more detailed reports should be given to the Government, and then to Parliament and the Dail. That would allow us to make a considered and rational judgment about whether the actions of the Provisionals—and, one hopes, of the loyalist organisations in due course—can command confidence.

For those reasons, I feel strongly that the new clause should be supported.

**Mr. David Wilshire** (Spelthorne): I shall come to the Minister's rescue. I wrote down what she said when she said it, as I wanted to comment. I can therefore confirm that she said that the IRA had performed a "credible" act of decommissioning. I wanted to ask what that meant. I hoped that she was going to tell the Committee but, when goaded, she added that the Government knew nothing else.

**Jane Kennedy:** Perhaps it will help the debate if I were to say that an act of decommissioning would be deemed to be credible if it satisfied those specifically charged with ensuring that arms were dealt with in accordance with the scheme that had been laid down.

**Mr. Wilshire:** That is fascinating, and a perfectly reasonable point. I would go along with it, if the Minister

*[Mr. Wilshire]*

could say what had been decommissioned. That would allow us to judge whether the act had been credible. If we knew what had been decommissioned I would go along with the Minister, but she cannot tell us, as she also said that the Government know nothing else. I therefore do not know how we can decide whether the action in the autumn was credible.

I should like to be able to decide that the act was credible. I have been one of those who have maintained that the agreement will not work. I have always said, when I have intervened on this matter in the House, that I would be happy to stand up one day and say that I got it wrong. I really would like to do that, but I will not be in a position to say that I got it wrong until the Minister or someone else can tell me what has been decommissioned.

A credible act of decommissioning is the key to this matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) made a point that I very much wanted to make when he said that in some people's opinion one bullet, 1 g of Semtex or one gun would be important. Historically, the weaponry and explosives that were held in sacred trust for the cause were not for Sinn Fein-IRA to give away, but one gun would be. However, that does not lead us to the Minister's view that one gun will be significant; rather that has led to a group of people who still subscribe to the belief of no surrender and no decommissioning breaking away from the IRA. Therefore, it is not enough to say that such a move on decommissioning is credible because some IRA members are prepared to go along with something.

The Minister also said that this measure was reasonable because decommissioning was a long-term process. For it to be a long-term process, a lot of material must be decommissioned. There is not much else to do, and what there is will not take five minutes. If the Minister can justify the Bill by saying that decommissioning is a long-term process, I assume that she knows that there is a large amount of material to be decommissioned; otherwise, how can it be a long process? Yet she has told us that she does not know more than we do. The argument that decommissioning is a long-term process and that all our concerns are unreasonable falls on the Minister's admission that she does not know any more than we do.

I hope that, even at this stage, the Minister will consider accepting the new clause.

**Jane Kennedy:** I think that I said that implementing the Belfast agreement is a long process. We have seen the start of decommissioning, which is when the debate about what is credible, significant and important started. The start of decommissioning is important and should be acknowledged.

**Mr. Wilshire:** Yes, if that is what the Minister said or intended to say, I readily accept that. It is not what I understood her to say, but I will not make an issue of it. I accept entirely what she says and tomorrow's *Official Report* will provide clarification one way or the other.

I ask the Minister to consider accepting the new clause, which I judge to be very modest. I do not believe it to impose a strenuous requirement. Indeed, it is with some trepidation that I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) that he could have made the new clause even stronger had he wanted. In her very brief contribution, the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) referred to a negative report. The new clause merely requires the general to say something; I think that it would be helpful for him to tell us something rather than just say something. To say that nothing had happened would prompt us to ask whether to go down this route; to say that only one gun had been decommissioned would be pretty negative.

If the report is submitted to Parliament, as the new clause proposes—and I say this as much to those on my Front Bench as to the Minister—it should include an assessment of the overall quantity of arms and explosives that are to be decommissioned. There is no way of judging significance until we know how much the commission thinks is to be decommissioned. In addition, it would be enormously helpful to know how much of that the commission has actually seen. I suggest that that information should be required to be laid before Parliament. Then we can begin to assess what has been going on.

7.15 pm

**Mr. Hunter:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it would also be helpful in such a report if the inspector could confirm that he stayed until the end of the process and did not leave IRA men with the weapons that had allegedly just been put out of action?

**Mr. Wilshire:** I have a long list of items that I think should be included in a report, but that is not one of them, so I am eternally grateful to my hon. Friend for adding to the list. I shall come to some of the others shortly. However, my hon. Friend makes a very relevant point: unless we see what is going on for the whole of the process, how do we know whether it is credible or significant?

The report, after assessing how much material there is and saying how much the commission has seen, must state how much material has been put beyond use. Credibility can be determined only when we know how much material is beyond use. I understood the general to say not that a significant amount of arms had been decommissioned but that the event was significant. Given that, historically, parts of Sinn Fein-IRA have always said that they will decommission nothing, we come back to the general's point that even one bullet, as the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said, is a significant event. So that tells us nothing. We have to know how much has been put beyond use.

We also need to know how such material was put beyond use. The arms and explosives could be put beyond use in such a way that they were still usable. I imagine that some in the terrorist organisations would honour their commitment to give nothing away by sealing something up while knowing that as long as it was still usable, they had not destroyed it. If material had been put beyond use in such a way that, if it could be reached, it could be used, the report should say what arrangements were in place for the repeat visiting of the sites to ensure that, once sealed, material could not be used without breaking those seals. We would need to be assured, in more than one report, that inspections were continuing so that weapons were permanently beyond use.

If the report is to include an assessment of what the commission considers to be the total quantity of material, we would need to know how it came by that information.

To what extent has the commission had any dealings with the security services or the police in Northern Ireland or in the Republic? If it has not had any such liaison, where has it got its information about how much material is to be decommissioned? Presumably the only other way of finding out is to listen to the terrorists, and I would not take anything they said at face value.

**Jane Kennedy:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. I must try to resist this urge to intervene; it is a very bad habit, and as a Whip I would have discouraged it. However, does the hon. Gentleman accept that the new clause would impose no such requirements on the commission to include that kind of detail? It would require the commission to say nothing new. That is why I think that the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) was right to query the motives behind the new clause, which would not achieve the objectives set out by the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Wilshire:** The hon. Lady, as a former Whip, will know the lack of wisdom of intervening. She will also know that for an existing Whip, such as myself, speaking is not held to be a particularly useful activity either, so she may have some sympathy. Her point highlights why I said, as gently as possible, that some of my comments were aimed at both Front-Bench teams.

I accept what the Minister says; if she does not like this new clause but agrees with the principle, it is open to her to say that she will table another one that will go even further. I would be delighted if she was willing to offer us that, and would come into the Lobby with her. However, she does not appear to want to intervene again, so she clearly has the habit under control.

The Minister rightly said earlier that there is a tendency always to talk about Sinn Fein-IRA. I believe that we should all put it on record as often as possible that the purpose of this debate—indeed, of any debate about decommissioning—is the decommissioning of all weapons and explosives, irrespective of who holds them. Perhaps we can do business with Sinn Fein-IRA; I do not think so, but other people do. However, the weapons and explosives are moving to another group of people who will not hand them over, so dealing with only one organisation, from whichever side of the divide, will never be adequate.

What worries me most about resistance to the new clause is the spin that is being put on these proceedings: why should the Opposition be concerned? Why should we be trying to change the legislation when what is going on is positive? The word "significant" is being used positively. The word "credibility" has come up. All sorts of comments have been made about the fact that we are making real progress with decommissioning, yet the truth—rather than the spin—is that we simply do not know.

Thus far, the loyalist paramilitaries are the only people to have done anything—a point that is overlooked. The general Unionist community in Northern Ireland has seen almost nothing. The hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) made the point that watch towers had been taken down, so the nationalist community had seen some result. The Unionist community has seen nothing that reassures it, yet it is from that community that the major concessions have come throughout the process.

It is not too late to introduce a confidence-building measure—the whole debate on the Northern Ireland peace process has consisted of such measures. The Unionist community needs a confidence-building measure to show that there is transparency in the decommissioning debate. The people of Northern Ireland as a whole need reassurance that, in return for the concessions that they are making, there really is credible decommissioning.

The Minister could be proved right by accepting the new clause and then saying, "Look, this is what has happened. That is why you should feel reassured". Until that happens, however, I shall take the secrecy and the refusal to explain anything as meaning that nothing has been going on and there is nothing but smoke and mirrors. Until that is put right, the people of Northern Ireland will not be content.

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** When I read the new clause yesterday I was not terribly enthusiastic about it. During the debate, I realised that it could not do much harm, but when I heard the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton), I was convinced that such a provision was essential. The hon. Lady made the case well.

The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), however, put his finger on the matter: for an hon. Member to suggest that a nil report or a negative report from the commission might be used as a reason to oppose the Bill, or an extension to it, shows clearly that the party in question wants to hide behind a lack of information and would much prefer vagueness and ambiguity; and that to have the facts out in the open might lead the Committee to do something that it would not do if those facts remained hidden. As ever, the Liberal Democrats are the aides and accomplices of the Government; they have acted in accord with the Government on all these matters. It is thus clear that when Liberal Democrat Members make such comments, the Government are speaking through them.

The hon. Lady put the point forcefully. Like the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) I, too, have been jotting down the remarks of various Members. The hon. Lady said that we could not allow that position to arise. What position can we not allow to arise? Is it the one in which the House of Commons would have the facts made available to it? That is the position of the Liberal Democrats.

**Lembit Öpik:** I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for decommissioning, but he will note that the proposal, about which he wisely expressed scepticism, does not specify the nature of the report. Surely he must agree that even if the proposal were included we would have no more information than we do at present. Will he explain what he considers significant? His case would be strengthened if he could describe, for comparison, the measures of success that he would use for a more specific report.

**Mr. Robinson:** During my remarks I shall deal with those issues. If I forget to do so, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will remind me.

It is essential that facts be made available to the Committee on which we can base our conclusions. As regards the precision of the amendment—to address the

*[Mr. Robinson]*

first of the hon. Gentleman's points—it might have been better to specify that the general should give precise details of each type of weapon and explosive, as well as the weight of the explosives and the number of weapons that have been decommissioned, so that we could draw conclusions. If the general reads the report of our debate—I suspect that he has plenty of time on his hands—he will know what information we seek.

In relation to the hon. Gentleman's question about significance, no one in the House could judge whether the amount of weaponry was credible or significant unless there was a clear appraisal of the amount of weaponry currently available to the Provisional IRA and each of the loyalist paramilitary groups. The judgment as to whether an amount is significant should also include information as to whether it forms a significant proportion of the weaponry.

An attempt was made by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) to detail the weaponry believed to be available to the Provisional IRA and to the loyalist paramilitaries. That seemed to provoke the Government. Some of their Back Benchers thought that to list the scale of weaponry available to paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland was uncalled for. However, only when there is a common understanding of the amount of available weapons can we judge whether the event described as "significant" by the general really was significant or credible.

We know that at least one gun, one ounce of explosive and one bullet were decommissioned because the commission refers to all three categories.

**Mr. Trimble:** More than one.

**Mr. Robinson:** More than one gun, one bullet and one ounce of explosive—that is referred to directly in the general's statement.

I think that the scale of weaponry available to the Provisional IRA as outlined by the hon. Member for Reigate is correct, so if the amount was only two or three guns, a couple of pounds of explosive and half a dozen rounds of ammunition, can the Government actually come to the Dispatch Box and say that it was credible? I do not believe that they could do so. Could they say that it was significant? They certainly could not say that it was a significant amount of weaponry compared to the total available to the Provisional IRA.

I must take the Minister to task when she uses the word "credible". Although one might say that the occurrence of the event had significance—the House might at least allow the Government to say that it was significant that an event took place—to use the word "credible" speaks of quality and quantity. It talks about the proportions, not merely the significance of the event. It relates to the scale and the impact of decommissioning. The Government are attempting to spin what the general and the commission said beyond what is justified.

**Jane Kennedy:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we are talking not about the amount but about who describes the act as significant? That is about the integrity of the IICD. That is what I was saying was credible. If the general describes the amount as significant—as he did—the Government are satisfied that there was a credible act of decommissioning.

**Mr. Robinson:** The Minister is in a hole and she should stop digging. In reality, the only word that anyone is entitled to use is "significant", because that is the word used by the commission. To use that word, we need to recognise what the commission means by it. What the Minister might consider significant might not be considered significant by other hon. Members. So we are not simply talking about the difference between—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) wants me to give way, I shall do so—instead of which she consistently chirps away from a sedentary position and never contributes to the debate.

7.30 pm

**Lembit Öpik:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Robinson:** Yes, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who does make a contribution.

**Lembit Öpik:** In an attempt to curry favour with the Government, may I ask a related question? I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman's view that the proportion of guns handed in would be the only meaningful measure, but is it not within the realms of possibility that the people who would have to inform us how much weaponry they have might be tempted to lie about it? That has always been the underlying difficulty with an objective statistical measure of what proportion has been decommissioned.

**Mr. Robinson:** I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman thinks in those terms about the security forces in Northern Ireland. They are, of course, on record as having briefed Members of Parliament and the press very considerably on the extent of the weaponry held by the various groups during the past few years, and several reports on the extent of that weaponry have been made available publicly.

Everyone has a reasonable grasp of the amount of weaponry available at least to the Provisional IRA. A lot less is known about the amount of weaponry in the hands of the loyalist paramilitaries, but I suspect that they have a lot less than many people in Northern Ireland, and perhaps some of their own members, think they have. All weapons must be decommissioned, irrespective of whether an organisation has half a dozen or 600 weapons, and the Bill must apply to all of them.

Whether one uses the words "significant" or "important" makes no difference to the community's ability to comprehend what the general is actually saying, unless one has some idea of what is significant to the general. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), the Conservative party spokesman, quoted some of the comments that I made during my last speech, which followed the meeting that my colleagues and I had with General de Chastelain and his team.

We dealt with several issues at that meeting, the first of which was that the general was unable to tell us, because he did not know, where he had been. He did not know where the event had taken place. Secondly, he did not tell us what type of weaponry had been put beyond

use. He would not tell us what amount of weaponry had been put beyond use, nor would he tell us how it had been put beyond use, but he did tell us, under questioning, that he had left whatever product was at the scene in the hands of those whom he had met on the site—the Provisional IRA.

The general was therefore asked whether the process could be reversed. It was his judgment that it could not, but unless hon. Members know what method was used to put the weaponry beyond use, we cannot determine whether it would be possible to undo what had been done. Clearly, from all that the general and his colleagues told us, there was no evidence, which we could have taken on board, to suggest that a significant amount of weaponry had been decommissioned in a way that would have been satisfactory to us or, indeed, to other hon. Members. There was no evidence to suggest whether a significant proportion of the weaponry available to the Provisional IRA was involved.

The general told us very precisely that there was no programme for further decommissioning, however. No such programme had been agreed. If there is no programme for decommissioning, we are entitled to deduce that this was a gesture, a token and a stunt—some people have called it cynical; others have grasped it as a great event. As it stands, it is a one-off event, until the general has a programme that will lead to total decommissioning. That is the only kind of programme that will convince the people of Northern Ireland, provided that it is fulfilled at each stage.

During the debate, reference has been made to the value of agreeing to the new clause, given that there may be some delay before the general could provide such a report. There is no substance to the argument that this is a delaying tactic. No one could reasonably argue that, if the Committee were to agree to the new clause, the general would drag his feet in providing the House with the necessary report. I am pretty sure that the report would be forthcoming as quickly as the general and his team could put it together.

I believe that such a report is necessary because it would provide us with a starting point, showing where we stand at present, but what is essential is that in a year's time, when the House decides whether to extend the provision for a further year in a ritual that it would undertake for at least another five years, it would know from the report available to it under the new clause what progress had been made in the intervening year. The House would therefore know whether extending the period had any value, or whether we were simply going through a process by which the Government were attempting, by spin and hiding behind an ambiguity, to pretend that the process was on-going when, in reality, the Provisional IRA was not delivering, but was gaining all the benefits of being part of a process.

**Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): May I begin my remarks by briefly apologising to you, Mrs. Heal, and the Committee for the fact that I had to miss the first part of these proceedings because of a Select Committee meeting?

Having listened to most of the debate on Second Reading, I felt strongly that I wanted to speak in favour of new clause 1. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) for the new clause, because it goes to the heart of a key issue in the process: if we are to ensure that progress towards peace in Northern Ireland and progress towards decommissioning take place, checks and balances will be needed along the way.

I come to this issue very much as a fresh player; I am a new Member of Parliament, without deep or long-term experience of Northern Ireland affairs. In many ways my perceptions have been shaped in the same way as those of the British public, not only in mainland Great Britain, but to an extent in Northern Ireland. The impression conveyed today is of a largely one-way process. That impression is clearly left as we see the events unfold.

If that impression continues, the implications for the future of Northern Ireland are very serious indeed. That is why it is particularly important to include checks and balances in the process, so that we ensure that we do not continue, step by step, down the road, with concessions coming from one side, but not the other. If one side keeps giving way and making the concessions in any process of negotiation, the result is bad and unworkable. As we go forward, it is tremendously important that concessions come from all sides involved in the process, not just from one.

When I look back at what has happened since 1997, I see the release of prisoners, and Sinn Fein-IRA members joining an Administration in Northern Ireland and becoming Ministers in the United Kingdom. Steps have been taken such as that involving the amnesty for prisoners on the run, and Sinn Fein Members of Parliament have been given access to the facilities of the House.

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sylvia Heal):** Order. The hon. Gentleman is wandering wide of the new clause.

**Chris Grayling:** Thank you for that clarification, Mrs. Heal. I am trying to make the point that the process requires the kind of checks and balances that the new clause represents. If we do not have such checks and balances or ask whether we are involved in a one-way or two-way process, the Government will continue step by step to offer concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA and we will not have a balanced process that will create confidence.

The new clause would significantly improve the Bill because it would require the House to take stock of the exact situation in the decommissioning process before the Bill became law. As we have heard, there has been a dramatic reduction in the amount of violence and an act of decommissioning has taken place. That is a major step—some would say an historic step. There is no doubt that the decommissioning that has taken place has not happened before in the recent history of Northern Ireland. We should pay tribute to the efforts of all involved and to General de Chastelain and his team for securing it. However, it is also important to remember that it was only a gesture that was, in many ways, forced by the determination of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble).

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford referred to the fact that we have limited knowledge of the gesture that has taken place. There is still a vast arsenal of weaponry out there and the IRA is still active in some respects. I very much hope that

*[Chris Grayling]*

violence will tail off, but can we be sure that it will if there is not a further step in the decommissioning process? So before the Committee takes the next step and renews the Bill, we should say that, at the very least, we want to hear from General de Chastelain about the current situation and whether there has been or is expected to be further progress towards decommissioning.

**Mr. Swire:** Does my hon. Friend not agree that, since the implementation of this process, there has been the very reverse of a tailing off of violence? For example, since 1999, the number of casualties resulting from paramilitary-style attacks has risen from 207 to 302 now. That is the reverse of what was suggested earlier.

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. There is still trouble in Northern Ireland and weapons are still being used. There is no clear sign that we have taken the first step in a steady process of decommissioning. There is every possibility that what has happened is a one-off. Before we make further concessions and send further signs to Sinn Fein-IRA and to all involved in acts of violence in Northern Ireland that the House and the Government will play their part in a continuing process, we must, at the very least, ensure that a check and a balance are in place to make sure that others are with us. The new clause is important, because we must not move on to the next phase unless and until we know more about the decommissioning process.

If the Committee rejects the new clause and the Bill is enacted, we shall send a message to Sinn Fein-IRA that the next step will take place regardless of their participation and regardless of gestures from them and further progress on the decommissioning of weapons. The new clause would provide a mechanism to review progress and to give the House greater certainty before it takes decisions that are fundamentally important to the future of Northern Ireland and this country. It would provide the House with a safety net against a lack of progress in decommissioning.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford and the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) were involved in an exchange about the concept of a nil report. Surely if there is a risk of a nil report and a risk that General de Chastelain will come to the House to say that there has been no further progress on decommissioning and that there is no sign of any, that factor should be considered before we take further steps to implement legislation that will extend the relaxation of the laws of this country to allow decommissioning to take place at an indeterminate point in the future. Full information must be on the table in front of us before the Bill becomes law.

7.45 pm

The new clause drives to the heart of the issue. We must go down the path of decommissioning in the full knowledge that concessions will be made by both sides. Members of the House and the Government must be confident that that will happen, because the people of this country and the Unionist community in Northern Ireland demand it. That is why the new clause is so important. It is a signal, a statement, a check and balance and a safety net for the House. I commend it to the Committee, and I very much hope that the Minister, even at this stage, will change her view and support what would be a constructive addition to the Bill.

**Mr. Barnes:** First, I wish to clarify what is meant by a nil report. Such a report could only be about recent developments that had taken place since arms had begun to be put beyond use. Opposition Members are keen to have a detailed report that would tell us what was behind the de Chastelain report that talked about the significant putting of arms beyond use.

Although there could not be an entirely nil report, there could be a nil report on recent developments. The point is that whatever the report's importance or size, it would trigger the measures in the legislation that allow it to operate. The proposal for a nil report is a mild one to obtain something from the commission, but that does not mean that it is not worth while to attempt to obtain one.

The new clause is a sort of halfway house, but that does not necessarily mean that there is anything wrong with halfway houses. However, it does not meet the aspirations of a number of Conservative and Unionist Members, especially those of the hon. Members for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). They want the commission to produce a report for the House that would tell us the lot and that would be fully open. We would therefore know exactly what arms had been put beyond use, where they were and what proportion they formed of the total arms held. That would be difficult to establish as no one would know whether all the detail had been provided. That approach is consistent with the approach that those Members have taken for a considerable time as they are opposed to the Belfast agreement.

However, those Members who went along with the Belfast agreement see some difficulties with insisting that more and more details are provided. Some of the terms on which the agreement was accepted were based on the understanding that the issue of decommissioning would go to a commission and that we would take the commission's word. It is legitimate for those who opposed the agreement to continue their no campaign and to seek to uncouple the measures that happen to be before us. That is what they are doing.

Although the agreement was a compromise, was associated with all sorts of difficulties and was obscure on some issues, those of us who support it must at least try to clarify matters slightly. However, it is difficult to pursue some issues further, and that is why the new clause says what it does. It does not state what the nature of the report should be because it is trying to attract the support of those who would like very detailed information to be made available. However, it tries to jog things along.

Although putting the issue in someone else's hands and depending on their report is not the best solution, most of us accept the logic of doing that. In the circumstances, that was the only way to square the circle so that further action could be taken.

**Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley): I follow the hon. Gentleman's line of argument, but his case presupposes that decommissioning as an act is an end in itself. If he reflects on the agreement, he will recognise that that is not so. The end is, in fact, confidence building.

Decommissioning was one of a number of measures that were designed to build confidence in the process. My problem, which has also been articulated by other hon. Members, is that if the act lacks credibility because it is not transparent, it does not have the effect of building confidence. That is the point, and it is why detailed reports from the independent commission are important. They need to convey something of what has happened to achieve the end of confidence building.

**Mr. Barnes:** I take the point that the measures were associated with confidence building. There has been an attempt to build almost an artificial centre in Northern Ireland and to draw people to it out of the agreement. As people co-operate, they gain understanding and become less worried and their confidence in the process grows. I agree that the information that the commission feels able to make available and that it is encouraged to produce is worth while, especially as Provisional IRA decommissioning is important when it comes to the worries and fears of the Unionist community.

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** I do not want to pull the carpet from under the hon. Gentleman, but his argument is built on the premise that the supporters of the Belfast agreement, and especially its architects, signed up to hand over all responsibility for decommissioning to the decommissioning body and that they have no independent judgment on the matter. Where in the Belfast agreement does it say that they cast that role into the lap of the decommissioning body and do not want to hear anything more about it?

**Mr. Barnes:** It is not that that role was given over entirely, but there was agreement that it would be part of the mechanism of the procedures. People had many ideas about what they were signing up to, and that is what is important. We are trying to hold people together. I accept that the hon. Gentleman is, and always has been, implacably opposed to the agreement, and that it is legitimate for him to use anything that affects Northern Ireland which is brought before the House to advance his case. However, some of us stand on different, and not easy, ground. We try to draw different people together in difficult circumstances. The logic of the argument of the hon. Gentleman and people who think like him is not given great consideration by us.

Let me say something in favour of the words "credible" and "significant" as used by de Chastelain. One set of people that they upset considerably, and who it is worth while upsetting, are members of the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein. The more they think that there has been a reasonable and important handing over or destruction of weaponry, the more that affects their traditional feelings and attitudes, and the more they are disenchanted by the process and by those who are involved in the political process. If it were spelled out that massive decommissioning was taking place, they would be even more disenchanted. The act of decommissioning might not be as significant as some of us would wish, but it is a reasonable avenue to pursue. The perceptions of people within the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein are important in how we advance the process.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** The hon. Gentleman has moved away from the pertinent question asked by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). May I bring him back to it? There is nothing in the Belfast agreement to preclude the report that we propose. The Act that the House passed five years ago laid the basis for the intergovernmental agreement that provides for reports. All we are doing as we renew that Act is to improve the reporting procedure in the existing structure. It is absurd to suggest that anyone who is in favour of the Belfast agreement cannot support the new clause.

**Mr. Barnes:** I was not arguing that. I was saying that the hon. Members for Spelthorne and for Belfast, East and some other hon. Members want to go beyond what is contained in the new clause. That reflects their initial disagreement and current disenchantment with the Belfast agreement and the developments since it was reached, although it is not the position of those on the Conservative Front Bench. That is why I described the new clause as a halfway house. It tries to get better information and greater clarity into the process and to put a bit of pressure on the commission, but it does not deliver what some Opposition Members hoped it would.

I am not saying that what the new clause attempts to achieve is inconsistent. However, it is legitimate for those of us who support the Belfast agreement now to debate the reasonable way forward in the circumstances. How decommissioning is interpreted by certain republican forces and people within Northern Ireland is an important consideration.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East made an interesting point about the distinction between the words "significant" and "credible". He engaged in a good piece of language analysis. He showed that "significant" could be used to describe a significant move to which the commission might respond. However, there is another use of "significant". Was the decommissioning itself significant and credible? De Chastelain tells us in the report that the amount of decommissioning was significant; he does not say that it was merely a significant act.

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** That is precisely what the general does not say in the report. He says that the event was significant, not the amount of weaponry, and he confirmed that both to the Ulster Unionist party and to the Democratic Unionist party delegations that went to see him.

**Mr. Barnes:** Perhaps the general felt that the move was significant, which it was, and that even if a small amount was involved, it was also significant.

**Jane Kennedy:** This is the first chance that I have had to listen to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) in a debate. He advanced an eloquent argument in support of the new clause. He almost persuaded me until I re-read it and was struck by the thought that we were not reading the same thing. He described the new clause as important and as something that offered a check and balance on the process. The hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) described it as a wrecking measure. The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) said that that was not so and that it was a strengthening measure. A number of other Conservative Members made that same case.

*[Jane Kennedy]*

Before I say what I think about the new clause, I shall deal with the points made by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and some others.

I understand the thirst for information felt by the hon. Member for Belfast, East. Several contributors to the debate have described their dissatisfaction with the lack of information about the act of decommissioning described by General de Chastelain. I accept that that position is not merely born out of the hon. Gentleman's party's opposition to the Belfast agreement. It has been genuinely expressed by hon. Members from other parties too.

I say again to the hon. Member for Belfast, East, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) and others who have spoken in the debate what I said earlier in interventions: by describing the act of decommissioning as credible, I meant that if it satisfies those whom we have charged with ensuring that arms are dealt with in accordance with the scheme, we accept that it is credible. Hon. Members have the right to disagree with that assessment, but that is our firmly held view.

8 pm

It must be remembered that General de Chastelain has said publicly that if he thought that progress was not possible, he would say so. We must therefore have confidence in his assessment when he says that an act is significant, or when he says that he believes that further progress is possible.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford speaks of the rationale for the report, but there is currently nothing to prevent the general from issuing a report making an assessment of the decommissioning process over the past five years. However, we should leave to him and his colleagues the decision about whether to do so. I do not see how requiring him to do so before the Bill can be commenced serves any useful purpose in ensuring further decommissioning.

As drafted, the new clause would confer on the commission a power to lay before Parliament a report, while imposing on it no obligation to do so, thereby leaving the commencement of the Bill entirely at the commission's discretion. The new clause is clearly intended to secure for parliamentary scrutiny information not currently in the public domain. However, the commission would be at liberty to submit a report saying nothing new. Even if it were accepted, the clause would not achieve the desired effect. The hon. Members for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and for Basingstoke and others accepted that in the debate.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** The hon. Lady's arguments do not carry conviction. Clearly, if the commission decided that there was no purpose in continuing with the process, and no merit in enabling the Bill to come into effect, on the hon. Lady's own criteria there would be no point in continuing with decommissioning. I do not see that her argument works at all.

**Jane Kennedy:** The hon. Gentleman misses the point, but I shall not go over it repeatedly.

The reporting responsibilities of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning are well established. They were agreed between the Conservative Government and the Government of the Republic of Ireland, and are set out in the treaty between our two countries. The IICD reports periodically, as we heard, to the two Governments, as is required.

The House entrusted to General de Chastelain and his colleagues the business of ensuring that arms are put permanently beyond use in accordance with the decommissioning schemes. Having given them that task, we must respect their considered view on how best to achieve it. It is absolutely right that we should want to have periodic reports from the decommissioning commission. We all want to see an end to the use of illegally held weapons and explosives on the streets of Northern Ireland, and we look to the commission to provide us with news of progress.

The new clause would unfairly restrict the commission; it is constitutionally questionable; and it would harm the prospects for further decommissioning by imposing an unhelpful deadline. Since July 1999, the decommissioning commission has issued 12 reports. That averages out at about one every two to three months. The last report was published in October. I have every confidence that we can look forward to another report some time in the near future, but at the right time. That must be for the commission to decide on the basis of its work.

Making the commencement of the Act dependent on the publication of a report takes the power to legislate out of the hands of elected Members in this place and gives it to an unelected body. I find that highly questionable, and I am surprised that the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford got the new clause past the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). I do not doubt the commission's integrity and I do not suggest that it would not act wisely, but I find the principle suspect.

In addition, making the commencement date conditional in that way would impose further artificial deadlines on the process. It would impose a deadline on the commission to produce a report by a set time, whereas the House agreed that the commission should be allowed to decide such matters for itself. It would impose a deadline on decommissioning, because, as hon Members know, if the Act does not come into force on the day specified there is no indemnity in place for those who do want to engage in the decommissioning process.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said on Second Reading, we do not believe that the pressure of the 26 February deadline was a factor that influenced the IRA's decision to decommission. That decision was more likely to have been influenced, as we have said, by the persistent application of pressure by Governments in the UK, in Ireland and in the United States, and also by the events of 11 September and the resignation of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble).

As I said, we have made it clear on numerous occasions that we do not believe that the imposition of deadlines is helpful. Indeed, our view is quite the contrary. They damage the process, instil distrust and undermine confidence. I explained during the earlier stages of the Bill why deadlines do not put pressure on others to act, but in fact remove it. They give to those who want one an excuse to walk away and an opportunity to blame others for a

failure to act. We want to keep the pressure on. We do not want to give any group an excuse to disengage. For all these reasons, I ask the Committee to reject the new clause.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** With permission, Sir Alan, I shall speak briefly. The hon. Lady's comments confirm me in the view that we were right to table the new clause. I am extremely sorry that she cannot accept it. She has shown herself to be wrong on the facts. It is not true that the House decided that the commission should report on dates of its own choosing—it decided no such thing. The provision for reports and the rules for reports are those that I quoted earlier in the debate, and they are in an intergovernmental agreement—the one dated August 1997. The House has never had an opportunity to decide the basis on which reports should be made, the timing, the content or anything of that kind.

We have taken the opportunity to try to ensure that the House should retrieve the position and should in future have some influence over the timing of the reports. In introducing the new clause, I said that we should not seek pre-emptively or prescriptively to determine the content of the report or the matters covered. That should be left to General de Chastelain.

**Jane Kennedy:** I want to clarify my remarks. I said that the terms under which General de Chastelain would report were agreed between the then Conservative Government and the Government of the Republic of Ireland, as set out in the treaty between the two Governments.

**Mr. Davies:** Now the hon. Lady has made two mistakes. First, she referred to the House having decided, but as I explained, the House did not decide. Then she referred to the Conservative Government; in fact, it was the Labour Government. The intergovernmental report dates from August 1997. That is some months after the election, which I expect the hon. Lady remembers.

The hon. Lady is wrong on fact and in her logic. She suggests that our proposal is inconsistent in principle with the agreement. Of course it is not, because the principle that there should be reports was accepted in the intergovernmental agreement. All we are proposing is that we learn the lessons of the past five years and try to improve the reporting process. I have set out at some length the way in which we believe it is necessary to improve the process.

This debate has been extraordinarily revealing and resonant. I was just saying privately to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) that when I tabled the new clause I did not anticipate that there would be such a general feeling that we needed to take in hand the issue of reporting and introduce greater discipline into that very important part of the process. Labour Members and the Secretary of State still seem to be unaware—if they perceive the problem, they are trying to hide the reality from their eyes—that, sadly, the absence of any understandable or unambiguous commission reports is in real danger of undermining public confidence in the way in which the commission is monitoring the decommissioning process. That can only be very damaging to confidence in the peace process as a whole.

What I described earlier as the Delphic nature of General de Chastelain's reports is clear. Far from generating a sense that all must be well because we can simply trust the general, the reports have led to the kind of serious doubts that have been expressed by representatives of several Opposition parties. It must be in the interests of the commission and of the peace process that those doubts and uncertainties are removed. If the Minister cannot do any better, all we can do is place the matter in the hands of the Committee of the whole House.

*Question put,* That the clause be read a Second time:—

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 142, Noes 357.

**Division No. 125]** **[8.11 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony

Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Charles Hendry and**
**Mr. David Wilshire.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd

Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'dns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Ian Pearson and Dan Norris.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Bill reported, without amendment.*

*Order for Third Reading read.*

8.26 pm

**Dr. John Reid:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Obviously, as we are dealing with questions of violence and guns, the House would expect me to say something about the terrible events of this afternoon and this evening in that context in north Belfast. A number of police have been injured in north Belfast and I think that I speak for everyone in the House when I once again commend the courage and dedication of those in the Police Service of Northern Ireland who so often have to stand between two communities. I obviously condemn utterly the renewed violence around the Holy Cross school in Ardoyne. It would be a tragedy if the progress made last year in resolving this dispute were thrown away, and if the children of north Belfast and the decent people of Northern Ireland were to have their lives and reputations betrayed by people acting like thugs and hooligans, from whatever quarter of the community they come.

The people of Northern Ireland deserve better and I believe that they fully support those in the devolved Administration and the local community who are trying to promote peace and reconciliation. They and everyone in the United Kingdom utterly reject those who seek to spread conflict and violence. In a debate in which we have had our differences, I am sure that those sentiments are reflected largely throughout the House and in all parts of it. So to anyone engaging in rioting in Belfast tonight, I say this: the people of Northern Ireland reject your violence, which belongs to the past, and the people of this House also reject that violence.

In asking that the Bill be read the Third time, we search, as always in such a debate, for common ground. Unexpectedly, I suppose, there is a degree of unanimity throughout the House on at least one thing: as one would expect, and as became clear on Second Reading in December and in Committee today, the House is unanimous in wanting to secure the decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons in Northern Ireland. Where there are differences between us, they relate only to how best to achieve that objective.

It was clear in the exchanges between the contributors to the debate tonight that for the most part we are discussing, in essence, the practicalities. Most of the discussion centred on the question of deadlines, on the danger of sending the wrong signals, and on the need to maintain the pressure to decommission.

As I made plain on Second Reading, the achievement of progress in any of those areas, including decommissioning, benefits both from a degree of contextual progress on other issues and from a degree of pressure. The question of deadlines—or as others may call them, time frames—is to some extent a matter of judgment. It seems to me that there is a view among some Opposition Members that it is essential to impose deadlines if we are to succeed, and that deadlines will ensure success. On that, I am afraid that we will have to agree to differ.

Of course we need a time frame in which to operate, but neither my hon. Friend the Minister of State nor I, nor any other member of the Government, believe that deadlines and public ultimatums will necessarily achieve the objective that we all share—nor, indeed, that they are always helpful. In any case, as has repeatedly been made clear during all the stages of the discussion on this issue, there will have to be not only a time frame that breaks down into 12-month periods, but a debate every 12 months. Not only—

**Mr. Trimble:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Dr. Reid:** I shall certainly give way to my right hon. Friend, if he will let me finish my sentence first.

Not only is there a time frame broken down into 12-month intervals, but it is open to anyone, depending upon their judgment in such matters, to declare that that time frame is a deadline. Indeed, before I give way I shall make a prediction: before we discuss this subject in the House next time round, many hon. Members, some on the Opposition side of the House, will declare the date of our next debate on the issue to be a deadline.

**Mr. Trimble:** The Secretary of State is making somewhat heavy weather of the deadline aspect, but

*[Mr. Trimble]*

before he started to do so he said that decommissioning had occurred partly as a result of pressure. That was also the position adopted by the Minister of State earlier—that decommissioning was produced by pressure from a series of events. Of course a deadline itself can provide pressure, so the Secretary of State is probably going too far in trying to rule deadlines out completely—although he is probably doing that simply for the purposes of the debate on the Bill before us.

May I put to the right hon. Gentleman the point I put to the Minister of State earlier? So far there has only been one act of decommissioning. The Government have announced a programme of normalisation and a series of events aimed at normalisation. Will the Secretary of State continue with that programme even if it is not matched by continuing events and progress on the decommissioning track? Would it not be in his interests, and in the interests of all of us, for him to be prepared to delay those measures until there is equivalent progress on the decommissioning track?

That might not be a huge pressure, but it would be some pressure. If there were any indication from the Government at this stage that they were prepared to put on pressure in the event of a failure to progress on decommissioning, there would be no need for others to put on pressure. I assure the Secretary of State that if he fails to apply pressure, I will put pressure on—at a time and in a manner of my choosing.

**Dr. Reid:** The right hon. Gentleman raises an eminently reasonable point and an eminently valid question, which deserves an answer a little longer than a curt yes or no.

Normalisation in Northern Ireland and its society is an objective that we all wish to see. It should be the objective of any civilised Government to achieve a normal society—but there is another responsibility for any civilised Government, which is to protect the lives of their citizens. In the promotion of human rights, the most fundamental right is the right to life, and the right to live free from threats to that life.

The extent to which we can normalise or reduce the military presence—which is not a cause of the troubles, but a consequence of the threat—depends, therefore, on the assessment of whether lives can be protected at any given level of military presence. Any decision that we take on the presence of military or security forces in Northern Ireland is dependent on an assessment of the threat, not on any deal being done. There is no automatic increase or decrease, no rolling programme upwards or downwards, irrespective of the circumstances. We can attend to the normalisation process only if there is a continuing reduction in the threat.

The right hon. Gentleman was correct in his implication—he did not say it explicitly—that one of the elements that allowed us to reduce the military presence and, for example, to take down the two towers, was the reduction in the threat as a result of decommissioning. There are other elements involved in the assessment of the threat, not least the dissident republican threat, in connection with which there have been some successes over the past few months. We continually analyse the threat and if, as a result of the advice that I receive from those who analyse these matters for me, I feel that there is leeway for reductions, I will take that action. If there were another act of decommissioning, for instance, that would allow some further reduction, but I always have to say that against the background of a threshold from the dissident republicans. That is as full an answer as I can give to the right hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Trimble:** I am focusing on the Secretary of State's comment that the act of decommissioning was a circumstance that enabled an assessment to be made that the threat level was lower, and therefore facilitated certain normalisation measures. Equally, a failure to follow through on that initial act of decommissioning or to make further progress could be regarded as a significant event relating to further acts of normalisation. Although the Secretary of State did not make it explicit, it seems to be implicit in what he is saying that it is open to him to regard a failure to continue to decommission as a basis on which to make a judgment regarding further normalisation. I would ask him not to leave that simply as a possibility, but to consider using it in a way that would effectively put pressure on republicans. The significant effect of that would be that, if the Government were taking action, it would reduce the pressure on others to act, but if the Government were not acting, it would become inevitable that others would have to do so.

**Dr. Reid:** I hear what the right hon. Gentleman says, and I take no great issue with his logic. There are two aspects involved in the assessment of any threat; one is intention, and the other is capability. While I fully understand the great stress on quantity—the capability issue—in General de Chastelain's report, people should never forget that an essential element in assessing a threat, or the lack of one, is people's intentions. That was also significant as regards the decommissioning event. The prolonged period during which it was obvious that what had started as a process was never intended to be a process is, therefore, an issue that one would have to take into account in assessing the threat.

The only other point that I would make in counterbalancing that is that the threat from the Provisional IRA that the right hon. Gentleman is talking about is by no means the only threat in Northern Ireland. We see threats from loyalists and, particularly in the border areas and south of the border, from republican dissidents. I would like to take this opportunity to say that those who so avidly seek the demilitarisation of areas such as south Armagh should place the responsibility for the necessary consequential presence of the military and security forces in south Armagh where that responsibility lies. At present, that lies largely, though not exclusively, with those dissident republicans who insist on maintaining the intention of murder and mayhem in Northern Ireland in order to impose their will.

I have given as full an answer as I can to the right hon. Gentleman on this issue.

**David Burnside:** I seek further clarification of threat and intention. We discuss the threat of international terrorism as much as we discuss domestic terrorism. Does the Secretary of State include in threat and intention the further and greater evidence coming out of Colombia of the involvement of the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein in international terrorism linked to FARC? Does he include

that in his assessment of threat and intention? It seems to many Members of the House that the threat is no longer domestic, but international.

**Dr. Reid:** Any relevant factor would be taken into account by any reasonable person, and that includes the point that the hon. Gentleman made. On Second Reading, I said that the events that led to an act of decommissioning were probably much more complex than people allowed for, and they included the actions of the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, the events of 11 September, the long-term commitment that was made by the Sinn Fein leadership, which perhaps did not affect the timing but was one of the elements and we should not dismiss it, the attitudes of the British Government, the Irish Government and the United States Administration, and the world context. These are complex matters.

I understand the passions that dates and deadlines arouse, but we should not assume that, by declaring a deadline, we are putting in our hands a weapon that forces others to take actions, or that if used irrespective of circumstances will always help us to achieve the end objective. That is the point that I was making before I gave way to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble).

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dr. Reid:** I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, and then I must make a little progress.

**Mr. Robinson:** Could the Secretary of State tell the people in the "cold house" in Northern Ireland how it is that the assessment of risk lowers when the Provisional IRA carries out a non-specified act of decommissioning, but its failure to take that any further does not have a contrary effect on the threat to decommissioning?

**Dr. Reid:** The hon. Gentleman is an intelligent man, and he will understand that the Provisional IRA has carried out an act that is unprecedented in Irish history—not just in the history of Northern Ireland, but in Irish history, with the exception of a number of pikes that were handed over in 1798. Any reasonable, intelligent person must take that into account when assessing the intention of the people with whom one is dealing.

The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that, if there is no continuation of the process that has begun, people may make an adverse judgment. Of course people may make such a judgment, but we should not assume that, by setting a deadline, especially within a time frame that allows us to debate it every year, we can predict with precision the multifaceted complexity of the political decisions that we may have to take six months, nine months or, for heaven's sake, two and a half years down the road.

Conservative Members have a particular view on deadlines, whereas the Ulster Unionists and the Democratic Unionists have a deeper, practical understanding of the difficulties, which is also exhibited by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik). If the deadlines had worked as effectively as we were led to believe by speeches today, and if they had had to be imposed as rigorously as was implied, we would never have taken the peace process beyond May 2000. That was the deadline, and no Opposition Member suggested what we might have done in May 2000.

When we passed that deadline there was another deadline, in June 2001—and when we passed that there was another deadline, as it happened, imposed by the resignation of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann. After six weeks, the whole Assembly would have fallen. There was then another deadline, because I suspended the Assembly. I do not think that creating the illusion that deadlines of themselves, especially if publicly declared, are always helpful, and constitute tablets of stone that will be observed by everyone—including the IRA and the loyalists—is being entirely honest with those who support the current process.

Some Members have suggested that, in continuing to provide the legislative framework within which decommissioning can take place, we are somehow sending a signal to paramilitary organisations that they need not decommission—that we are making decommissioning less rather than more likely. On the contrary, we are sending the signal that we will place no obstacles in the way of decommissioning, that there is no excuse for prevarication, and that in striving to ensure full implementation of the Belfast agreement—including the putting beyond use of all paramilitary weapons—we will not be found wanting.

I think many Members have missed the point that I just made. If deadlines had been strictly maintained, the act of decommissioning in October last year, historic though it was—whatever questions have been asked about it, I think everyone accepts that it was historic—could not have taken place. At the June, or May, deadline, action would have been taken that would have made it impossible, subsequently, for the IRA to decommission.

We all agree that pressure must be maintained if full decommissioning is to be achieved. I think that pressure, and dedication, must also be maintained if we are to bring stability to the Northern Ireland Assembly—if we are to go beyond just the legislation of human rights, and encourage people to adopt the culture. There is much debate about the level of military presence at any given stage. Of course pressure is involved in all those contexts. We in Government can play our part in maintaining it by, among other things, demonstrating our good faith to the international community.

I do not believe that the process that has been caricatured today as a one-way process of concessions has been anything of the kind. I do not believe that only one side of the community has benefited from the acceptance of the principle of consent regarding the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. I do not see that as a concession to the Unionists; it is a basic principle of democracy for all the people of Northern Ireland.

I do not accept that the abrogation of the territorial claim to the north by the Irish Government was a concession to Unionists. It was a recognition of the democratic decision and will of the people of Northern Ireland. Nor do I accept that the introduction of human rights, or equality of opportunity, is a concession to the republicans. It is the basis for a modern, decent, democratic society, as is inclusive government.

When we do these things, we do things that are good in themselves; but—this is the main point in the context of tonight's debate—we also do things that enable us, through recognition of the rectitude and legitimacy of our efforts to secure a decent, civilised, normal, peaceful Northern Ireland, to extend our own legitimacy in the eyes

*[Dr. Reid]*

of the international community. When I say "us", I mean the Government and those who support the Good Friday agreement. As a result, we bring pressure to bear on those who claim the deficiencies of democracy as a basis on which to use violence. Therefore, there is a much more sophisticated and complex debate, discussion and programme of action going on than is sometimes allowed for by some Opposition spokesmen.

**Mr. Donaldson:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Dr. Reid:** I will. It was remiss of me not to wish the hon. Gentleman and everyone else in the House a happy new year before I started.

**Mr. Donaldson:** I thank the Secretary of State for his good wishes, and I am sure that he could find ways of making 2002 a very happy year for me and for the people whom I represent, in Lisburn in particular. If he believes the point that he is making, will he elaborate on why in a recent speech he said that there was a danger that Northern Ireland would become a "cold house" for Unionists?

**Dr. Reid:** If the Deputy Speaker does not rule me out of order, I did not say that it was a "cold house", which was implied by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). I said that we must not allow it to become one. There is a danger of that. Sometimes, there is a natural assumption outside Northern Ireland in the international community that, in a period of change from conflict to peace, with all its difficulties, the people who by definition must have the greatest difficulty are the minority population. I was trying to make the point that that is not necessarily the case. There are equal difficulties for those among the majority population in Northern Ireland, who have to come to terms with issues concerning their own identity, and with not only agreeing and discussing but sitting in government with those who have been their enemies for so long and engaged in terrorism. Those are huge difficulties that no one in the international community should fail to recognise.

I hope, although the hon. Member for Belfast, East may not agree, that I, fellow Ministers and others try to recognise that. From the response, it appears that we do not always get it right but I was trying to raise the issue. I read all the responses, some of which were by him and his colleagues. I hope that the fact that we raised the issue was a measure of our recognition of a problem that had to be addressed. In deference to Mr. Deputy Speaker, who is giving me the gimlet eye, I will go no further down that road tonight.

Many hon. Members seemed to miss the points that I made earlier. I admit that I was not here for the whole debate because of difficulties in north Belfast. I would like to have been here and I apologise to the House for that, but while I was here and listening, I hardly heard any Opposition Member mention loyalist decommissioning. I do not notice people saying, "Yes, we did."

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** Yes, we did.

**Dr. Reid:** The hon. Gentleman did mention it after an intervention by the Minister of State—I happened to be in the Chamber at that point. She reminded him about loyalist decommissioning, but the reality is that loyalist decommissioning has not even started.

**David Burnside** *rose—*

**Dr. Reid:** In deference, there has been no loyalist decommissioning with the exception of a small number of guns that were handed in at the beginning by the Loyalist Volunteer Force. I accept that, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to imply that there is not a huge way to go. I do not mean to separate one side and weigh it in the balance; I am merely saying that, given the problems that we have to address with decommissioning, we have a huge road to go. We have achieved a historic step, even though deadline after deadline has been passed, and we have done so in particular international circumstances. However, this concerns not just the Provisional IRA; a large number of groups, even those on ceasefire, have a huge way to go in Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Blunt:** I understand why the Secretary of State could not be present throughout the whole debate. However, Opposition Members have concentrated on the holding of weapons by loyalist terrorists and a number of hon. Members in the debate spoke of the need for decommissioning on all sides. I hope that the Secretary of State accepts that hon. Members have properly concentrated on all the parties that illegally hold weapons.

**Dr. Reid:** As I said, I may have missed that. In any case, I was seeking not to score partisan points but merely to say that the problem that we still face in continuing the process is pretty huge.

I understand the concerns expressed by right hon. and hon. Members. When the original decommissioning legislation was passed in 1997, we all shared the hope that full decommissioning would be achieved within the five years for which it provided. Perhaps that was the euphoria of the agreement; perhaps it was the wish that our dreams and hopes would be fulfilled. Obviously, I am disappointed that that has not proved possible.

When the Belfast agreement was signed in 1998, we all took heart from the aspiration of all the signatories that decommissioning would be completed within two years of the referendums endorsing the agreement. Now that five years are drawing to a close, I share the regret that our expectation has not been fulfilled. However, I ask the House to consider the enormous progress that has been made towards securing a permanent resolution to the problems that have blighted Northern Ireland for decades. I have already said that I do not believe that the process has been all one way; nor do I believe that it has been a process of concessions.

We should ask ourselves whether we should countenance measures that would in any way lead, on balance, to the possibility of squandering the gains that we have made. I do not believe that anyone in the House thinks that we should do so. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) said that we operated more in hope than in expectation. We certainly have more cause for positivity now than we had in 1997 because at that stage the IRA was not even on ceasefire. Truly historic progress has been made.

In the midst of all the passions that these issues raise, Members of this House who have been involved in the great measures of the past few years—I do not refer to myself, because, like most Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, I am a fairly transient figure; there is a rapid velocity of turnover in Northern Ireland—whatever their misgivings, should not diminish the capacity that they have displayed and the results that they have achieved in terms of changing Northern Ireland. Let us remember what it was like 10, 20 or 30 years ago.

I understand when people say to me, "Yes John, but not peace at any price". We do not have a perfect democracy or a perfect peace, but let us never diminish the historic steps that we have managed to take. If we are to make progress, whatever our frustrations, we must provide the legal framework for further decommissioning by republicans and loyalists. We must work to bring within the process even those dissidents and rejectionists who are currently outside the process. The police on both sides of the border continue to be successful in frustrating their attacks. I am sure that hon. Members will wish to join me in congratulating the Garda Siochana on the recent arrest and charging of the six individuals associated with dissident republican activity. There has been some success, but I say that without any complacency, because I fully understand that one terrible successful attempt by those dissident republicans would have appalling consequences. However, I congratulate the police services on both sides of the border on the sterling work that they have done to protect the people of Northern Ireland from that dissident republican activity.

I hugely regret that decent, ordinary citizens in Northern Ireland are still open to the threat of such attacks and to the sort of violence that we have seen this afternoon. I regret to tell the House that it has flared again this evening, with burning barricades, the use of petrol bombs, a crowd of some 300 attacking the police line and the firing of plastic baton rounds. Sooner or later, those people will come to realise the futility of their position and the destructiveness of their actions. When they do, we will provide the means by which their weapons can be put beyond use once and for all.

I am the last to think that the process is easy for anybody in the House. Peace is not won easily and democracy is not built quickly. It is a long, messy and slow process that, precisely because of its imperfections, gives rise to a natural desire to have those imperfections removed. The Bill provides part of a framework that can address the building of peace and democracy. If it can do so, both are great undertakings to continue, and I therefore commend the Bill to the House.

9.2 pm

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** It was a characteristically generous and warmhearted gesture by the Secretary of State to start by wishing a happy new year to all of us and to the people of Northern Ireland. We of course reciprocate those wishes. I have never suspected that anything was amiss with the right hon. Gentleman's intentions and I have no doubt that he wants to do the right thing and is energetic and conscientious in trying to do it. However, I am concerned by some of his methods and I begin to wonder whether the problem stems from some fundamentally muddled thinking. There were three glaring examples in his speech, and although I do not wish to be controversial, I must draw his attention to them.

The Secretary of State mentioned concessions. He said that the peace process was not a process of concessions and that many of the things that had been done—he mentioned human rights—had been properly done on their own merits and should have been done anyway. I agree, but that is to misuse—not deliberately, I accept—the concept of concession. A concession is something that is done, not on its intrinsic merits, but as a price for something else. I hope that the Secretary of State does not think that the premature release of criminals with blood on their hands—multiple murderers—should be done on its intrinsic merits. He would not suggest that other serial murderers held in our jails should be let out much earlier than those who have committed more minor crimes. The right hon. Gentleman cannot seriously suggest that early release was not a concession. It was a concession. It is muddled thinking—though I do not consider it anything worse than that—to assume otherwise.

Equally, I do not believe that the Secretary of State, in his heart of hearts, thinks that changing the rules of the House to accommodate Sinn Fein-IRA MPs was justified on its own merits. Had that been the case, the Government should have introduced the change as part of their parliamentary reform measures after 1997. They could have said that people who do not want to take their seats and be here all the time should have some other status, because that would be a good way to run our democracy. However, the Government did not say that. We all know that they had no intention of introducing the change on its own merits, but that they did so as a concession.

The failure to see that distinction is a fundamental failure of straight and clear thinking. If the Secretary of State believes in new year resolutions, I hope that he will try to introduce greater rigour to his thinking. That would benefit us all.

A second and striking example of the Secretary of State's thought processes was revealed when he criticised me for being absurd in supposing that deadlines would always and necessarily lead to success. However, I did not say that, and I never suggested it. I noted that the right hon. Gentleman used the words "always" and "necessarily", as I wrote them down when he was speaking.

When moving the first group of amendments this afternoon, I explained at considerable length that we did not believe that deadlines were some sort of panacea. Deadlines do not necessarily achieve a purpose, and I said specifically that many factors, pressures and influences determined decommissioning. I said that that was true of the very welcome act of decommissioning carried out by Sinn Fein-IRA in late October.

The Minister of State is no longer present, but she mentioned the American and Irish influences that have a bearing on the matter. The Secretary of State has also referred to those other influences. The deadline is therefore just one of many influences.

Our debates would be clearer if the Secretary of State examined the questions put to him, and I should be happy to give way to him on this matter. I said that deadlines have an influence which is exerted in one direction. In other words, a longer deadline will not shorten the time taken to perform the obligation in question. By the same token, a shorter deadline may cause the necessary action to be performed sooner.

*[Mr. Quentin Davies]*

In many cases, of course, deadlines will be missed, but they have an influence, and it works in only one direction. In so far as it has an influence at all, a shorter deadline will have the effect of making more rapid the conclusion of the necessary task. Lengthening the deadline may make no difference, but if an influence is exerted it will be in the direction of ensuring that the task or action takes longer.

I do not want to embarrass the Secretary of State by quoting again his remarks on Second Reading, in which he acknowledged that people go "down to the wire", to use his phrase. However, I think that the right hon. Gentleman wants to intervene.

**Dr. John Reid:** I shall intervene, but only to take advantage of the hon. Gentleman's invitation to benefit from his intellectual rigour. The hon. Gentleman said that deadlines work only in one direction. Does that mean that he thinks that there are no circumstances in which the public declaration of a deadline might make the action that he wants to be taken—in this case, decommissioning—less likely to be taken?

**Mr. Davies:** Yes. I do not believe that shorter deadlines in the Bill would mean that—

**Dr. Reid:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for applying his intellectual rigour to a question that I did not ask. I did not ask about the length of the deadline. The hon. Gentleman has said three times, categorically, that deadlines can work in one direction only. Let us assume, for example, that the hon. Gentleman wants a person to act in a given manner. Will he say whether he thinks that there are any circumstances under which the public declaration of a deadline to be imposed on that person could have the effect of inhibiting that person from acting in that manner?

**Mr. Davies:** It is possible that the deadline will have no effect. I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman that shortening a deadline—*[Interruption.]* That is a different question about deadlines. Let me be specific. There are certain situations—and this may be what the right hon. Gentleman is driving at—in which a deadline is not an appropriate instrument to use and will not help to achieve the objective. In those circumstances, it is better to have no deadline. However, when a deadline is used, longer deadlines will lengthen the completion time, whereas shorter deadlines, if they have any influence at all, will shorten the performance of the action required. Is that an answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question?

**Dr. Reid:** It is not. As the hon. Gentleman has an amazing capacity for intellectual rigour, the problem must be my phrasing of the question. I will attempt to phrase it again. I am not asking about situations in which there are no deadlines or about shortening deadlines. I thought that it was quite plain that I was asking the hon. Gentleman to apply his renowned mind to the following question: are there any circumstances in which the public declaration of a deadline to be imposed on people whom we want to act in a given direction will cause them to be less likely to act in that way?

**Mr. Davies:** The answer to that is yes, and I have acknowledged that already. I have said that there are circumstances—

**Dr. Reid** *rose*—

**Mr. Davies:** I have given the right hon. Gentleman the short answer, which is yes. I am about to give him the explanation for that answer, which is not much longer, and then I will give way to him again.

I repeat that there are circumstances in which a deadline is not an appropriate or sensible method and imposing one will have a counterproductive effect. That is the first category. The second category is when deadlines are appropriate and will have an effect. I put it to the right hon. Gentleman unambiguously that if a deadline is an appropriate mechanism and if the object of the exercise is to advance or accelerate performance, it is sensible to have a shorter deadline. If the object of the operation is to lengthen performance, it is sensible to lengthen the deadline. Is that a clear answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question?

**Dr. Reid:** The first answer was extremely clear. The hon. Gentleman finally answered my question about whether there are circumstances under which the public declaration of a deadline can actually inhibit or be counterproductive, and he said yes. Will he therefore reflect on his earlier statement that deadlines work only in one direction? As a deadline can, by his own admission, encourage action towards the desired end or be counterproductive and move action away from the desired end, it patently can work in both directions. I would like the benefit of the hon. Gentleman's intellectual rigour here.

**Mr. Davies:** This is a very interesting discussion. Indeed, it is more like an exercise in formal logic, but I am happy to pursue it. This is a two-stage process; there is nothing complicated about that. The first stage is to decide whether a deadline is an appropriate instrument to use. The answer to that may be yes or no. It is a binary system, and very simple really.

**David Burnside:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Davies:** As I am involved in a logical argument, I suppose that I had better pursue it, after which I will give way.

There are only two stages here. The first is to decide whether a deadline is appropriate. If not, it will have a perverse effect and may damage the objective. When one has decided whether a deadline is appropriate, one has to decide whether it is intended to lengthen or shorten the process that one is trying to influence. This seems so intuitively sensible that I am amazed that the right hon. Gentleman is making such heavy weather of it. I think that everyone outside the House listening to the debate—if anyone is at this time of night—would agree that if a deadline is appropriate and the intention is to accelerate the required action, it is sensible for the deadline to be

shorter. If the deadline is made longer, and in so far as it will influence the time within which the process is completed, the time taken to complete the process is likely to be extended. That is the simple argument that we put when we debated amendment No. 1.

**David Burnside:** During the past, confused, 10 minutes, the English Front Bench might have been confused with the Scottish Front Bench.

Is the reason there is so much confusion in the debate on deadlines that neither the Government nor the Opposition have defined what sanction they would use to impose pressure to meet the deadline? What sanction do the Opposition recommend against Sinn Fein in government, if there is no progress on decommissioning during the next six months?

**Mr. Davies:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. That is why I shall come on to deal with sanctions or counterweights.

I want to take up with the Secretary of State a third matter in which there is an element of muddled thinking. The right hon. Gentleman twice told the House rhetorically—he may not have expected an answer but he is about to get one—that if the deadline of summer 2000 for the completion of decommissioning under the Belfast agreement had been taken seriously, there would have been no decommissioning in November and the peace process would have come to an end. That is known as the all-things-being equal fallacy. It has a Latin name but we will not go into that.

That is a simple but important practical fallacy to fall prey to, because of course other things would not have been equal. We made it absolutely clear that, after the signing of the Belfast agreement—as the right hon. Gentleman knows, the Conservative party has been consistent in its support of that—we wanted to make sure that prisoners were not released until and unless there was progress on decommissioning. We would have linked the two and used that element of leverage—to refer to the question put by the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside). We would certainly have used those sanctions.

The right hon. Gentleman was not the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at that time, so it was not his fault that his predecessors threw away that card—that instrument of leverage. We were appalled by that. My predecessor proposed an amendment to the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill which, like all amendments proposed to the Government, was discarded without its merits having been properly considered. Had it not been for the events in Colombia in August and in New York in September, there would probably have been no act of decommissioning.

The Government have persuaded themselves that although—on their own admission—the act of decommissioning was a result of those other unpredictable events, it none the less retrospectively validates the tactics that they adopted during the first two years of the Belfast agreement. However, they should actually draw the reverse conclusion: were it not for those fortuitous events—albeit utterly regrettable and tragic in the case of 11 September—they would not have achieved decommissioning yet. As sanctions or counterweights were absent from the Government's approach to decommissioning, they had no chance of using those tactics to ensure that the Belfast agreement was implemented.

That classic example of muddled thinking does not apply only to the right hon. Gentleman. As I pointed out, it was shared by his colleagues and predecessors. In practice, muddled thinking has led to a disastrous and regrettable result. It was tragic for the right hon. Gentleman to admit that the Sinn Fein-IRA decommissioning in November was largely brought about by factors beyond the Government's control; tragic, too, that he should regard that act of decommissioning as validating the Government's policies in the first two years of the Belfast agreement. That really is muddled thinking. We cannot afford muddled thinking. The stakes are far too high.

I wholly agree that, even at this 11th hour, we need to introduce a greater element of sanction, discipline and counterweight. This is not the time to go into the detail of that. However, the Minister of State challenged me to offer an alternative policy. She seemed rather surprised when I answered her question. Perhaps she was surprised because she was not expecting an answer. Perhaps she was surprised because the substance of my answer was new to her, but that shows that she does not listen to what the Opposition say.

Two or three times in the brief time I have played this role, I have said that it is necessary now, even at the eleventh hour, to try to negotiate a global package. I have called it a programmed process, leading to full decommissioning. Of course, it would involve the loyalist paramilitaries, Sinn Fein-IRA and the two Governments. It might also involve making some concessions that might need to be made, however unattractive, but no such concession should be made in advance of such a global agreement. I have said that several times in the House.

The hon. Lady has another bad habit common among those on the Labour Front Bench—she does not listen any more to what is said in the House. She has been sitting on the Treasury Bench when I have said such things several times, but she simply thinks, "Those guys have only got 165 MPs. We need not worry about them; they have no pressure in the Division Lobbies, so we can ignore them." It is a little like Stalin saying, "How many divisions does the Pope have?"

Neither the hon. Lady nor the Secretary of State thinks that way as a result of some personal temperamental predilection; they are not that sort of people. It is part of new Labour's culture—its arrogance of power and its knowledge that it can always override us in the Lobbies. Although Ministers may not treat us with contempt, they think that we can safely be ignored with impunity. So the hon. Lady did not know that I had already answered the question. She asked me a question rhetorically, and was rather surprised to get an answer.

I have limited myself—I do not wish to be more controversial than I have to be—to remarks that were directly called for by the Secretary of State's speech at the beginning of this debate on Third Reading, but I do not want to end on an antagonistic note. I am conscious, as he is, that we have had some extremely bad news from Belfast this evening. I did not know until he told us that policemen and women had been injured in north Belfast, but clearly there has been a serious riot.

*[Mr. Davies]*

The only conclusion that we should draw is that we are sitting on a powder keg. We cannot afford any kind of complacency or any mistakes. We certainly cannot afford to lull ourselves into supposing that because an act of decommissioning, however extensive or otherwise it might be, took place in November, everything is fine and dandy and on the right rails. I know that the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Lady have never said or implied that, but I am concerned by people outside the House who seem to think that the worst is over and that everything will now be plain sailing. Clearly, that is not the case.

When such a crisis occurs, it is a good moment to reappraise the strategy. I know perfectly well that the Government will not explicitly accept any advice from us. Anything that I say will be dismissed because it is said by someone who sits on the Opposition Front Bench. Nevertheless, I hope that the Government may reappraise some of their strategy. I hope that they will accept that the general perception, even if it is not their perception, on both sides in Northern Ireland is that they are on the run. They are giving away endless concessions, and there is no rigour in the process whatever. Clearly, Sinn Fein-IRA have reached that conclusion; they simply ask for the next concession and expect that, if they ask for three things, they will get at least one and probably two of them. That has been the basis of that dialogue.

Equally, on the other side of the divide, as has been said by representatives of both Unionist parties here tonight, there is an enormous sense of demoralisation and cynicism in the Unionist camp, which feels that the whole process is a one-way street and that the Government simply have no natural stopping place, so the process of endless concessions will go on and on. Of course, those two things are directly linked to decommissioning, as I have said already during today's proceedings.

The Minister of State said today—it was the most despairing thing to come out of the debate—that the process may now take years. If that is true—and it may well be—it is clear that Sinn Fein-IRA expect to be able to buy an endless raft of concessions from the Government, by promising at least not to withdraw the prospect of an act of decommissioning and by saying that perhaps something will happen next month or in a few months' time. In fact, Sinn Fein-IRA have so effectively turned the tables on the Government that, as I have already argued, far from the Government putting pressure on Sinn Fein-IRA, Sinn-Fein-IRA now have no incentive to speed up the process of decommissioning. They have every incentive to hold on to their currency and to let it go as slowly as possible. That is most unfortunate.

The Secretary of State began his speech by referring to the Holy Cross school. It is a tragic situation and it is particularly tragic that, after the hopeful news that we had before Christmas, we are once again facing violence. It is obviously too early to apportion blame, to decide who started the trouble and to determine the circumstances in which it began.

I believe, however, that the whole House will agree when I say that anyone who starts violence or makes the decision to resort to violence puts him or herself fundamentally in the wrong. Whatever the grievances, problems or disputes, anyone who resorts to violence takes a terrible responsibility on his or her shoulders. I hope that no one will suggest that the siege of the school should now resume, because anyone who targets children in a political dispute puts themselves beyond the pale.

The tragic deterioration of the situation in north Belfast underlines, once again, the need to get the decommissioning process back on the rails. Of course, the Secretary of State is absolutely right to say—in the context of north Belfast, it is a particularly pertinent point—that progress in decommissioning must be made by both republican and loyalist paramilitaries. Let me quote the figures to the House to remind everyone of what happened last year. I understand—the Government will tell me if the figures are wrong—that Protestant paramilitaries are believed to have been responsible for 14 murders and that republican paramilitaries are believed to have been responsible for two murders in the Province.

One murder is far too many, but it is clear that, in terms of murders—I leave out the important issue of permanent maimings and the appalling beatings and shootings that take place—Protestant paramilitaries have been most bloodthirsty recently. I certainly do not underestimate the threat from them or the absolute need to treat them with the same kind of discipline and rigour as I want us to use on all paramilitaries and anyone who breaks the law in our country.

This has been an interesting debate. We have covered a lot of ground, and rightly so. Because decommissioning is at the centre of the whole peace process, we have brought in almost every other major aspect of the issue. Even if the Government do not want ever to say this in public, I hope that they will listen to what is said by Opposition Members and, if it is possible to even a minor degree, that they will consider some of the things that have been said in the debate. They might even think again about the reporting requirements of the international commission when we renew its mandate as I fear, if the Minister of State is right, we shall have to do next year.

I hope that the Government will accept the need to adopt a slightly more determined line as regards the way in which they deal with Sinn Fein-IRA. If the statements that I and others have made tonight make it easier for the Secretary of State to tell Sinn Fein-IRA that he is under considerable pressure in the House not to give them any further unreciprocated concessions, our debates will not have been in vain.

9.29 pm

**Lembit Öpik:** We now have only half an hour left of the debate. I know that the Minister of State wants a couple of minutes to reply and that at least two Members on the Benches behind me want to speak. I shall therefore try to keep my comments brief, not least because the key points have been made, and made a number of times by some individuals.

If the debate is about anything, it is about trying to stop the violence that is going on outside Holy Cross school. We have to focus on the outcome. This is not an esoteric debate about principle; it is about life in Northern Ireland and what is best to normalise its community. If the Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen were in the IRA, would they be more or less likely to decommission if the British Government played hardball, despite the fact that decommissioning started in the context of an amnesty? It is obvious that in the world of human nature and practical judgment the hardball playing that the Conservatives propose would be wholly counterproductive.

Furthermore, we have established that the proposal is not a matter of principle for the Conservatives, but a matter of practicality. Let us consider that in detail. They are not concerned about the principle of the amnesty because they introduced that idea five years ago when they were in government. They are not even concerned about the principle of extending the time because their amendments would have extended it to 2003 or 2005, which in the latter case means that we are arguing about two years' difference. That is a matter of judgment.

I am confused about what logical argument convinces the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) that what was right in much more dangerous circumstances in 1997 is no longer right, even though the Conservatives accept that the policy was successful in moving things forward. When I asked the hon. Gentleman on Second Reading whether he accepted that it was a greater act of faith to have acted in that way back then, he said:

"Yes, that is true. That took place right at the beginning of the peace process launched by the Conservative Government and it required a considerable act of faith."

What has changed? What logical justification is there for the Conservatives to shy away from a lesser act of faith than the one that they took back then? Despite the hon. Gentleman's intellectual formidableness, I am sorry to say that I was not convinced that his point was consistent.

The hon. Gentleman also said that longer deadlines do not create shorter implementation periods. I would go further and suggest that plenty of evidence shows that shorter deadlines create a longer implementation period. When this Government have called the bluff of terrorists and others, the terrorists have simply said, "Forget it. We are not going to do it that way."

In addition, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that in an earlier and happier time the former Prime Minister John Major was willing to be much more sensitive to the genuine need to bring such people to the negotiating table without threatening them with a stick. Why else would he have phoned terrorists, who were not even on a ceasefire, to begin to move things forward? Why else did the former Conservative Government take the risk of an amnesty when there was not even such a thing as the Good Friday agreement? There is a strong inconsistency in what we heard from Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen.

In the same debate, the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) said that I

"must understand that in 1997 the Government were setting up a mechanism to test the genuineness of terrorists' intentions to give up violence."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 107.]

That test was so successful that it actually delivered some decommissioning four years later. What was the logic for having a five-year amnesty instead of a two or a 10-year amnesty? It was an arbitrary call. I challenge the Conservatives to think seriously about that if they expect us to take seriously the argument that they have some insight into the future and into the mind of a terrorist and that changing the amnesty period from five years to one, which is the most extreme change that they propose, would be acceptable.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) summed up the matter for me. He said that he could create a deadline of his own, and I think he is right. Of all the people in the Chamber, he is in the strongest position to cause movement on that, but how can he if decommissioning is a criminal offence and someone who walks in with guns and bombs is prosecuted? How will he do that without an amnesty? It does not add up.

The deadlines threaten a period after which there will be a greater barrier to decommissioning. The deadlines are based on the assumption that after a certain date something will happen that will make decommissioning more likely, or people will be so frightened of that date that they will decommission beforehand. However, all the evidence suggests otherwise.

How do we know whether decommissioning is even worth while? How important is the quantity of weapons that have been handed in so far? The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) was right to say that any meaningful statistic must be expressed in terms of proportion. In reality, we have no way of being sure how much decommissioning has taken place. That extends beyond the IRA to the other organisations. Why do we not trust John de Chastelain, a man who has generally been praised by all sides in the House, when he provides what he believes to be a strategic and useful contribution on the question of significance?

I have said before and I say again that I would take the Conservatives' argument much more seriously if they specified the proportion that they would find acceptable. I fear that whatever proportion was offered, it would not be enough. The only reference that I have heard from them in the past was to total decommissioning, yet that is not a realistic expectation, even in their eyes. They wanted to extend the period so that there would be an on-going process of decommissioning.

In conclusion, it seems clear to the Liberal Democrats that the deadlines are not about increasing the pressure; all the experience of the Northern Ireland peace process tells us that—they are about removing the barrier that I mentioned. If I became the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I would leave the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford with this question: if we look past 27 February 2002, and if he had his way, which is presumably to vote down the Bill tonight, what would he do the following day? How would he push the process forward? If the hon. Gentleman has no plan B, I strongly recommend that he think about supporting plan A, which is before us tonight, as the Liberal Democrats intend to do.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Lembit Öpik:** With respect, the hon. Gentleman had an awfully long time earlier, and I must leave time for others to catch the Speaker's eye.

I conclude with a request to Her Majesty's official Opposition. The Liberal Democrats believe that the Bill is about leaving the door open and keeping one barrier out of the way while other forms of pressure are applied for decommissioning to take place. The Conservatives seem to think that the harder line approach is appropriate. History will say who is right and who is wrong, but I sincerely hope that before Conservatives vote against the Bill tonight, they will remember that they asked for much greater acts of faith when they were in government. In fairness, they were rewarded for taking the risk. It would be a shame if they lost their resolve and their faith in the very strategies that they adopted.

9.38 pm

**Mr. Donaldson:** I thank the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) for his brevity. It is appreciated.

The issue of decommissioning cannot be considered in isolation. One of the reasons why my party will vote against the Bill tonight is that we consider it inappropriate to extend the deadline as proposed. Like the official spokesman for Her Majesty's Opposition, we believe that lengthening a deadline means lengthening the process of decommissioning and making the prospects of achieving further substantive decommissioning highly unlikely.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** I interrupt the hon. Gentleman's speech only so that there can be no possible misunderstanding. I understand how, as a matter of principle, he and his party may vote against the Bill for all the reasons that we set out today. However, I should make it clear that I have no intention of asking my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the Bill on Third Reading, as it would be perverse to have no framework for decommissioning. Much as we would have preferred one with a one-year deadline, we would rather have some framework in place than none whatever.

**Mr. Donaldson:** The decommissioning issue was part of the agreement and part of a package. I took part in the talks at Weston Park last summer. We are now seeing the product of what the Government decided to proceed with after Weston Park. I want to make it clear, as a participant in those talks, that there was no agreement at Weston Park between the parties and the Government. However, the Government have decided to proceed with a number of measures. Extending the deadline for decommissioning is undoubtedly one of them, but there is another very important measure.

We have talked a lot about amnesty in these debates tonight. Another amnesty is being proposed as a result of the Government's initiative after Weston Park that it is important that the House appreciate, as it is the price that is being paid by the Government in return for some progress on decommissioning. It is the amnesty to be granted to those terrorists who are on the run and wanted for questioning by the security forces in Northern Ireland about serious terrorist offences, or who are fugitives from justice, having escaped from prison. Who are those people? Perhaps the House ought to know who some of them are.

A person such as Dermot McNally, who escaped with 38 other IRA prisoners from the Maze prison in 1983, is to be granted amnesty. A person such as Robert "Fats" Campbell, a member of the M60 gang that escaped from the Crumlin Road jail in 1981 having been sentenced to life, in his absence, for the murder of SAS Captain Westmacot, is to be granted amnesty. Liam Avril, who escaped from the Maze prison dressed as a woman during a Christmas party for prisoners and had been sentenced to life in prison for the IRA murders of two innocent Protestants in Garvagh in 1996, is to be granted amnesty.

Owen Carron, the former Sinn Fein-IRA Member of Parliament for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, who gained his seat following the death of the IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands was caught in possession of an AK47 rifle in the late 1980s, was granted bail, skipped bail and went on the run in the Irish Republic is now to be granted amnesty. Rita O'Hare, part of the Sinn Fein talks team that went to America in the mid 1990s, is wanted for questioning about IRA attacks in west Belfast and is now to be granted amnesty.

Michael Dixon, former British soldier and member of the IRA, is wanted for questioning about an attack on the British Army base in Germany and for the bomb attack on Thiepval barracks in Lisburn in my constituency, in which one soldier died in 1996, and is to be granted amnesty. Charlie Caufield, wanted for questioning about the explosion in Enniskillen on Remembrance Sunday—the poppy day bombing—in which 11 innocent people were murdered, is to be granted amnesty; and so the list goes on. The other day I read in the Belfast *News Letter* that Dermot Finucane, the brother of Pat Finucane, has just been granted his freedom after 20 years on the run—granted amnesty.

We come to another individual, Joseph Patrick Blair, known as "Mutch" Blair. Mr. Blair is an interesting character. He was the main IRA bomber operating in the south Armagh area for a number of years. He is a lifelong friend of Thomas "Slab" Murphy, who is also known as the current chief of staff of the Provisional IRA. Together, they have been involved in terrorism since the early 1970s.

Blair was involved in the making of the mortars that were used in the attack on the Royal Ulster Constabulary station in Newry in 1985 in which nine RUC officers were murdered, including, tragically, my cousin, Chief Inspector Alexander Donaldson. Blair was also involved in the murder of three police officers, who were gunned down in cold blood in the centre of Newry as they sat in a police car, by IRA gunmen dressed in butchers' clothing. I could go on.

Blair was also involved in the death of Constable Colleen McMurray in a landmine explosion in south Armagh which resulted in injuries to Constable Paul Slane. I should tell those Members who do not know of Paul Slane, one of my constituents, that he was the police officer who received the George Cross from Her Majesty the Queen at Hillsborough. Blair was responsible for that bomb.

I come to a more recent incident: the Omagh bombing. Blair is a member of the Provisional IRA and that bombing was carried out by the so-called Real IRA. The Secretary of State will be aware of a recent report by the police ombudsman on the police investigation of the Omagh bombing. In that report, there is mention of a police informer called Kevin Fulton. Fulton asserted that he met a senior republican in Dundalk a few days before the Omagh bombing. He further asserted that he smelt explosives on the person of that individual. I can tell the House that I am being informed by security sources that that individual was Joseph Patrick Blair, the IRA bomb maker. One therefore has to make the assumption that Blair, as a Provisional IRA member, was involved in the construction of the Omagh bomb.

That is why decommissioning is so important. These weapons have been and still are being used in Northern Ireland. I join those who have condemned the violence today in north Belfast. We all condemn it. Tonight, on the

streets of north Belfast, weaponry is again being used. That is why decommissioning is essential. However, what is the message that is coming from this House tonight to people such as Joseph Patrick Blair, a member of the Provisional IRA who used his Semtex from the IRA arms dumps to give the Real IRA the capacity to explode the Omagh bomb that killed 28 innocent people? That is why decommissioning is so important.

I want to conclude with the words of Victor Barker, the father of James Barker, a young boy who lost his life in the Omagh bombing. Recently, Victor Barker, out of sheer frustration with some of the things that are happening, sent to the Prime Minister coroner's photographs of his dead son. Why would someone like Victor Barker have to do something like that? I shall explain why. He said:

"I have written to the Prime Minister about what I regard as the scandal of giving Sinn Fein offices and funds from the British Parliament. Whilst seeking to have that facility, these people specifically refuse to encourage any of their supporters to give information concerning those responsible for the Omagh bomb. The people who did that are their former colleagues and to pretend that they have no association with them is absolute nonsense."

That is why Victor Barker sent those photographs—to remind the Prime Minister. The association to which he refers is there in the person of Joseph Patrick Blair, a man who is a member of the Provisional IRA and who helped to construct the Omagh bomb.

I conclude by saying that that is why decommissioning is essential and must happen now. It should have happened and would have been completed by now if the agreement had been followed, but like the extension of the deadline and the amnesty that has been granted to IRA terrorists on the run, it seems that certain aspects of the agreement are flexible and can be changed as we go along. The problem is this: the IRA and the other terrorist organisations know that. They know that they have only to hold out and they will be let off the hook. We must not let them off the hook, for the sake of people such as Victor Barker, the families of the people who lost their lives in the poppy day bomb in Enniskillen and all the innocent victims on both sides in Northern Ireland. If we are to build a real and lasting peace in Northern Ireland, we owe it to them to ensure that the gun and bomb are removed from our politics. I am afraid that by taking the actions that we are taking tonight, we postpone the day when that will happen.

9.48 pm

**Mr. Nigel Dodds** (Belfast, North): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson). I thank him and the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), for their brevity and for allowing some time for others to contribute.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) made a plea at the end of his speech for the Government to listen to at least some of the points made by Opposition Members. I must say that I doubt whether the Government will respond to that plea, given that they are not prepared on many occasions to listen to the views of the people of Northern Ireland or, as has been demonstrated, to those of the majority of the Unionist population. On this issue and many others relating to the Belfast agreement, they have steadfastly turned their face against the democratically expressed wishes of the majority of the Unionist population, even though we were told that this process was based on having the consent of both communities, nationalist and Unionist.

We are debating deadlines tonight, and one of the problems that we have with deadlines in Northern Ireland is that they have been patently and blatantly ignored and cast aside. We were told by the Government and by the pro-agreement leaders and parties in Northern Ireland that May 2000 was the deadline not for the start of decommissioning but for its completion—the handing over and destruction of all illegal terrorist weapons, particularly by those who had a part in the government of Northern Ireland.

Let me say categorically that we want to see both loyalist decommissioning and republican decommissioning. The reason why there is so much focus on republican decommissioning is that although republicans still hold on to virtually all their weaponry, have their total terrorist machine intact, and still target, intimidate and maim people on the streets, they are still part of the government of Northern Ireland. That is what the people in Northern Ireland find so unacceptable.

We have seen the decommissioning deadline cast aside in May 2000 and again in May 2001, and if the House votes that way tonight, we are about to cast another deadline aside. Yet at the same time, a series of measures have been delivered to the republican movement according to a strict timetable—the release of all terrorist prisoners, for example. We have also seen the dismantling of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and a series of other concessions, one of which—the introduction of an amnesty for terrorists on the run—was highlighted by the hon. Member for Lagan Valley, who powerfully described the sort of people to whom that amnesty will apply.

In contrast to the way in which the so-called decommissioning event was carried out, we have seen the open and transparent dismantling and pulling down of security installations along the border, in total opposition to the wishes of many people living there, who feel that their security has been denuded and reduced.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) asked why we could not trust General de Chastelain. One of the reasons why it is difficult to proceed on the basis of the event that General de Chastelain told us had happened is that we saw a previous event of decommissioning, carried out by the Loyalist Volunteer Force, as part of the process. That was done quite openly, and I dare say that the weapons destroyed amounted to a greater proportion of its total weaponry than the proportion involved in the IRA's event. Yet where does the LVF stand now? Its ceasefire has been declared to be over. Why was that event not considered significant in the long run, as something that could be built on? It was because it was a one-off event, and not part of a timetabled sequence or programme leading to complete and verifiable decommissioning.

Yet nothing that we have heard thus far in relation to the IRA's so-called act of decommissioning gives that impression, and nowhere have we been told that there is any programme or timetable that would lead to the total and verifiable destruction of all IRA weaponry—which we, the people of Northern Ireland, were told would have happened by May 2000.

*[Mr. Nigel Dodds]*

One of the reasons why people are so disillusioned, angry and frustrated in Northern Ireland tonight is the series of concessions that have been granted. How else can we describe the release of all terrorist prisoners, the destruction of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the granting of amnesties to terrorists on the run? While that series of concessions takes place, in this House tonight we are to have the Third Reading of a Bill that will allow the IRA off the hook on decommissioning again.

Finally, I want to mention the events in north Belfast. In my constituency, we have seen in recent months a series of troubles in various interface areas. It is fair to say that people in north Belfast do not recognise any sort of peace process. They see paramilitary organisations holding sway on the streets in many areas. They see men of violence who previously used guns continuing to hold sway, and holding on to and using those weapons. All hon. Members will deplore and be dismayed by the upsurge of violence on the Ardoyne road today. I am dismayed that there seems to have been a major setback after all the hard work that went into trying to make progress.

I call on everyone in north Belfast to exercise calm and restraint, and not to engage in violence. It is clear that some people are prepared, for propaganda and political purposes, to undo some of the hard work that has been done, and are not content to see progress being made. But we need to be careful with the language that is being used in relation to the Holy Cross dispute. The events that were taking place as of 20 minutes ago were happening away from the Holy Cross school altogether, in the republican Ardoyne area. That is where the rioting is going on, so let us be careful that we do not fall into the trap of saying that everything is to do with the Holy Cross school. It is not.

We need to ensure that the measures that were agreed as part of a package to try to make progress are implemented speedily and seen to be delivered on the ground. Not least, we need to ensure that the right signal is sent out to people in north Belfast and across Northern Ireland that security will be provided to the ordinary decent residents. The proposals for the removal of two police stations in north Belfast are opposed by everyone in the community. They are opposed by the SDLP as well as by the Unionist parties, and by the clergy, community workers and others. I urge the Minister to make representations to ensure that those police stations are kept open, particularly in the light of today's events and of recent times.

The Bill will send out the wrong signal to the paramilitaries and to those engaged in violence. It will encourage them in their belief that violence pays and that violence works, and I trust that the House will vote against it tonight.

9.57 pm

**Jane Kennedy:** Our debates on Second Reading and today have given us the opportunity to use the vehicle of a very short Bill to discuss some serious issues. They have been a useful two days and I am grateful to everyone who has participated.

The Bill does one thing only. It extends by one year the period during which a decommissioning scheme may provide an amnesty for those decommissioning weapons. It provides for the possibility of further extensions, subject to parliamentary approval. I will not use words such as "credible", "significant" or "important", but we have seen a start to decommissioning. I do not think that anyone expects all paramilitary organisations to have completed decommissioning by 28 February.

May I say to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) that, although he and his hon. Friends cannot agree with the Bill in its entirety, I am grateful to hear that he has committed his party at least not to vote against it? The Bill will provide the continuing framework for further decommissioning, and it is right that we should expect that to happen. The event that happened on 23 October was an historic move forward, but it would not have been possible had not the scheme designed by his hon. Friends in the last Conservative Government, and the regulations, provided an amnesty for those decommissioning weapons.

If we are to fulfil the promise of the Belfast Good Friday agreement, it is essential that we continue to provide the means by which weapons may be put beyond use. The mandate of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning—the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms—comes from the Good Friday agreement, and the pursuit of that objective must continue. The Bill is critical to that, and I commend it to the House.

*Question put,* That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 357, Noes 6.

**Division No. 126]** **[9.59 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann

Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Eliman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger–Ross, Richard

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Nick Ainger and**
**Mr. Phil Woolas.**

**NOES**

Burnside, David
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Hermon, Lady
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Roy Beggs and**
**Mr. Nigel Dodds.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill read the Third time, and passed.*

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

**Mr. Speaker:** With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Ordered,*

That the Care Home Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3965), a copy of which was laid before this House on 12th December 2001, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Private and Voluntary Health Care (England) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3968), a copy of which was laid before this House on 12th December 2001, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the National Care Standards Commission (Registration) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3969), a copy of which was laid before this House on 12th December 2001, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the National Care Standards Commission (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3980), a copy of which was laid before this House on 12th December 2001, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Fur Farming (Compensation Scheme) (England) Order 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3853), a copy of which was laid before this House on 3rd December 2001, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

## SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

*Motion made,*

That, following the Order of 20th November 2000, Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Frank Cook and Mr. Edward O'Hara be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

## PETITIONS

### Foot and Mouth Disease

10.13 pm

**Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): It gives me great pleasure to present the petition from the people of Herefordshire, particularly as the outbreak of foot and mouth disease caused extensive damage, hardship and disruption to the farming and rural community, to the tourist industry and to other business throughout the United Kingdom, with consequent economic loss to those directly and indirectly affected and to the economy of the United Kingdom as a whole. There is a particularly strong feeling in the countryside. The petition states:

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons resolves that Her Majesty's Government, as a matter of urgent public importance, hold a fully independent public inquiry under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921 into the causes, progress and administration of the foot and mouth outbreak of 2000/2001, the adequacy of measures taken to investigate and to remedy the outbreak and with terms of reference no less than those provided by the three inquiries into the foot and mouth disease outbreak and the future of farming set up by the Government, and to make recommendations as for the prevention of any recurrence with respect to financial compensation and relief and the application of European rules relating thereto and for the future of agriculture and related interests and those of the rural and business community and the environment.

*To lie upon the Table.*

### Sidford Bypass

10.14 pm

**Mr. Hugo Swire** (East Devon): I have the honour to present a petition signed by 645 residents of Sidford in Devon, who oppose the sale for development of the land formerly earmarked for a bypass for Sidford.

The petition states:

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to take appropriate action to prevent the sale and development of this land.

And the Petitions remain, etc.

*To lie upon the Table.*

## Acupuncture

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

10.15 pm

**Mr. David Tredinnick** (Bosworth): I am delighted to see you, Mr. Speaker, in your place at this late hour to chair the debate. I am also delighted to see the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), with whom I have debated before, in her place to respond to the important issue of the regulation of acupuncture, because there has been a seismic change in Government policy in the past few weeks. I shall explain why I think that that is the case in a few moments.

In the past year or so, much has been going on in complementary and alternative medicine, not least the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee's report on complementary and alternative medicine, most of which the Government accepted. As a result, the Government have now got themselves a new committee to help take forward the process of statutory self-regulation for two key and related parts of the complementary and alternative process: acupuncture and herbal medicine. Although herbal medicine is slightly ahead of acupuncture, we must treat them as a whole tonight; we cannot divorce one from the other.

I believe that statutory self-regulation is so important and the way forward because, two Parliaments ago, I sat on the Standing Committees for both the Osteopaths Bill and the Chiropractors Bill and saw them enacted. I know what a difference it has made to have statutory regulations for osteopathy and chiropractic. Having been treasurer of the parliamentary group for complementary and alternative medicine since 1987, I know how crucial it is that we build confidence among not just patients seeking treatment but qualified medical practitioners to refer cases to other disciplines, such as acupuncture and herbal medicine.

The story so far is that both acupuncture and herbal medicine practitioners are in favour of such moves and are making significant progress. Herbal medicine and acupuncture are inextricably linked. In traditional Chinese medicine, the prescription of herbs and the use of acupuncture—inserting needles to regulate the flow of "chi", or energy—are intertwined, although in the west, herbal medicine does not necessarily involve the use of acupuncture.

Herbal medicine practitioners, with whom I shall deal first, have just completed a scoping document with the Department, which sets an ambitious and demanding route to statutory self-regulation for the herbal profession. The Department is to be congratulated—I have not used that word often—on setting up a regulatory working group for herbal medicine. It is significant and important that the Government have had the foresight to make it clear that that group will have the capacity to assess the needs of other disciplines, such as aromatherapy, for statutory self-regulation.

It is also helpful that Professor Michael Pittilo has been appointed to take over the detailed work of preparing herbal medicine for statutory self-regulation. I applaud the bringing in of representatives of the Foundation for Integrated Medicine and other lay advisers, because one of the criticisms that the parliamentary group has always had of the Department is that it has never had on board enough people who understand the issues. That is a step in the right direction. I am pleased by that positive response, but I must tell the Minister that the Conservative manifesto at the election said that complementary and alternative medicine should be made much more available in the health service. The pressure that has been applied to the Government from those on the Conservative Benches over the years has probably had some effect. I do not want the Minister to raise her eyebrows too much, because we have had a good relationship in discussions in the past, but I want to make that one political point.

I was astonished to read over my cornflakes before Christmas that the Government have now apparently embraced complementary and alternative medicine, and integrated health care generally, so dramatically. The reports said:

"Herbal drugs may become routine NHS treatment",

"Ministers call for herbal cures on NHS" and

"Hopes for herb cures on the NHS".

It was also claimed that yoga may become a treatment on the NHS and that the Secretary of State wants to set up contracts with licensed alternative therapists. That is a dramatic change. Normally the Government like to bury the bad news in the busy weeks, but this time they have slipped out some good news. It may have gone unnoticed, but it has the potential to make a significant shift in the way in which patients are treated by the health service.

If the Minister and her colleagues will really embrace the 50,000 complementary practitioners, waiting lists will fall. One point that emerges strongly from the submissions made by complementary practitioners, especially acupuncturists, is that they believe that they achieve a 30 per cent. improvement rate when treating patients. Other benefits would include reductions in drugs bills.

Acupuncture is so important because it can treat many different afflictions that it is sometimes difficult to treat within the health service, possibly because of lack of resources and overstretched doctors and sometimes because other treatments are not successful. Acupuncture has been successfully used in drug addiction, treatment of pain, musculoskeletal problems and asthma.

The Minister may not be aware of the following three examples. A team at Derriford hospital in Devon, headed by Sarah Budd, who recently won an integrated health care award, provides a maternity acupuncture service. The hospital has about 4,500 births a year and the service offers a choice of pain relief for women in labour. Because it was such a success, it was expanded to a popular in-patient and out-patient service for antenatal and post-natal problems. Nearer to my Leicestershire constituency, the Kingsmill hospital in Sutton in Ashfield, which is in Nottinghamshire, has been treating eight pregnant ladies for back pain, and that also has been very successful. Those projects should be encouraged, as should the project at the Claydon health centre in Manchester, which uses acupuncture alongside hypnotherapy in smoking cessation treatment. I have given up smoking and I know how hard it is. The Government have a project to reduce smoking—I have raised the issue twice at recent Question Times—and the Minister should consider incorporating acupuncture in that plan

*[Mr. David Tredinnick]*

The British Academy of Western Acupuncture gave me a list of the different afflictions that acupuncture can treat, and they include migraine, trigeminal neuralgia, asthma, bronchitis, menopausal problems, digestive problems, hiatus hernia, colitis, nausea, vomiting, recurrent cystitis, bed-wetting, eczema, psoriasis, hay fever, sinusitis and anxiety. Just about every treatment can be treated using acupuncture.

The herbalists are likely to achieve self-regulation first, followed by the acupuncturists, but the Minister must focus on the issue of managing two registers. Broadly speaking, it has been agreed in the Department that herbal medicine—a category that includes western herbal medicine, the Indian Ayurveda discipline and the traditional Chinese herbalism—should all be regulated as one group. The three different disciplines would be treated in a sort of federal way, with one system of regulation.

Acupuncture should be treated separately. That is my view: some people disagree, but the Minister should not be blown off course. She must stick with the two registers, one for herbalists and one for acupuncturists. The experts in this country who have been taking the matter forward have produced a scheme that has required a lot of careful negotiation.

However, we must find a mechanism to ensure that those who practise both disciplines do not have to pay two registration fees. That was a problem for osteopaths and chiropractors, who found the combined fee for the two registers to which they belonged of more than £1,000 to be prohibitive.

Secondly, the acupuncturists' register must be all-inclusive and embrace all the different bodies. In particular, it must cover the British Medical Acupuncture Society, the Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists and the British Acupuncture Council. Each of those bodies has some 2,000 members, but the other, smaller groups are no less important.

Regulation is important because it builds confidence. It gives patients the confidence to go to these practitioners, and it makes it much more likely that doctors will be prepared to refer patients to complementary practitioners. I hope that that will make possible a dramatic increase in the numbers of people treated on the NHS. I think that acupuncture should be available, free at the point of delivery, at most GPs' surgeries and most NHS hospitals. That should be the objective.

Regulatory bodies have to be financed. I hope that the Minister will say whether the Government would be prepared to produce some of the funding for the registers for acupuncturists and for herbalists. That matter needs to be resolved at an early stage.

I shall not say too much more, as I want the Minister to have a proper chance to answer the debate. It is always unfortunate when Ministers get squeezed for time at the end of Adjournment debates, so I shall give her the best part of a quarter of an hour to reply. However, research is a key issue. People ask where the research on acupuncture can be found, as they do not know enough about it, but the answer is that a lot of research has been done.

We sometimes forget that the People's Republic of China, the origin of Chinese medicine and acupuncture, has a population of 1.273 billion people. The country has 67,000 hospitals, and the anecdotal evidence gathered over the 2,000 years for which acupuncture has been used is overwhelming. There must be studies in Chinese that could be translated into English. Instead of initiating new studies, I believe that we should get our embassy in China to translate some existing surveys. That would engender confidence in this country, and help to take acupuncture forward.

Finally, some other organisations have raised some points to which I should like to refer. The European Federation of Modern Acupuncture has argued that there should be a complete audit of how acupuncture is used in the private sector, to determine how best to use it in the public sector. It also suggested that the more controversial acupuncture treatments—such as the Voll technique, which tries to identify health dysfunction by the reaction to needles—should be thoroughly analysed. I support that.

The Modern Acupuncture Association has stated that its practitioners can improve the health of at least 30 per cent. of people referred to them. It added:

> "In chronic diseases, acupuncture may reduce the need for drugs in 30 per cent. of patients involving acute conditions such as sciatic, headaches, glandular disfunctions".

Another key point concerns the costs that can be saved, as the needles are extremely inexpensive when compared to some vastly expensive drugs. That is why in the past the drugs industry has, generally speaking, taken a disparaging view of complementary medicine and pooh-poohed it. Fortunately, that situation has changed.

The British Academy of Western Acupuncture has written to say that the tendency in the national health service is to refer a patient to the acupuncturist when all else has failed. Mr. George Nieman, the principal, writes:

> "I can assure you that the results are very favourable but there is little doubt that if the patients were referred to the acupuncturists first, a better result could be achieved."

He also talks about expenditure and points out that under current arrangements, treatments are frequently rationed to six only, whereas an acupuncturist needs about 10 treatments to make an impact. Perhaps the Minister will address that point.

The British Acupuncture Council argues that doctors should at least be able to meet World Health Organisation standards of acupuncture education. That should be the minimum requirement. I think that the time has gone for doctors merely to say, "It probably won't do you any harm." Doctors have to know how homeopathy works and about the principles of herbal medicine, the pulses and chi in Chinese medicine. It is no good telling patients that such treatments will probably do them no harm.

I have initiated this debate because I think that it is crucial to have statutory self-regulation to improve the way in which acupuncture is delivered in this country. I also think that, at a time when the Secretary of State for Health is sending patients abroad for treatment, it is crucial to make better use of the roughly 10,000 acupuncturists who are available to work in the health service.

I shall finish by paraphrasing passages from a lovely book called "The Watching Tree" by Adeline Yen Mah, a Chinese lady who was brought up in Shanghai and Hong Kong and came to live in the west. She went with her aunt, who had developed a lump in her breast, to see a Chinese physician in Shanghai. The doctor did not examine her at all but simply took her hand for 10 minutes

and studied it. Mrs. Yen Mah could see her aunt getting nervous. The practitioner said that he was well aware that her aunt had a lump. He continued:

"When you are older, you will come to realise that everything in one's body depends on the flow of qi—

or energy. He continued:

"That flow is carried by blood and reflected in the twenty-eight types of pulses which I can differentiate. By her pulse, I can detect any type of illness she may be suffering from. In a way, you can say that her pulse is tapping out her diagnosis and transmitting it to me through my fingers."

After the consultation, the aunt received herbs from what was described as a strange looking cabinet. Mrs. Yen Mah said:

"We left the doctor's office without him examining any part of Aunt Baba but her wrist."

The aunt took the medicine. The author says:

"We met again thirty-one years later. I asked Aunt Baba about her breast mass. She told me it had never gone away but had remained the same all those years."

She lived to tell the tale. That wonderful system of medicine, about which we in the west do not have a great enough awareness as yet, saved that person's life.

10.33 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) for raising the regulation of acupuncture and its use in the NHS. I pay tribute to his unflagging enthusiasm for complementary and alternative therapies. He has raised them on a number of occasions and we have discussed them. Let me, however, sound a small note of caution at the outset. I would not like him to run away with the idea that complementary and alternative therapies are the answer to all our problems in the national health service, although they can clearly make a significant contribution.

A number of therapies which not very many years ago would have been dismissed as fringe activities are beginning to be taken seriously by orthodox medicine. Osteopathy and chiropractic have joined the established health professions by gaining statutory recognition. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, herbal medicine and acupuncture are now making serious preparations to gain that ultimate recognition. Other therapies are beginning to strengthen their regulation—by bringing together a range of the diverse bodies involved to hold joint discussions—and that is much to be welcomed.

Acupuncture has already attracted interest in the NHS. A BMA report on acupuncture, published in June 2000, identified a growing interest in acupuncture among GPs, and called for improvements and strengthening of its regulation. Acupuncture was one of the therapies included in the complementary medicine information pack that was sent to primary care groups in July 2000. The pack outlines a range of complementary therapies; it describes what is involved and sets out how primary care groups—and now primary care trusts—can begin to commission such services. It does not pretend to act as formal guidance, but highlights where complementary and alternative therapies can be useful.

The fact that acupuncture can help in treating nausea, back pain, tooth pain, migraine and other forms of pain is well recognised. It was the subject of a complete review of the evidence base that was published last November. There is a developing recognition of the evidence base for acupuncture. It is important to note, however, that the therapy cannot apply to the whole range of ailments. It is essential that we have a good, strong, well recognised evidence base for such therapies.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned smoking cessation. A review of the evidence revealed that in 21 trials acupuncture was no better than placebos in securing long-term abstinence from smoking. In fact, it was less successful than nicotine replacement therapy. We must be aware of the contribution that can be made by acupuncture, while also being rigorous about the process. It is through such rigour that there will be acceptance, and people will feel confident and safe in making referrals. We need a balanced consideration of the issues.

Other sources have publicised the effective use of acupuncture. NHS Direct Online, in its new health encyclopaedia, includes advice on the use of acupuncture. It focuses mainly on types of pain relief, where it has been proven to be of most use.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the recent awards for good practice in integrated health care highlighted the work carried out in maternity provision at Derriford hospital. It has been suggested that the hospital might consider applying for beacon status, as a means of achieving wider dissemination and knowledge of the services provided in its maternity unit.

Acupuncture is already used by many, many NHS professionals. It would certainly be desirable if more of them could provide acupuncture. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the importance of doctor training and of ensuring that, through their curriculum and their education, doctors are made aware of the range of complementary therapies. The final draft of "Tomorrow's Doctors", currently being prepared by the professions, refers to the possibility of background instruction in complementary and alternative therapies for trainee doctors. That is an important step in ensuring that doctors are aware of the evidence base and the available therapies.

Even with more qualified NHS staff, however, there will be a need to expand the range of professional acupuncturists—those who practise that therapy exclusively—and there should be more scope for NHS providers to engage their services. That is why a new, professional, regulator of acupuncture could help the NHS by advising on the training and competencies needed by NHS staff to carry out those services. As the profession grows, equality of access to acupuncture on the NHS will ease considerably. Access is not universal and it will increase as the profession becomes more established and acquires more publicity and greater standing through regulation.

Acupuncture is generally considered relatively safe compared with other forms of treatment. However, in a few cases it has been known to have serious adverse effects, and its reliance on the insertion of needles clearly poses a risk to patients. Risk can be minimised by ensuring that acupuncture is administered to high standards of safety and competence by properly trained therapists. That requires effective regulation to define that competence and the necessary training standards, so that patients and the public can rely on the safety of the service.

By comparison with some of the other therapies, acupuncture already has in place many of the features that provide effective regulation on a voluntary basis. Most of

*[Ms Hazel Blears]*

those who practise acupuncture full time are regulated by the British Acupuncture Council—an organisation of some 2,200 members that was formed in 1995 by bringing together the membership of five disparate professional groups. The council was favourably mentioned in a House of Lords Select Committee report, not least because the council had formed an independent accreditation board for educational standards and was well on the way to setting up proper regulation.

In this country, two different groups use acupuncture in different ways. One group consists mostly of professional acupuncturists, who are fully trained in the holistic Chinese approach. The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the relationship between traditional Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture. The other group consists of established conventional health professionals, who are already regulated on a statutory basis in connection with their majority employment. Whether they are nurses, physiotherapists or general practitioners, they use acupuncture in their more conventional practice. They may have had more limited training and may make more limited use of acupuncture than the professional acupuncturists who operate full time.

It is very important that those two groups come together and collaborate. They have already carried out joint research, illustrated by articles published in the *British Medical Journal* in September last year, so the groups are considering such issues together. It is important that, when we begin to develop the regulation, damaging splits should not occur between the different forms of practice. Those groups have many issues in common, and they can come together to help to make the regulation effective, safe and of comfort to patients; and to ensure that the whole acupuncture profession can function properly in the future.

Safety is clearly a key issue for the Government. That is why we want to try to appoint a single, authentic source of professional expertise to protect patients' interests. I am extremely pleased that members of the British Acupuncture Council have supported the case for strong self-regulation. At its recent annual general meeting, the ballot was overwhelmingly in favour of taking forward such steps.

We want to ensure that we create the body with professional expertise, so that it can speak with authority on behalf of acupuncture as practised in the United Kingdom, and so that it can encourage competent practice. We also want to try to ensure that we embrace the whole range of approaches to acupuncture in taking that forward. We can build on the approach that has been taken in relation to herbal medicine by ensuring that we set up proper working groups to consider the issues, that those groups meet regularly and make recommendations, and that the Department of Health is involved.

The way in which herbal medicine has been taken forward—we are involving lay people—provides an important model to ensure that we have the widest possible agreement on such issues. A working group has been appointed to consider herbal medicine, and it is a little in advance of the one considering acupuncture at the moment, but I hope that both bodies can learn from their joint experience as they progress.

The working group on herbal medicine will make recommendations which will form the basis for a subsequent order under section 60 of the Health Act 1999. Clearly, there will be a great deal of work to do before we reach that point, but it is important that this be a joint enterprise with the Government, so that we can embrace the recommendations from the consultation exercise properly in the necessary legislation to give the professions a proper statutory footing.

It is important that the bodies play a major role in deciding how to make progress. This is not a matter for the Government to dictate; it is for the people involved in the service in the professions—the people who treat patients—to make their recommendations. I understand that there will be a meeting on 31 January when all the parties will get together. The Department of Health will be fully represented at that meeting, and we will begin to see dramatic progress.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we already support a great deal of research in this area. There are two major research projects, and about £350,000 is being spent on research, but clearly more work remains to be done. I understand that the hon. Gentleman was involved in preparations for the regulation of osteopathy and chiropractic medicine, and I am sure that his contributions will continue to be extremely helpful in developing the statutory regulation of herbal medicines and acupuncture. I urge him to maintain his involvement and to ensure that he continues to contribute to that process as it develops. Indeed, I urge other hon. Members who are members of the all-party group who have an interest in such issues to ensure that they take part in the consultation that takes place.

The hon. Gentleman asks about the Government's contribution to the cost of regulation. Clearly, regulation costs money. As professions become increasingly successful, the unit costs can be spread more widely and thus perhaps become more manageable. We will make a contribution in the form of the section 60 order, the preparations, and the consultation process. If there is a good, strong case for us to contribute to the profession's infrastructure, we shall certainly consider that in so far as we can.

*The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour,* MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

*Adjourned at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Thursday 10 January 2002*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### Student Support

1. **Patrick Mercer** (Newark): What plans she has to consult the National Union of Students over the new system of student support. [23789]

**The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris):** My hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning met Owain James, the president of the National Union of Students, in the summer to discuss student finance. A review of student finance is now under way. We plan to consult on any proposal for change and, naturally, would expect the NUS to respond and contribute.

**Patrick Mercer:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for her reply. This is certainly the most emotive issue among my constituents in Newark and Retford who are involved in further education. Although a review is welcome, I see no evidence so far of consultation with the NUS, Universities UK and even the teachers' unions, on top of which there is confusion about the timing. May I beg for greater transparency? Let us have evidence at least of the open government of which we hear so much and see so little.

**Estelle Morris:** The hon. Gentleman is a little unfair. We have made the principles of the review clear, and no one in the higher education world or the student body thinks that they are not free to send us their views; they have being doing that in great numbers. When we have proposals, we will publish them and then we will begin a proper consultation exercise. As we have said, the results of the review will be available early in the new year, which is roughly where we are, so it should not be too long from now.

**Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons** (Rochdale): Does the Secretary of State share my surprise, as an ex-president of the NUS, at the gall of the Opposition, who tried to shut down the NUS, in talking to us about consulting it? Will she please bear it in mind in the review that the NUS also represents students in further education, which is a vital stepping stone for many of our constituents who are still excluded from the higher education that they are capable of attaining, to the benefit of the community and the economy?

**Estelle Morris:** My hon. Friend is right. We have noted that the Opposition's views on education unions have changed a great deal in schools, as well as in higher and further education. She makes a valid point. When we talk about student finance, we often restrict our comments to people in full-time study between the ages of 18 and 21, who represent fewer than 50 per cent. of those who study. That has always been the case. She will know that, in the Labour Government's first four years, we spent resources to help part-time and mature students, and I assure her that in our on-going work—not only in the review, but in funding adult learning—we will not forget that incredibly important body. The number of students studying part-time in their mature years is likely to grow, not shrink, in the years ahead.

**Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): I declare an interest in that I have three sons in the student age group.

Given that the Secretary of State has already done two U-turns in the student finance proposals that she has leaked to the press, must she not give a much better answer than the wishy-washy one that she just gave when she said that the proposals will be made some time in the new year, especially as many thousands of students are currently trying to make up their minds about whether they should go to university this year or next year, when they might get a better financial deal?

**Estelle Morris:** I take the point, and we will publish our recommendations, or our thoughts and ideas, in due course. We have also made it clear—I am glad of the chance to clarify this important point—that we do not envisage major changes for entry in 2002, and I encourage all those who are considering applying to enter higher education to do so. The figures published only yesterday by higher education institutions show either a 5.4 or a 5.5 per cent. increase in the number of students starting to study this year. When they started in October, we had already announced that we were looking at student finance. I take the hon. Gentleman's point seriously. Students who start their studies this year need to know what their situation will be in September. We have talked about that, and we will make it clear again that they should apply. We do not envisage any significant change in the method of student finance for those who apply to enter this year and start in the next academic year.

### School Autonomy Criteria

2. **James Purnell** (Stalybridge and Hyde): What criteria she will use to determine whether schools have earned increased autonomy. [23832]

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms):** The criteria will relate to two school characteristics—first, performance and, secondly, school leadership. On leadership, we will work closely with

Ofsted, and I will provide the House with a draft consultation document on the detailed criteria before the Education Bill leaves the House.

**James Purnell:** I thank the Minister for that answer. May I draw his attention to schools, such as Alder High in my constituency, that do not perform outstandingly in terms of absolute results and league tables but do very well in terms of value added and that are rapidly improving? Will he explain how such schools, which would particularly benefit from the extra freedoms under the provisions for earned autonomy, will be able to earn that autonomy?

**Mr. Timms:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. Our aim is to establish a modern, effective comprehensive system that commands the confidence of every community in the country, building on the extra investment that we are making in schools. We want successful schools and teachers to lead a wave of reform, and our view is that giving them greater freedom, as will happen under the earned autonomy provisions, and removing some of the current constraints, will enable them to do so.

As my hon. Friend says, it is important that the opportunity should be available to schools in the whole range of local circumstances. In the consultation, we certainly intend to propose referring to the newly available value-added data to ensure that schools such as his have that opportunity, along with schools in other parts of the country.

**Mr. Phil Willis** (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Does the Minister accept that the concept of earned autonomy is insulting to the vast majority of Britain's schools that deliver quality results year after year? He refused to provide clear criteria in the Education Bill that we are considering, so may I suggest the criteria that we should use? If a school is not in special measures, or not showing serious signs for concern, it should automatically have earned autonomy.

**Mr. Timms:** No, I do not agree with that suggestion. It is right that we look to our most successful schools and teachers to lead the next wave of reform in education. If we had taken the hon. Gentleman's advice, we would not have had, for example, the literacy and numeracy strategies. We intend to set the criteria so that about 10 per cent. of schools will qualify for earned autonomy in the first instance. We will see how things go from there, but it is important that we look to our most successful schools to take the reforms forward and pioneer the innovations that we shall then want to apply throughout the whole system.

**Mr. Gwyn Prosser** (Dover): Most of us are pleased to support and accept more autonomy for our local schools, but is my hon. Friend aware of the problems caused by some foundation schools that set their own admission criteria, especially in areas such as Kent, where selective education is in place? What plans does he have to help to sort out the mess caused by Tory Kent county council, whose failure to look ahead and plan means that pupils in Aylesham village and other parts of my constituency are denied places in secondary schools in September?

**Mr. Timms:** My hon. Friend knows that we have taken the view that decisions about whether there should be changes in the selective nature of admission arrangements in some parts of the country, including Kent, should be made by parents locally. He will also be aware of the arrangements that we have made for that.

I reassure my hon. Friend that the provision for earned autonomy is certainly not about reintroducing anything like the old grant-maintained schools that were introduced by the previous Government. For example, there will not be any extra money for schools with earned autonomy. As to changes to admission arrangements, our view is that they are best dealt with locally.

**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin** (West Derbyshire): What powers will the schools with extra autonomy have that grant-maintained schools did not have?

**Mr. Timms:** We have proposed in the Bill that the extra freedom should be in two areas. The first is over the curriculum and the second is over teachers' pay and conditions. There is, of course, the possibility that we shall want to extend that list in due course in the light of experience, but that would require additional primary legislation. For now, we are sticking to those two areas.

**Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): I am sure that my hon. Friend will not have read the *Bolton Evening News* this week. If he had, he would have seen headlines to the effect that schools across Bolton between them have banked more than £5 million as they wait for a rainy day. Each has a genuine reason for keeping the money in the bank, but would it not be better to bank the money centrally so that the cash flow could continue? If that experience has been replicated across the country, billions of pounds must have been banked. The money is not being used for the purpose for which it was designed, namely education.

**Mr. Timms:** That is a matter for governors to decide. I have, sadly, missed the latest issue of the newspaper that my hon. Friend mentioned, but I think that he will accept that schools have enjoyed great gains from their ability to make their own decisions about how to allocate their resources. They can decide their own priorities on issues such as maintenance and repair work. It is right that the resources are used for the benefit of children in each school and that they should be applied to that end. If there are concerns, I hope that the governors in the schools involved will ensure that the resources are applied properly.

**Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Opposition strongly support increased autonomy for schools, but what confidence can schools and parents have that the criteria will be open, clear and transparent when the Government persist in abusing their majority in the House, as they did this morning to prevent proper debate and scrutiny of the Education Bill? On Tuesday, the Committee lost 11 clauses because they were not debated—and four more this morning—because of the application of an absurd timetable by the Government,

who use knives to prevent discussion of the important parts of the Bill while allowing time for those that no one wants to talk about.

**Mr. Timms:** I am mystified by the hon. Gentleman's point. The Government offered the Opposition an additional three hours of debate in Committee on Tuesday. We were keen to continue the discussion beyond the time that we actually took. We offered an extra three hours, but the Opposition refused them.

### Information and Communications Technology

3. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): What progress is being made to equip schools with resources in ICT. [23833]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis):** The Government are investing more than £1.8 billion in information and communications technology in schools. Some 97 per cent. of schools are now connected to the internet and there is a computer for every seven secondary school pupils and every 12 pupils in our primary schools. Before Christmas, the Prime Minister launched curriculum online and only yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced £100 million to help equip teachers with laptops.

**Tony Cunningham:** I thank the Minister for his answer. I have certainly noticed the huge difference that extra information technology resources have made in many schools in my constituency. However, as we all know, computers are only as good as the people who use them. What is being done to improve the training of teachers, which is of paramount importance? Are there plans to increase the number of IT assistants, who also do a tremendous job in our schools?

**Mr. Lewis:** I agree that it is essential that teachers have both the skill and the confidence to use the most up-to-date technology to ensure that pupils get access to the highest possible quality education. The Government have a proud record on training teachers in the use of the most up-to-date technology. Over the past three years, we have provided training for teachers through the new opportunities fund. Nearly 350,000 teachers in England have signed up for that training and more than 160,000 have completed it. A survey in October 2001 indicated that 73 per cent. of teachers feel confident in their use of the most up-to-date technology.

On trained technicians, the funding that the Government provide under the national grid for learning programmes can be used by schools specifically for technical support. In November last year, we launched a technical support website to provide advice and information to help schools develop appropriate approaches to managing and organising technical support.

**Bob Spink** (Castle Point): In recognising the value of the digital curriculum, does the Minister also recognise the great danger inherent in allowing the BBC free rein to use licence fee payers' money to provide the digital curriculum outside any education controls, checks and balances? Will he agree to meet the industry to discuss how the checks and balances can be brought to bear on the delivery of the digital curriculum?

**Mr. Lewis:** I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point that we have to get the issue right. However, there have been meetings with the industry, and I pay tribute not only to the BBC, but to the industry for their contribution in that respect. Before the BBC gets the go-ahead to produce its curriculum digital service, it will be required to submit its proposals to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for formal consultation and approval. We are in constant dialogue with the industry and are delighted that both it and the BBC have entered into a partnership with the Government in this most imaginative and exciting way.

**Mr. Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow): The Minister will know that South Tyneside has one of the highest unemployment levels in the country, so it is vital to equip kids with new technology skills. Is he aware that South Tyneside has identified a major shortfall in IT provision in the education development plan? Will he take special note of that case and investigate it so that the kids in South Tyneside do not lose out?

**Mr. Lewis:** I am more than willing to respond positively to my hon. Friend's request, and if he informs me of the details of any issue to be addressed in South Tyneside, I will look into it. There is no doubt that South Tyneside will have had its fair share of the significant resources that the Government have made available for the use of up-to-date technology, but I am willing to look at that issue.

### Primary Schools

4. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): How the Government intend to improve primary schools to promote standards of education for 11 to 14-year-olds. [23834]

**The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris):** As a result of the national literacy and numeracy strategies, more pupils are leaving primary school with the skills that they need to access and benefit from secondary education. Our key stage 3 national strategy aims to help those who are just below the expected level to catch up quickly with their peers. Secondary and primary schools, working together, can support those pupils with summer literacy and numeracy schools, bridging units and catch-up programmes.

**Siobhain McDonagh:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Has she considered how parents can be involved in improving standards? Many of the children who need the most help have parents who themselves feel alienated from the education system, and who desperately want to assist their children but do not know how to do so. How can we get them involved?

**Estelle Morris:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. Nothing can replace good teaching as a means of raising standards, but the combination of good teaching and support from home and family is a formula that can work with every child in the country. That is why it is right to

address the needs of parents. I pay tribute to the imaginative work of so many of our schools in making links with parents, including those who are the most difficult to reach.

The Government's commitment to raising standards is evident from the fact that during the National Year of Reading, the National Year of Mathematics in 2000 and Science Year, which is this year, much of our effort is about making parents feel confident that they have a role to play. The message from us all, which is not political, is that those parents who did not succeed at school and who do not have qualifications or a degree can play a full part in their children's education. Every parent can play a role, and all the partners in education—not least the Government but mainly schools—have a responsibility to try to make it as easy as possible for them to play that role.

**Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): Does the Secretary of State think that it would help to improve primary schools and, for that matter, secondary schools if the Liberal Democrats' proposals to undermine the Catholic education system and, indeed, many Church of England schools, by preventing them from selecting on the basis of faith, were implemented? Does she agree that it would be better to leave good schools to get better and poor schools to become good than to mess about with their admission policies?

**Estelle Morris:** There's a question. In this job, a lot of research evidence lands on my desk, but I have never yet seen any relating strength in literacy and numeracy to religious belief. I suppose that it may emerge at some point. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) knows that my views on religious education differ from his, and I am more in agreement with the comments that have just been made.

The role of Churches in education goes back a long way, and if the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) had wanted to, he could have pointed out that hundreds of years ago. Churches were making sure that the poor could read and write when the state had not accepted its responsibility for doing so. I pay tribute not only to faith schools but to all schools for raising literacy and numeracy standards. Just to be absolutely clear, I do not think that people who attend a church have a better chance of being successful in reading and writing or of higher achievement at key stage 3.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most significant contribution that we can make to improving performance in secondary schools is to improve performance in primary schools? May I draw her attention to Henwick primary school in my constituency where I have been a school governor for 16 years? The school struggled along for many years, starved of resources, but the education action zone has provided laptop computers for all the staff, which has made them more efficient, and targeted more resources at the school, allowing it to reduce class sizes at key stage 2. That means that it has the most improved performance of any primary school in the education authority area. Is not that testimony to the investment that we have made in primary schools? Should not we now move on to secondary schools and achieve the same?

**Estelle Morris:** I am happy to pay tribute to the school in my hon. Friend's constituency and, indeed, to his personal support for that education action zone. The good news is that the story is repeated in thousands of primary schools throughout the country. Every Member will have similar stories to tell about the achievement of primary schools. Secondary schools are having to rethink completely what they do with year 7 students because of the improvement in standards. That is the best problem that secondary schools could have to face—how to adjust teaching because the quality of children and their learning is better than it has ever been.

We are not there yet, and I do not wish to sound complacent. For every child who gets to year 7 without the basic skills needed to access the secondary school curriculum, an opportunity is lost. The statistics show that if someone has not conquered basic skills by 11, the chances of them doing so thereafter and getting five A* to C grades at 16 are not good, which is why we must continue with that work. I am delighted with the progress.

**Mr. Damian Green** (Ashford): The right hon. Lady said that she does not want to sound complacent, in which case I invite her to read *Hansard* tomorrow. Is not having enough teachers the first step towards improving standards both in primary schools and for 11 to 14-year-olds? In that context, has she read reports about the head teacher in Fareham who said that the situation is so bad that he devotes two days a week simply to recruitment and has set up a stall in his local Sainsburys in the hope of attracting an ex-teacher or two? Or has she heard about the head teacher of a school in Cambridgeshire who said:

"there is a lot of papering over the cracks going on . . . one head was heard to say that if it's upright and breathing, appoint it"?

The situation is desperate. Is the right hon. Lady not just a little ashamed to be presiding over it?

**Estelle Morris:** I gather that the hon. Gentleman thinks that there are so few teachers in Wandsworth that he had to go in and help out. We could have a long debate about how that has affected the quality of learning for children in that school, but I hope that he enjoyed his three-day sojourn and I welcome him back. Seventeen more years and he will catch up with my experience in the classroom, but never mind.

The fact that there are 12,000 more teachers than in 1998 is a tribute to the Government's investment in recruitment and retention. There is no getting away from that figure. There is an issue about teacher recruitment and retention; some of our secondary schools have serious problems, especially in the shortage areas of maths, design, science, English and modern foreign languages. Of course that is the case, but it is also true that there are more teachers than there have ever been before.

The hon. Gentleman should engage in a proper debate about the dilemma of staffing our schools and how we square the statistic that there are more teachers than there have been for more than a quarter of a century with the fact that there is a real shortage, as well as a perception of shortage. We are dealing with that and have already

talked about remodelling the profession, taking burdens off teachers and seeing how we can better use people who do not have qualified teacher status. That is the debate, and those will be the solutions to the historic problem of staffing our schools effectively—not quoting the odd school here and there and offering anecdotal evidence.

**Mr. Green:** If the right hon. Lady wishes to discuss my enjoyable time in Southfields this week, I should point out that the children awarded me seven or eight out of 10 for my teaching skills in the lesson that I taught yesterday. I am not sure that teachers would award her such a high mark for her performance.

The right hon. Lady dismissed the head teachers' experience of teacher shortages, but perhaps she will listen to local education authorities instead. Kingston upon Thames surveyed teachers who had left the profession. The main reason for leaving was the work load, and the report said that a significant factor in that was

"Frustration felt by teachers over the large amount of paperwork, established through Government initiatives."

Does the right hon. Lady recognise that her Department is not providing a solution to teacher vacancies, but is a large part of the problem as it is causing them?

**Estelle Morris:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman was not teaching the children of Southfields maths; the fact is that there are 12,000 more teachers than in 1998. As long as he refuses to accept that—*[Interruption.]* There are 12,000 more teachers, which means that, no matter how many have left, more have joined the profession; that is what 12,000 more means. There are more teachers now than there were three years ago; the hon. Gentleman must accept that. He wants me to repeat what I have said when he offers anecdotal evidence. Yes, there are problems; some head teachers have to spend far too much time looking for teachers and there are far too many supply teachers in our schools. I repeat what I have said on previous occasions: I would rather that head teachers spent that time raising standards.

The real issue is that because of the action that this Government have taken, there are more teachers than ever before. There is a real increase this year in the number of teachers going into teacher training and more teachers are training to be maths teachers. There are more teachers today teaching our children in our schools than in 1998. That is the reality, but there is still a problem. The solution to that problem is not about sending teachers fewer pieces of paper, but about how we can enable them to do the things that they know are good that have emanated from the Government, which are about target setting and pupil-level support, while getting other staff in with a different range of skills to support them in doing that. I say to the House and to head teachers that sending teachers less paper will neither raise standards nor satisfy them of our ability to give them the support that they need to do the job.

## School Sport

7. **Mr. Andy Reed** (Loughborough): What steps she is taking to improve the level of participation in competitive school sport in the east midlands. [23837]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis):** We have already funded almost 500 school sports co-ordinators nationally to assist families of schools to deliver after-school competitive sports. Thirty co-ordinators are in post in the east midlands covering 204 schools. Competitive games are a compulsory part of the national curriculum for pupils aged between five and 14 and are an option for 14 to 16-year-olds.

**Mr. Reed:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, but does he agree that while school sports co-ordinators are a fantastic success, by the time we produce the 1,000 or so that we need throughout the country, the current funding stream will end? Will he assure the House that he is doing everything that he can to ensure continued core funding for school sports co-ordinators, and also to ensure that at least two hours of sport is undertaken by children during core curriculum time? If we do not do that, we will have a nation of couch potatoes. We have already seen obesity increasing among children. School sports co-ordinators offer a fantastic chance to make a difference. Will he assure me and the House that they will be funded for the long term?

**Mr. Lewis:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's long track record of passionately arguing the importance of school sport and physical education. He has rightly been a powerful advocate of this important part of a child's educational experience. I can give him and the House a cast-iron guarantee that the continued and expanded funding of school sports co-ordinators will be considered as part of the 2002 spending review. I do not think that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or the Treasury would allow me to say anything different at this stage. We are consulting on how we can ensure that the Government's commitment to two hours of high-quality physical education and school sport happens in practice. One issue that we will consider is the whole concept of that being part of, or outside, the school day. That will feature in the consultation process.

**Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): I am not sure whether the Minister is old enough to remember the 1970s and 1980s, but many of us in the House can, including, I think, the Secretary of State. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that she is much younger than me.

In the 1970s and 1980s, competitive school sport was undermined by the dogma of Labour education authorities. *[Interruption.]* It is no good the Minister addressing the matter in such a way, as he obviously does not remember. Will he now pledge that any local education authority that says that we must not have competitive school sport will be brought into line by the Government? It was Labour dogma that destroyed competitive school sport in the 1970s and 1980s.

**Mr. Lewis:** The comments about my right hon. Friend's age were disgraceful and unforgivable. The hon. Gentleman seems to have forgotten that the Conservative party was in government from 1979 onwards and that it was the Conservative Government who forced schools to flog off playing fields to pay for basic repairs to schools, which we have funded properly since we came to power. We have spent millions of pounds and we plan to spend a further £7.8 billion on school buildings. As a result

of the Government's commitment to giving schools resources, schools no longer need to flog off playing fields. Alongside the legislation that we have introduced, that means that schools have more opportunity to enable their pupils to participate in competitive sports.

Events that the hon. Gentleman mentioned had nothing to do with dogma or ideology and everything to do with lack of resources and forcing schools to flog off basic facilities.

### Examination Results

8. **Roger Casale** (Wimbledon): What recent assessment she has made of the attainment rates of GCSEs grade A* to C. [23838]

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms):** The results published on 20 November show that 50 per cent. of 15-year-olds gained at least five good GCSEs this year, compared with 49.2 per cent. last year—an increase of 3.7 percentage points since the targets were set in 1997. We are delighted that the 50 per cent. mark has been reached a year early.

**Roger Casale:** I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he join me in congratulating Wimbledon college in my constituency on increasing the number of students who received a grade between A and C at GCSE from 46 per cent. to 57 per cent? Does he agree that the individual variations in schools' performance scupper the argument that improved standards are achieved through easier exams? If that were the case, the impact would be the same on all schools. We should recognise that improvements in schools occur as a result of the dedication and hard work of teachers, students, support staff and parents. We should reward best practice in schools such as Wimbledon college and ensure that it spreads to other schools.

**Mr. Timms:** I agree with my hon. Friend and I am glad to join him in paying tribute to the achievements of Wimbledon college. Each year, as improvements occur, some people claim that they are the result of easier examinations. That is not the case. We have an extensive monitoring programme through the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. It shows that the difficulty of the syllabus and the performance of GCSE examination candidates have been broadly maintained not only in the past few years but over decades. Standards in public exams are more rigorously scrutinised today than in the past. It is right to commend the achievements of young people and schools that have enabled important and welcome progress.

**Adam Price** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The Minister will clearly be aware of the Department's recently commissioned research, which shows that attainment rates at GCSE level in coalfield communities lag considerably behind the national average. The Government have adopted a targeted approach to educational underachievement in urban areas; will they consider a similar approach to those problems in coalfield communities? Will the Secretary of State consider holding a joint ministerial summit with her colleagues in Wales and Scotland, where there is a similar pattern of underachievement in coalfield communities?

**Mr. Timms:** We are adopting a targeted approach across the country. We have introduced floor targets so that every school, wherever it is based, will be supported to secure at least 20 per cent. of students with five good GCSEs by 2004, rising to 25 per cent. by 2006. Wherever those schools are located, they will be supported to increase their achievement levels to that of the floor target, which will rise with time.

Our excellent clusters approach targets parts of the country that are outside urban areas, for which excellence in cities is available, to tackle disadvantage and deprivation in rural communities.

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): I think that I am right in saying that the range of grades for GCSEs runs from A to G. Unfortunately, a lot of children get grades E, F or G, for which they do not think it is even worth bothering to turn up to the presentation ceremonies to receive their certificates. Can my hon. Friend assure me that we will consider a broader range of options for young people at 14, so that they are not forced into doing subjects that they do not feel motivated to do, ending up with qualifications that they do not feel will serve any purpose? I am talking about options on the more vocational routes, which I hope will keep young people learning and may lead them to keep learning beyond the age of 16.

**Mr. Timms:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. I would not want to denigrate the achievements of some youngsters in obtaining E, F and G passes at GCSE, and we have seen the number of children with no qualifications fall again this summer, which I welcome. But my hon. Friend is right in saying that we need to extend opportunities to young people beyond the age of 14. That is the intention that we set out in the White Paper and we are debating the matter in the Education Bill Committee at the moment. We shall shortly give further details of our proposals to extend opportunities and raise standards for young people beyond 14.

### Further Education (Teaching Vacancies)

9. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): What recent meetings she has had with the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education to discuss the shortage of *(a)* teachers and *(b)* lecturers in further education. [23839]

**The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge):** We have had a number of meetings in recent months with representatives of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education. Discussion at those meetings covered a wide range of issues about the further education sector, including teacher and lecturer shortages in some subject areas, and the initiatives that the Government have introduced to attract new staff into the profession and to reward and retain excellent FE teachers and lecturers.

**Mr. Hoban:** Fareham college in my constituency is finding it very difficult to recruit staff because of a combination of lower pay and a heavier work load leading to poor morale for teachers and lecturers throughout the

sector. It is finding it difficult to refill vacancies, and is having to advertise three or four times to find the right calibre of staff. It is not only the secondary sector in my constituency that is suffering. Will the Minister set out in detail what she is going to do to address the recruitment and retention crisis in the further education sector?

**Margaret Hodge:** The reason why the college in the hon. Gentleman's constituency has found it tough to recruit and retain excellent teachers in past years is the cuts in spending on further education that the college had to bear under the Conservative Government—12 per cent. in five years. That is part of the legacy that we have inherited. Since we have come into government, we have increased the amount of money available to FE colleges by 17 per cent. in real terms. Specifically to attract new teachers into the FE sector, we are introducing golden hellos, helping with teaching bursaries and looking at helping with student loan write-offs. As in the secondary and primary sectors, we acknowledge a problem, but we are the ones tackling it; the Conservatives were the ones ignoring it.

**Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Select Committee on Education and Skills interviewed three of the major teaching unions yesterday? Is she further aware of the changed atmosphere in the unions? There is a much more positive spirit, in terms of recruitment and of what they think the Government are achieving. On the other hand, a recent meeting with NATFHE flagged up some real concerns about recruitment into the FE sector. The Government rely on this sector, which covers the ages of 16 to 19, to deliver the sort of educational performance that we need for people who often miss out in the first phase of education. Will my hon. Friend take seriously the fact that something has to be done very quickly about recruitment?

**Margaret Hodge:** I am delighted that there are regular meetings between the Education and Skills Committee and the teaching unions, as there are between Ministers and those unions. I agree with my hon. Friend that the atmosphere is one of co-operation and working in partnership. Of course we take seriously the issue of recruiting and retaining high-quality staff in the FE sector. I think that we are the first Government to take the FE sector seriously at all. I hope that initiatives such as the teachers' pay initiative, involving more than £300 million over three years, will start to give some indication of how we want to raise the rewards to excellent teachers in the FE sector.

**Alistair Burt** (North-East Bedfordshire): My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) raised in his supplementary question the issue of morale and its importance to retaining and recruiting teachers and lecturers. Is the Minister aware that the already low morale in that sector has been lowered still further by the impact on further education of the failure of the Government's individual learning account scheme?

The Association of Colleges tells me that principals, teachers and lecturers have to deal with irate and frustrated students, many of whom are the mature and part-time returners referred to by the Secretary of State, who do not know what is going on, wrongly blame colleges and teachers for their experiences and threaten legal action against them. All that is distracting those in further education from what they should be doing.

Will the Minister explain to the House and those in further education who are bearing the brunt of anger that should be directed at the Government what she intends to do about that failed scheme and when; how much her Department's overspend on it already runs to; and which part of her budget—schools, adult education, further education or higher education—will have to be cut to pay for it?

**Margaret Hodge:** I do not accept that morale in the FE sector is as low as the hon. Gentleman claims. I find in all my discussions with staff and college principals that there is huge confidence in the fact that we are investing real money in the FE sector and raising standards.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that when we discovered that there were genuine problems with the way in which the individual learning account scheme was operating, it was right to stop it. I also hope that had he been in our position, he would have taken a similar decision.

We must get on with the job of sorting out and paying those people who are waiting for the money that they are owed, and we are doing that. We also have to sort out a proper scheme that will ensure that we can encourage learning among adults in the workplace, and we are doing that. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman would have tackled the issue any differently had he discovered the problems that we have had. It would have been nice had the Conservatives, over their 18 years in government, done anything—anything at all—to encourage adult learners into such a scheme.

**John Cryer** (Hornchurch): Does my hon. Friend agree that the root of the problems of FE lecturer shortages is the Conservative Government's policy of incorporation, which in reality was backdoor privatisation?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I do not think that the Minister will want to answer questions about the last Government. It is her Government who she has to worry about.

**John Cryer:** I was about to come this Government, Mr. Speaker. The key question we face is whether to inject a degree of democracy and accountability back into FE colleges. Owing to incorporation, the power of principals—or chief executives, as some of those with particularly bloated egos call themselves—became immensely concentrated and there are no checks and balances. That led to depressed wages, de-recognition of unions and deliberate attacks on the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education—many trade union activists were targeted and shifted from their jobs. We need to reintroduce accountability—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I call the Minister.

**Margaret Hodge:** I agree that the introduction of incorporation had terrible impacts for sixth-form colleges in particular and the FE sector in general. I hope that, through the learning and skills councils, we are introducing better mechanisms to ensure that colleges in each locality can work together in the interests of learners in their area. I also hope that the new inspection regime,

with Ofsted working with the adult learning inspectorate, is achieving better accountability on quality and standards for learners and the local community.

**Recruitment and Retention (Oxfordshire)**

10. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): If she will make a statement on recruitment and retention of primary and secondary school teachers in Oxfordshire. [23840]

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms):** The annual census showed that the vacancy rate for Oxfordshire was 0.4 per cent. last January compared with 1.4 per cent. nationally.

**Mr. Cameron:** I thank the Minister for that reply, but if he reads the answer to the written question that I asked his Department he will see that in January 1997 there was just one vacancy, whereas in January 2001 there were 14. That is not an anecdote, but fact. Will the hon. Gentleman take two concrete steps to deal with the issue in the south-east: impose a moratorium on new circulars and paperwork to teachers and give all schools greater freedom to pay and reward staff?

**Mr. Timms:** The hon. Gentleman is right to be concerned about pressures on recruitment in his area, but I think that he will welcome the news that the disruption in schools that some predicted last term did not materialise. I think that he will welcome other encouraging signs too. For example, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out, the number of applicants for teacher training increased by a further 5 per cent. this year. That is the second successive increase after eight consecutive years of reductions. The long decline in recruitment for training has been reversed, which I think suggests good prospects.

**SOLICITOR-GENERAL**

*The Solicitor-General was asked—*

**Crown Prosecutors**

32. **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): How many Crown prosecutors at each level of seniority there were in the post in each year since 1995; and if she will make a statement. [23866]

**The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman):** Rather than reading out the tables relating to the five grades of Crown prosecutor over the last six years, let me tell the hon. Gentleman that I have arranged for the information to be put on the Law Officers website. I can summarise it by saying that in 1995 there were 2,218 Crown prosecutors, and in 2000 there were 1,922.

**Mr. Llwyd:** How many prosecutors have been female, and how many have been members of ethnic minorities? What efforts are being made to increase recruitment in those groups?

**The Solicitor-General:** I will supply the hon. Gentleman with the exact percentages, but I can tell him now that there are relatively more female and ethnic-minority lawyers in the Crown Prosecution Service than in private practice. We welcome that, and want to build on it.

One of the ways in which we attract women to the CPS is to provide much more flexible employment, and much more family-friendly terms and conditions, than they would find either in private practice or at the independent Bar. But we need to go further. We must not just recruit ethnic-minority lawyers at the basic level, but ensure that they move up the system and become higher-court advocates. I hope that they join the judiciary as well, so that we can play a part in its diversification.

**Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that Crown prosecutors take account of the interests of victims and their families, especially in prosecutions relating to traffic incidents?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. That question is far too wide.

**Road Offences (Cyclists)**

33. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): How many cyclists were prosecuted for road offences in the last 12 months who had fines of over £500 imposed on them. [23867]

**The Solicitor-General:** In the most recent year for which figures are available, more than 700 cyclists were prosecuted and 600 were found guilty. About 500 were fined, but none were fined more than £500.

**Mr. Chapman:** Is my right hon. and learned Friend as dismayed as I am at the fact that cyclists nowadays seem to flout the law with impunity—riding through red lights, riding without lights, riding down footpaths, riding on pavements and riding in the wrong direction down one-way streets? Penalties exist, but are insufficiently applied. What could be done to rectify the problem of lawless cycling in general, and the specific problem caused by the failure of some authorities to issue fixed penalties?

**The Solicitor-General:** The CPS is well aware that the law—including the criminal law—applies to cyclists as it applies to everyone else. If there is evidence that cyclists have committed a criminal offence, they should be prosecuted. I have given my hon. Friend the figures. He mentioned a range of offences; they are included in the 700 prosecutions that have taken place in the last 12 months.

As my hon. Friend will know, two questions arise in relation to decisions whether to prosecute: is there enough evidence, and is a prosecution in the public interest? I am not aware that the CPS has ever said, "Oh well, it is just a cyclist, so although there is evidence we will not bother".

I know that my hon. Friend is raising other issues with the police and the courts

## Crown Prosecution Service

34. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): What guidance she gives to the Crown Prosecution Service on efforts to be made to trace defendants who fail to answer Crown court bail. [23868]

**The Solicitor-General:** If a defendant who has been granted bail does not turn up in court, it is an offence under the Bail Act 1976. The CPS will apply to the court there and then for a warrant to be issued for the arrest of the defendant. The system for tracing defendants who fail to answer bail is the standard procedure for finding and arresting under a warrant. The court issues a warrant and the police trace and arrest the defendant.

**Mr. Kidney:** I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that answer. My question was inspired by a tragic constituency case in which a young man was knocked down and killed on the pavement by a motorist. When the trial date came, the accused, who had been granted bail, did not turn up and has not since been found. The two general issues that arise are whether to grant bail and the length of time that it takes to reach trial. However, when a defendant fails to appear, cannot the CPS and the police be much more proactive in the steps that they take to trace him or her? For example, the BBC "Crimewatch" programme helps to trace people before they are charged. Could it be used to help to trace people who have bunked off when they should be on trial?

**The Solicitor-General:** I am aware of the case that my hon. Friend raises because he has written to me and his local chief crown prosecutor about it. He raises the issue of whether the CPS should object to bail. He also raises the issue of "Crimewatch", which can be used to find people who have skipped bail. On the issue of the CPS and the police working closely together on tracing people and bringing them back to court after they have skipped bail, that is important through the whole process, including during trials and advice on cases generally. My hon. Friend raises a tragic case and I understand that the police do not yet know where the defendant is. I hope that they find him, and when they do, he will be brought before the court to face the charges.

**Mr. William Cash** (Stone): Can the Solicitor-General shed light on the mystery of why, since 1997, the number bailed by the Crown court has fallen by 11 per cent., but the percentage failing to appear has increased by 3 per cent.? Why is that happening? In relation to the question of objecting to bail, does she have any remedies, because the situation appears to be getting exponentially more serious?

**The Solicitor-General:** The CPS always thinks carefully, according to its code for prosecutors, about whether it should object to bail when a request is made. The hon. Gentleman knows that the CPS does not know why more of those granted bail are skipping bail, but that will inform its view of how often it is right to object to bail. The general pattern of more people skipping bail will make the CPS look harder at whether it should object to the granting of bail. I will consider the figures and see whether I can shed more light on the mystery that he raises.

## Previous Convictions (Disclosure)

36. **Mr. Neil Turner** (Wigan): What assessment she has made of the impact on the work of the Crown Prosecution Service of implementing the proposal of the Auld report that the previous convictions of defendants be disclosed at trial. [23872]

**The Solicitor-General:** In his review of the criminal courts, Lord Justice Auld recommended that consideration be given to the Law Commission proposal on evidence of bad character as part of a review of the law of evidence more generally. The CPS is consulting its prosecutors about the implications of different approaches to admitting evidence of previous convictions.

**Mr. Turner:** I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that answer. Anything that allows the CPS to make more prosecutions must be welcomed, but if convictions are made known to the court prior to witnesses giving evidence, might that make them less liable to come forward? Is that a possible drawback of any change to the system?

**The Solicitor-General:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The provision to the jury of evidence of previous misconduct—previous convictions—is an issue not only in relation to the defendant but in relation to defence witnesses. Should the jury know about their previous convictions? All those issues are within the scope of the Law Commission's report and recommendations, and all have been looked at by the Auld report, consultation on which will finish at the end of January. There has also been regional consultation, in which evidence has been discussed.

The Government will consider all the information coming from the wide-ranging consultation and we will publish a White Paper. One of the things contained within that will be the way in which we deal with the issue so that we have simpler, clearer and more predictable rules of evidence in relation to previous convictions, which command public confidence.

**Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Does the Solicitor-General have figures for the trials that already have disclosure of previous convictions and for trials in which the defendant's previous convictions have not been disclosed under the present rules? I ask because the right hon. and learned Lady will be aware that there is great concern about any significant change in the proposition that somebody should be tried without knowledge of their previous convictions, because if these are brought in, we hugely increase the chance of a conviction, whether the person is guilty or not.

**The Solicitor-General:** The Law Commission's proposals—which are still out for consultation—would mean that some previous convictions that are currently

admissible would no longer be allowed, and that others that are currently not admissible would be allowed. The situation will change. The Attorney-General and I have asked the Crown Prosecution Service to consider the issue in great detail because the CPS is in court, dealing with issues of evidence. Obviously the CPS and the Government want the system to be fair, clear and understandable; that is also in the public interest. We can all agree that that is not the situation at the moment, but the rights of defendants and the question of bringing offenders to justice must both be considered under the new system.

# Business of the House

12.32 pm

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

**The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook):** The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 14 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Office of Communications Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion to approve a money resolution on the Home Energy Conservation Bill.

TUESDAY 15 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill.

WEDNESDAY 16 JANUARY—Opposition Day [7th Allotted Day]. Until Seven o'clock there will be a debate entitled "State of the Railways" followed by a debate entitled "The Crisis in the Care System". Both debates will arise on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats.

THURSDAY 17 JANUARY—A debate on Bristol Royal infirmary on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 18 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 21 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill.

TUESDAY 22 JANUARY—Opposition Day [8th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 23 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the International Development Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 24 JANUARY—Motion to take note of the outstanding reports of the Public Accounts Committee to which the Government have replied. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 25 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

I should like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall on Thursday 17 January will now be a debate on victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system.

I should also like to inform the House that, on Wednesday 16 January 2002, there will a debate on the sixth environmental action programme in European Standing Committee A. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

*Following are the documents:*

*Reports Session 1999–2000*

| *Report No:* | *Title* | *HC No.* | *Publication Date* | *Govt Reply* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 38 | Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: The Sheep Annual Premium Scheme in England | 362 | 24 November 2000 | Cm 5021 |
| 39 | HM Customs and Excise: Revenue from Gambling Duties | 423 | 8 November 2000 | Cm 5021 |
| 40 | National Savings: Public-Private Partnership with Siemens Business Services | 566 | 15 November 2000 | Cm 5021 |
| 41 | The Gaming Board: Better Regulation | 611 | 16 November 2000 | Cm 5021 |
| 42 | The Management and Control of Hospital Acquired Infection in Acute NHS Trusts in England | 306 | 23 November 2000 | Cm 5021 |
| 43 | Hip Replacements: Getting it Right First Time | 513 | 13 December 2000 | Cm 5071 |
| 44 | Ministry of Defence: Accepting Equipment Off-Contract and into Service | 319 | 30 November 2000 | Cm 5078 |
| 45 | Ministry of Defence: Acceptance of the Chinook Mk 2 Helicopter | 975 | 30 November 2000 | Cm 5078 |
| 46 | Ministry of Defence: Kosovo—The Financial Management of Military Operations | 582 | 21 December 2000 | Cm 5071 |
| 47 | The National Health Service Executive—Valedictory Hearing: Sir Alan Langlands | 624 | 19 December 2000 | Cm 5071 |

*Reports Session 2000–01*

| *Report No:* | *Title* | *HC No.* | *Publication Date* | *Govt Reply* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Inpatient Administration, Bed Management and Patient Discharge in NHS Acute Hospitals | 135 | 25 January 2001 | Cm 5127 |
| 2 | Public Trust Office: Unclaimed Balances Held in Funds in Court and the Office's 1998–99 Accounts | 142 | 31 January 2001 | Cm 5127 |
| 3 | Emergency Aid: The Kosovo Crisis | 143 | 14 January 2001 | Cm 5127 |
| 4 | Grants made by the National Lottery Charities Board | 168 | 16 February 2001 | Cm 5127 |
| 5 | The Draft Social Security (Inherited SERPS) Regulations 2001 | 243 | 18 February 2001 | Cm 5127 |
| 6 | Review of Audit and Accountability for Central Government | 260 | 2 March 2001 | Cm 5201 |
| 7 | Excess Votes 1999–2000: Class X, Votes 2 and 3 | 284 | 9 March 2001 | N/A |
| 8 | Maintaining the Royal Palaces | 77 | 14 March 2001 | Cm 5201 |
| 9 | Managing Finances in English Further Education Colleges | 283 | 21 March 2001 | Cm 5201 |
| 10 | Parole | 349 | 29 March 2001 | Cm 5201 |
| 11 | The Housing Corporation: Overseeing Focus Housing Association | 365 | 2 May 2001 | Cm 5261 |

*Reports Session 2000–01*

| *Report No:* | *Title* | *HC No.* | *Publication Date* | *Govt Reply* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | English Heritage: Access to Properties | 265 | 3 May 2001 | Cm 5201 |
| 13 | The Refinancing of Fazakerley PFI Prison Contract | 372 | 5 July 2001 | Cm 5261 |
| 14 | Ministry of Defence: Managing Reductions in the Number of Vacant Family Quarters | 391 | 5 July 2001 | Cm 5261 |
| 15 | Strategic Rail Authority: Action to Improve Passenger Rail Services | 392 | 18 July 2001 | Cm 5261 |
| 16 | The National Blood Service | 207 | 11 July 2001 | Cm 5261 |

*[Wednesday 16 January 2002:*

*European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union Document: 5771/01, Sixth Environmental Action Programme of the European Community. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 28-xi (2000-01); HC 152-i and HC 152-ii (2001-02).]*

**Mr. Forth:** In thanking the Leader, may I take this opportunity, if it is not too late, to wish him a happy new year?

May we have an urgent statement on a very serious allegation that has been raised today—what I would have to call the "cash for no question" issue? It would appear—I can scarcely believe this—that the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) had a question down to the Prime Minister, but that the powers-that-be in the Government persuaded him to withdraw his question—which was going to be about the inadequacy of funding for a hospital in his constituency—with the promise of £200,000 additional funding for the hospital.

We are used to allegations about cash for questions, but the amount seems excessive, and to be an example of regrettable parliamentary inflation. Apparently, the going rate for the withdrawal by a Government Back Bencher of a question—presumably to avoid embarrassment to the Prime Minister—is £200,000. I hope that the Leader of the House will assure us that an urgent statement on this serious matter will be made—if not today, then tomorrow—because we need to get to the bottom of it and to be assured that the allegation is untrue. If it is true, we need to be told how the tactic can be justified.

I hope that the Leader of the House will also make provision for the Deputy Prime Minister to come to the House and explain his response to the unusually truthful statements from the Minister for Europe. Today's press report that Minister as saying:

"We have the worst railways in Europe.

We started transport investment far too late . . . We should have been more radical earlier."

I quote from *The Sun*, which the House knows has a direct line to No. 10, so we can rely on what it says. It states:

"Last night, a Government source"—

and we all know who that is—

"said: 'Peter Hain has finally coughed to what we have known for some time.

The transport system has been going to pot since the day Labour won power.

John Prescott, who told us for years what he would do to put it right, messed it up once he got the chance.'"

These are serious matters, because not only is a Minister of State admitting finally that the railways have been put into a disgraceful condition by the Government—which we have known for some time—but a Government source is seeking to undermine the Deputy Prime Minister. I ask, therefore, for a statement, either from the Deputy Prime Minister or from the Minister for Europe. Otherwise, I hope that the Leader of the House will arrange for a statement to be made by the Prime Minister, as it is obviously his man who has given this information to *The Sun*.

**Mr. Cook:** First, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his good wishes for the new year. I am very happy to accept them, however late they may come in the course of the parliamentary Session. I shall observe only that it is plain that the Christmas and new year recess has in no way softened his approach to these exchanges, but I would have been surprised and disappointed if it had.

I have no insight into why my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) may not have asked his question. That is entirely a matter for him to decide. However, I am taken aback that the right hon. Gentleman should complain about a case in which an hon. Member, finding that an issue that he has raised has been satisfactorily resolved, decides not to continue to press that issue in the House. I should have thought that resolving the problems of our constituents was what Parliament was for. If this constituency matter has been resolved, I can only commend the speed with which that has been achieved.

I turn now to the railways. The right hon. Gentleman may not have been present in the House when we debated transport matters in the 1970s and 1980s. Had he been present, he would have heard a number of speeches—by me, and by the Deputy Chief Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Keith Hill)—making the point that investment in Britain's railways was among the lowest in Europe, and that that had caused a relative decline in the quality of our railways. That is why this Government have set about increasing investment in the railways.

I remind hon. Members of what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday. He told the House that, in the previous Parliament, this Government increased by half as much again the annual investment in the railways inherited from the previous Conservative Government. In this Parliament, we shall double that amount. Every year of this Parliament, this Government will be investing three times as much as the average for the last years in office of the previous Conservative Government.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe drew attention to what has been a matter for discussion in the Labour party and in the press—that, for the first two years of this Labour Government, we followed the investment

and spending plans inherited from our Conservative predecessors. I am perfectly willing to listen to my colleagues and friends in Government ask whether, in retrospect, we should necessarily have shown such patience. I am not willing to listen to lectures from the Conservative party, which left us those spending plans and an inheritance for the railway industry that will take a decade to put right.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): May we have a debate on the coal industry that will be wide ranging enough to deal with the problem of equal pay for the female cleaners and catering staff who have missed out on equal pay provisions? It should be broad enough to deal with the continuing compensation problems that exist for those with vibration white finger, bronchitis and emphysema and to take into account the miners' pension fund. The 50:50 arrangement on surpluses is in an unfortunate position and needs renegotiating so that those pension rights can be extended and developed.

**Mr. Cook:** I am well aware of both the points that my hon. Friend raises; the deep personal concern of the individuals involved has been articulated in the House on a number of occasions.

I remind my hon. Friend that the Government were anxious to find a solution to the problem of the cleaners and other domestic staff who were caught in the position to which he refers. Indeed, we settled with all those who were nominated by the union. We very much regret that it appears that people were not included in that initial nomination, but there comes a point at which we have to draw a line under the settlement. Although I understand why the individuals concerned may feel aggrieved, we took a step that no previous Government had taken to try to resolve the issue, and we did resolve it with all those known to us at the time.

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): When can we expect the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to come to the Dispatch Box and give us a full explanation of what is going on in the rail industry? The crisis is reaching desperate proportions but we have had no full statement from the Secretary of State. Does the Leader of the House really believe it to be desirable or satisfactory for a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister, in the columns of *The Spectator*, to produce the first analysis of the chaos that the Government have added to by failing to undo the disasters of rail privatisation in their first four years? Does the right hon. Gentleman really think it satisfactory that the Liberal Democrats have to provide the Secretary of State with an opportunity to explain to the House the chaos that has been caused in the rail industry and the confusion that is increasing every day, to the disadvantage of rail passengers?

In the light of what will obviously happen as a result of the Lord Chancellor's duffing up at yesterday's meeting of the parliamentary Labour party, can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether it is true that Labour Members are being invited, by questionnaire, to tell the Government what proportion of elected Members of the second Chamber they are prepared to accept? Why, as Leader of the whole House, is the right hon. Gentleman not inviting all members of all parties to tell him how the Government have got it wrong?

**Mr. Cook:** On the last matter, I am happy to put the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest. No questionnaire from the Government Whips is going round the PLP.

**Mr. Forth:** Why not?

**Mr. Cook:** If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to send a questionnaire to all Labour Members, I can predict some of the answers that he will get. However, he is welcome to do so.

We are about to have a debate on the House of Lords in which I will address the matter at greater length—indeed, perhaps at great length. I hope that the process of the debate will help take us forward to find a point of consensus on the plans for reform of the House of Lords.

On the rail industry, a speech will be made by the Minister with responsibility for the railways in the debate next week. In addition, Monday sees the publication of the new four-year plan from the Strategic Rail Authority under its new direction. I anticipate that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will have things to say on that occasion.

**David Wright** (Telford): My right hon. Friend will be aware that a review of English Partnerships' activity is under way. English Partnerships is a major landholder in Telford and is key to the regeneration of the town. When will there be a statement to the House on the progress of the review?

**Mr. Cook:** I am advised that the review is already under way. It was announced in October 2000, and there will shortly be an announcement on its progress.

**Peter Bottomley** (Worthing, West): The Leader of the House said that he was not prepared to listen to Conservative Members. I remind him that most of the signatories to early-day motion 513 on the parliamentary commissioner are Labour Members:

*[That this House has confidence in the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and invites Elizabeth Filkin to accept reappointment on the terms of the initial contract working four days a week.]*

Is the announcement that Mr. John Stonborough has been appointed as the crisis manager for the House of Commons Commission a sign that we are likely to have that debate? What progress is being made in making a nomination to the House? Is it open to the House to say that the present commissioner should be invited to carry on with her work on her present terms?

**Mr. Cook:** The last sentence is a statement of the facts at the present time. The commissioner remains in post and must continue with her job; indeed, we would be distressed if she did not do so. The offer remains open to her to include herself on the shortlist, on which we guaranteed her a place. I have repeatedly urged her to accept that invitation. We want to ensure that we get the best possible candidate for the House to occupy the role of parliamentary commissioner. That is why we have

*[Mr. Cook]*

tested the market. I am pleased to say that we have received a number of excellent applications, on which we will reach a judgment in the next month or two.

**Mrs. Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside): Will my right hon. Friend secure a statement on Iran's refusal to accept the Government's choice of ambassador to Iran, Mr. David Reddaway, on the grounds that he is Jewish, or that they believe him to be so? Does my right hon. Friend accept that that is plain anti-semitism, that it should not be accepted and that Iran should not be in a position to dictate to the Government who should be our rightful ambassador?

**Mr. Cook:** As I understand the situation, the friction to which my hon. Friend refers does not exist. Mr. Reddaway is an excellent diplomat. I knew and worked with him when I was at the Foreign Office and have full confidence in him. It is not unusual for there to be a short delay between one ambassador leaving and another arriving. There is no friction of the sort to which she refers.

**Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): Will the Leader of the House find time soon to debate an issue that I first raised on 5 November—namely, European Union regulations on the disposal of refrigerators? Are the Government aware that this is entirely a matter of their creation, because they failed to seek a derogation from those regulations, thus making it impossible for refrigerators to be disposed of, which is leading to fly tipping and all sorts of problems? Does he recognise that it is a problem that must be rectified, and soon?

**Mr. Cook:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that I share his view that that is a serious and pressing problem. It is having a serious impact in a number of areas. The Government are fully seized of the issue and are looking for a way to deal with it as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): Following the question about English Partnerships, which often used to get rid of land in new towns without consulting the local community, is my right hon. Friend aware that Defence Estates is also engaging in that practice? For instance, it has given the local Royal Air Force benevolent club in my constituency notice to quit. I hope that he will urge Defence Ministers to explain to the House that Defence Estates will act in the interests of communities, not against them, when they take such decisions.

**Mr. Cook:** I cannot say that I am familiar with the case that my hon. Friend draws to the House's attention, but I am glad that he has been given the opportunity to ventilate what is obviously a serious issue for his constituency. I will happily draw his comments to the attention of the Ministry of Defence.

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield): As the Government grapple extraordinarily ineffectively with the winter of discontent that has descended on public services in many parts of the country, is the right hon. Gentleman, who was on the Government Benches in 1978, suffering from a sense of deja vu? Will he reconsider the suggestion that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) and I made, which is that we should have regular debates—say, every month—that are attended by the Prime Minister so that we can monitor on behalf of our constituents how he is getting on with his solemn pledge to the British people at the general election that he would deliver world-class public health services?

**Mr. Cook:** I am refreshed to see that Conservative rhetoric has not changed in 30 years. It is helpful in this world of change to have such a reassuring statement of stasis and paralysis. Of course, there will be plenty of opportunities for the House to debate the state of the public services during this Parliament. Indeed, the Prime Minister has shown a refreshing and welcome interest in those matters. In December, he took part in discussions on health policy, and he will continue to do so. The hon. Gentleman should not run down the improvement that has been secured through the increase in the number of doctors and nurses in the health service and the first increase for more than a generation in the number of beds in our hospitals. That is why this winter has passed so far without the sort of crisis that we saw in the closing years of the Conservative Government. They did not increase the number of beds in our hospitals; they dramatically cut the number.

**Mr. Mark Fisher** (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Will the Leader of the House take soundings throughout the House to establish the views of Members on two points: first, whether there is now a consensus, as I suspect, in favour of a wholly or substantially elected second Chamber, on the principle that, in a democracy, the people should decide who sits in our Parliament; and, secondly, whether now is the time for the responsibility for policy on the subject to be located in this House—the House of the Executive—and specifically in the office of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House?

**Mr. Cook:** I think that I would be very unwise to respond to the last part of my hon. Friend's question. On the other matter, I invite him to listen attentively to the half hour that I am about to embark upon.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will be aware of the concern in the House about the relationship between India and Pakistan. The Prime Minister recently visited those countries, yet we have not had a statement on what happened. Specifically, is it possible to have a statement on whether he made any representation to the President of Pakistan about the person in Pakistan who is agitating for attacks on this country, and whether there is any chance of extradition to enable that person to be brought here to be tried for such activities? Concerns were expressed about London being a centre of international terrorism; now it seems that we can be attacked from abroad, by encouragement. Is it possible that there might be that ambiguity in the Government's viewpoint between home-bred terrorists and international terrorism?

**Mr. Cook:** I see no such ambiguity in that case. I believe that the hon. Gentleman refers to Mr. Butt, whose inflammatory and irresponsible rhetoric we would all deplore. It must be borne in mind that on several occasions in the past he has made wild statements that have turned out to have no substantial basis in fact.

Without referring specifically to the case of Mr. Butt, our security and law enforcement services monitor the situation very carefully and look very hard to see whether there is any evidence of a threat to this country from within or without it. I am pleased to say that, as a result of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, those authorities now have more means with which to conduct that search for any threat to the country and hold to account those who are a threat to this country.

**Mr. Martin Salter** (Reading, West): Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that should a full-scale war break out in Kashmir, it would have a disastrous effect on community relations in many towns and cities in Britain that have a substantial number of citizens of Indian and Pakistani origin? It has been said that the conflict could produce civil unrest on Britain's streets that would make the current disturbances in north Belfast seem like a teddy bears' picnic. Will he find time for the House to be regularly updated on the worrying events in Kashmir, and will he ask our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to redouble his efforts to encourage peaceful dialogue in the region?

**Mr. Cook:** I would not wish to be alarmist about the consequences of conflict in the sub-continent. We have witnessed such conflict in the past without any sensational developments on our own streets, although we must be careful about the rhetoric that we use. However, having expressed that reservation, I would have no dissent with my hon. Friend's concern about the consequences for the region and the world of any conflict. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister put so much effort into speaking to the Prime Minister of India and the President of Pakistan and urging them to return to dialogue. I find it very hard to understand why some have criticised him for going to that very substantial area of partnership for Britain, of community ties with the British people, and of concern about tension for world peace. I believe that he was absolutely right to go and absolutely right to try to ensure that peace continues.

**Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): Will the Leader of the House take an urgent look at the format of Transport questions, as under the present arrangements we can question only the Secretary of State for Transport Local Government and the Regions and his junior Ministers, none of whom runs the Government's transport policy? Will he find an early parliamentary opportunity for us to question the Government Deputy Chief Whip, who is responsible for negotiating with the striking unions, Lord Birt, who is in charge of long-term Government thinking on transport policy, and the Minister for Europe, who seems to be in charge of telling the truth on transport policy?

**Mr. Cook:** I have to tell the House that I know of no ministerial team from any Department that has appeared more often in the Chamber or any Cabinet colleague who has come more often to the Dispatch Box since the general election than the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and his team. It was entirely wrong for some in the press to criticise him for taking a holiday over the new year, for heaven's sake, and I should like to know whether those in the press who made that criticism have taken fewer holidays than him during the past 12 months.

**Mr. David Drew** (Stroud): Will my right hon. Friend make a clear commitment to the Government's commitment to mutual and co-operative organisations? Will he have a word with his colleagues in the Government—principally, those at the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry—to ensure that they carefully consider the two Bills that will be debated on 18 and 25 January? Those Bills would make a significant difference to mutual organisations, so anything that could be done would be of major importance all round.

**Mr. Cook:** The Government are highly supportive of the development of co-operative forms of ownership and partnership in industry and business, and we shall continue that record of support and ensure that there are no legal barriers in the way of such of organisations flourishing and competing successfully. I will pass on to the relevant Department my hon. Friend's comments on the forthcoming private Members' Bills.

**Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): The Leader of the House will know that the Government have recently published proposals—albeit, in consultative documents—seeking to make radical changes to our town and country planning system, including dealing with planning applications of national significance. As those issues are vital to all our constituents, does he agree that a debate on that matter would be very helpful to the Government and, indeed, the House at this time?

**Mr. Cook:** I am always open to suggestions for debates that would be helpful to the Government and will bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman says. He raises a very serious and strategic issue, and he is right to say that we are consulting on it. It is important that that consultation process should enable all those in the country to express their views. I understand that the proposals cannot proceed without legislation, so they are bound to be debated in the House at some stage.

**Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): May I tell my right hon. Friend how fearful many families in my constituency with friends and relatives in Kashmir are about the growing tension between India and Pakistan? I endorse the request from my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) to hold a debate on this subject in the near future. May I tell my right hon. Friend that my constituents appreciate the Foreign Secretary's efforts in seeking to mediate between India and Pakistan? Does he agree that this is perhaps now the time for the United Kingdom to play a more proactive role as a mediator in the conflict between those two nations?

**Mr. Cook:** My hon. Friend is correct. Some 3 million people in Britain have community and family ties with the sub-continent, all of whom will watch, with close interest and apprehension, what may happen to their relatives and back any effort to try to preserve peace. Those efforts are strenuously pursued in the Foreign Office and by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I appreciate my hon. Friend's call for more discussion of this issue in the Chamber, and I will retain a watching brief on it and consider what he says.

*[Mr. Cook]*

In the meantime, I should mention that I suggested in my modernisation proposals that we should reduce the period of notice for oral questions to increase topicality. Tuesday's Question Time was a good example of the need to do that, as the Order Paper contained not a single question to the Foreign Secretary on India and Pakistan. That would not have happened if we had a realistic period of notice.

**Mr. Andrew MacKay** (Bracknell): Is the Leader of the House aware that he has singularly failed to explain why the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has not voluntarily come to the Chamber since the House returned on Tuesday, when my constituents and others are suffering from neanderthal industrial action on the railways at the hands of the RMT? Is the real answer that too many Labour Members, starting with the Deputy Prime Minister, are far too close to the RMT?

**Mr. Cook:** I indignantly deny that suggestion. For the record and in case anyone subsequently complains, I explain that I have had a long relationship with the RMT, which has been regularly and annually declared. I am happy to make that clear.

The position that the Government have taken on the current dispute has been to invite both sides to go forward to arbitration. There is provision for arbitration in their agreement, and we hope that both sides will agree to arbitration.

Over decades, the House has discussed the Government's role in disputes and, by and large, the consensus has emerged—a consensus that was certainly followed by the previous Conservative Government—that industrial disputes are a matter for the business concerned. They are not for politicians to resolve on a political basis.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham): May I ask for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to come to the House to make a statement on the performance of the train operating companies? Too much of the debate about the railways has focused on individuals rather than on what people in the street want done to improve the railways. My constituents suffer the daily misery of travelling to central London on Connex South Eastern, which is almost certainly the worst-performing train operating company on the rail network. We need a proper debate—not one that is petty and backbiting about who is or is not running the railways—that will bring about the improvements that we need. The performance of the train operating companies and the persistent poor performance of the management of those companies is worthy of debate in the House.

**Mr. Cook:** I echo the central thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks. This issue is not a matter of personalities and it should not be personalised. Fundamental strategic issues are involved and those who use the railways are aware of some of them. They would like those issues, and not personalities, to be at the centre of the debate.

I invite my hon. Friend to look forward to the announcement on Monday of the Strategic Rail Authority's four-year plan. I hope that it will provide a way in which we can create a consistent theme to take forward the future of the railways and to address some of the problems that they face.

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): Can the Leader of the House find time for a brief debate on the helicopter industry? He may be aware that just one hour ago Westland helicopters, which is now part of AgustaWestland, announced 600 job losses at its base in Yeovil. That will have a serious effect on my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws). Is it not time that we had an opportunity to hear from Ministers in the Ministry of Defence about the strategic importance to both military and civil avionics of our helicopter industry, and from Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions about the help that they can afford my constituents at this very difficult time?

**Mr. Cook:** I fully sympathise with the position of the hon. Gentleman's constituents. I was notified of the recent announcement of the redundancies in Yeovil and elsewhere in the south-west. The Government will obviously examine any way in which, through the Department of Trade and Industry and the Employment Service, we can assist communities to cope with the impact of the redundancies. However, at the end of the day, the decision is one for the company. It was not taken by the Government, and although we of course bear in mind the strategic importance of preserving our own weapons and armaments industries, those industries must ultimately decide what is required of their work force and the size of the work force they need.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): When can we debate the adverse effects of prescribed drugs? It has been reported that the young pilot who crashed into the skyscraper in Miami was being prescribed Roaccutane, which is notorious for producing side effects including depressive illnesses and suicidal tendencies. A few years ago, a young constituent of mine died after being prescribed this drug and his parents have been campaigning ever since for clearer labelling of the drug and for warnings that it had such awful side effects. I have seen no improvements since then on the warnings about Roaccutane. When can we debate the issue?

**Mr. Cook:** I have to confess that I am not technically qualified to enter into a discussion on the particular drug to which my hon. Friend refers. I will draw his remarks to the attention of the Department of Health. There are requirements on the information about and on the labelling of all drugs and they usually draw attention to the kind of side effects that he has mentioned. However, if there is a problem, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will wish to address it.

**Mr. Gary Streeter** (South-West Devon): Given that in two weeks' time South Hams district council will produce a local plan that almost certainly will provide, thanks to Government pressure, for a new town in the middle of my constituency for up to 4,500 houses that no one locally wants, may I add my weight to a call for a debate in Government time on town and country planning? Two points need to be made. First, while the Government consult on new rules, district councils up and down the country are producing local plans on the basis of existing

rules and are confused whether the new rules will apply to that process. Secondly, we need to be able to argue the case for existing national housebuilding targets to be scrapped so that decisions on the number of houses to be built locally can be taken by local people.

**Mr. Cook:** I would not advise the hon. Gentleman's council or any other to put decisions on hold pending a change in legislation. As Leader of the House I can say that there is no guarantee when legislation will be completed and come into force. It is important that decisions are not left in suspense until then. I understand the controversy that such a proposal must cause in any constituency, but there are many ways for the hon. Gentleman to ventilate his concerns, and I would encourage him to do so.

**John Cryer** (Hornchurch): Is there time for a debate on the energy industry? We need that debate for two reasons. First, Ofgem, the energy watchdog, plans to complete the deregulation of energy pricing, which has implications for rising energy prices for low-income families. Secondly, confidence tricksters are going around switching energy supplies to various homes without the permission of the people who live in them. Clearly that is to a large extent a result of deregulation and we need to crack down on those cowboys. Can we have a debate, or at least a statement, on those problems in the energy industry?

**Mr. Cook:** My hon. Friend makes his concerns most forcefully and I shall ensure that they are drawn to the attention of the relevant Minister. I understand that the Office for Gas and Electricity Marketing is consulting on some of those matters and he may wish to express his concerns directly to it.

**Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): In 1997, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"I will have failed in five years' time if there are not fewer journeys by car."

He went on to say:

"It is a tall order—but I want you to hold me to it."

I mention in the light of today's report that since 1997 there are 3 million more cars on the roads of the United Kingdom. May I press the Leader of the House for an urgent debate on transport so that we might first explore the total failure of the Government to move people from cars on to public transport and secondly consider the roads policy? It seems to me that most of those 3 million cars are parked permanently on the M6, unable to move because of the Government's failure to reach conclusions on the development of those vital routeways.

**Mr. Cook:** There have been more debates on transport than any other issue in this Parliament and I am sure that it will continue to be a priority. However, the right hon. Gentleman might, for completeness, have shared with the House the fact that more people are travelling by bus than before and more people are travelling by train than ever before. I would have thought that the Conservative party would welcome the new subsidies that we introduced to ensure that there are more rural buses.

**Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): Is the Leader of the House aware that quite a few of us on the Opposition Benches think that, all things considered, he was a capable and able Foreign Secretary, and in particular that his ethical foreign policy would have had more impact on Zimbabwe? Does he agree that the Government's policy on Zimbabwe is not delivering? It is about as much use as an ashtray on a motor cycle, and that country is facing its gravest crisis since independence. Is it not time that we had a full-day's debate on the crisis in Zimbabwe?

**Mr. Cook:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman's opening comment, but it would have been nice if it had been made when I was Foreign Secretary, rather than afterwards.

Zimbabwe is in a grave crisis. Indeed, no one in the Government has sought to diminish that in any way. I read the comments of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary at Question Time on Tuesday. He clearly laid the degree of persistent serious violation of human rights in Zimbabwe on the line and made a new commitment that if the situation does not improve the Government will speak up for the expulsion of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth.

We have gone through the gamut of measures available to us as sanctions. We have reduced aid and targeted it only for humanitarian purposes. We have used the political measures available to us. We have withdrawn the British military advisory and training team from Zimbabwe. We are working with both the Commonwealth and the European Union, with some success, to increase that pressure and we will continue to do everything that we can.

**Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): Can the Leader of the House find time in the near future for a Government statement on the ombudsman's report, published at the end of last year, on access to official information? The right hon. Gentleman may not be aware that the ombudsman found that this was the only occasion when a Government had failed properly to respond to a report of his on access to information. As a result, he laid it in the Library of the House, but there is still no Government response. Can the right hon. Gentleman ask the Deputy Prime Minister, who is responsible for relations with the ombudsman, to come to the House and make a response so that we can question him about what the Government are trying to hide?

**Mr. Cook:** The Government are not trying to hide anything; indeed, as the ombudsman's report accepts, the Government were acting entirely within the principles of the code and the decision concerned was not wrong, even though he himself may have chosen to disagree with it. The hon. Gentleman will have many opportunities to pursue the matter, and I am sure that he will do so.

**Bob Spink** (Castle Point): I became aware yesterday of some of the issues surrounding the withdrawal of a question to the Prime Minister by the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson). We heard more about that today from my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). The matter raises serious issues about Back Benchers' ability to hold the Government to account, Government control freakery,

*[Bob Spink]*

which is becoming all too apparent, and the status of Parliament itself. We ought to have a debate so that we can investigate all those issues.

**Mr. Cook:** Whatever can be said about the matter concerned, I can only say to the hon. Gentleman that it hardly seems to be an example of Parliament failing to hold Ministers to account; on the contrary, it demonstrates the Government responding quickly, expeditiously and appropriately to a Member's concern.

## International Assistance Force (Kabul)

1.11 pm

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon):** In my most recent statement about Afghanistan, on 19 December, I set out the encouraging progress that had been made towards the deployment of an international security assistance force to Kabul and its surrounding areas. I am grateful for this early opportunity to bring the House up to date with the considerable progress that we have made since then.

First, however, it is important to repeat why the United Kingdom is participating in and, indeed, leading the international security assistance force. That is entirely consistent with the objectives for the campaign against international terrorism that we set out last October. Those objectives have not changed. They are being achieved, and coalition military operations will continue until they have been achieved in full. The United Kingdom continues to support the hunt for Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders.

We have always made it clear, however, that our commitment to Afghanistan was not simply for the short term. One of the longer-term campaign aims that we set out in October was to secure the reintegration of Afghanistan as a responsible member of the international community and an end to its self-imposed isolation. That is vital if we are to ensure that the link between Afghanistan and international terrorism is broken.

An essential part of achieving that longer term aim is supporting the establishment of a new representative Government in Afghanistan—a process that was agreed at Bonn on 5 December. That means providing support to the Afghan Interim Administration. That support was clearly demonstrated by the Prime Minister's visit to Bagram on Monday.

The Bonn agreement called for the deployment of an international security assistance force to Kabul. One month on, troops are already on patrol in the streets of the Afghan capital. As the lead nation for the security force for the first three months, the United Kingdom has been responsible for putting the ISAF together. To have put together a major international force and agreed the terms of its deployment with an Interim Administration who have only just taken office—all in less than a month—is a remarkable achievement. I pay tribute to all the other nations who have offered troops—both those who will be contributing from the outset and those who will not—and to the Afghan Administration and to the United States. Without their help, we would never have achieved that in such a short time.

The way forward for the deployment of the force was cleared by the signing of the military technical agreement on 4 January by the commander of the ISAF, Major-General McColl, and the Afghan Interim Administration. That agreement, a copy of which I have placed in the Library of the House, sets out the relationship between the ISAF and the Interim Administration. It defines the status of the security force and gives it the powers that it requires to operate freely and without hindrance. It covers the legal status of the ISAF, its deployment and authority, and the support that the Interim Administration will provide. It specifies the location of the barracks in Kabul to which Afghan forces will be confined. Most important, it makes clear what the ISAF will do and where it will operate.

The ISAF is there to assist the Afghan Interim Administration, and the military technical agreement sets out what that might mean in practice. In addition to taking part in joint patrols with the Afghan police, the ISAF may assist the Interim Administration in developing future security structures; assist the Interim Administration in reconstruction; and identify and arrange training and assistance tasks for future Afghan security forces. The ISAF will operate in Kabul, and Kabul alone. The military technical agreement includes a map that clearly delimits the security force's area of responsibility.

In putting the security force together, we have made a careful assessment of the military capabilities that are needed to complete these tasks. Major General McColl and representatives from other troop-contributing nations have already carried out essential reconnaissance to that end. The ISAF headquarters is now operational and the first elements of the ISAF main body have already deployed. British forces have been on patrol in Kabul for nearly two weeks now. French troops began to patrol yesterday and those patrols have been extremely well received by the people of Kabul.

In total, the security force will be about 5,000 strong. Putting it together has not been easy, but not because we lacked offers of help. The international community responded swiftly and generously to our request for troops and at the planning conference on 19 December, 21 countries offered forces. Many nations offered infantry, but we had to construct a balanced and capable force able to get to Afghanistan quickly, support itself and do its job. The ISAF needs logistics support, explosive ordnance disposal troops, signallers, engineers, medical units, helicopters and, given that it will deploy and be supplied by air, it needs air transport.

As is always the case when putting a force together, we had to negotiate with the countries offering troops. Some were able to adjust their offers in the light of what we needed; others were not. For various reasons, some countries, such as Argentina, Jordan and Malaysia, have had to withdraw their offers to participate. There may, of course, be an opportunity for them to contribute troops at a later stage. There has been some comment about Canada's generous offer of an infantry battlegroup. It was not rejected; we were simply unable to accept it in its entirety from the outset. We had hoped to use its engineers right from the beginning, then replace our own infantry battlegroup with the Canadian battlegroup after several weeks. In the end, the Canadians decided to deploy their troops elsewhere—to Kandahar—to support continuing offensive operations in that region. While we would have welcomed them as part of the security force, we welcome their deployment to Kandahar where they will play an important role in the fight against international terrorism.

In total, we expect 17 countries to deploy troops alongside United Kingdom forces as part of the ISAF—Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. The participation of those nations will be formalised this afternoon with the signing here in London of memorandums of understanding. That represents the final step in agreeing the structure of the ISAF for its period under our leadership.

The nature of the forces provided by those nations varies considerably in size and type. The Austrians, Danes and Dutch are deploying forces as part of a German-led multinational infantry battlegroup; others are providing vital specialist troops. New Zealand, for example, is to provide headquarters staff and support troops; Norway has promised explosive ordnance disposal troops and other support troops; Romania has offered military police and air transport assets; and Turkey will help staff the headquarters and will deploy other troops as well.

The security force is authorised by a United Nations Security Council resolution and will be led by the United Kingdom. The United States central command has authority over the ISAF to ensure that there is no risk of its activities interfering with the successful completion of Operation Enduring Freedom. The membership of the security force will probably change over the next six months. The ISAF is a coalition of the willing, drawn from forces that are needed, available and deployable in the time required.

The United Kingdom has agreed to lead the ISAF for its first three months. We took that on because our armed forces have the right capabilities; we have experience in expeditionary operations and rapid deployments; and we can provide effective command structures and enablers to get a force in and up and running in the time scale required. Being the lead nation means that we must inevitably provide the core of the security force, which is vividly demonstrated by the breadth of the forces that we have assigned to it. The force headquarters is drawn from the headquarters of 3(UK) Division. The headquarters of 16 Air Assault Brigade will exercise tactical command. Our infantry battle group is centred around the 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, and includes a company of Gurkhas. Elements of 33 and 36 Regiments, Royal Engineers, will deploy—so will 30 Signal Regiment, which will provide strategic communications. Support troops will be drawn from a number of units, including 13 Air Assault Regiment of the Royal Logistic Corps, and 16 Medical Regiment of the Royal Army Medical Corps. The Royal Air Force is deploying a range of airfield enablers from stations across the country. Those are simply the major force elements; we will also deploy many other smaller support units. We are now withdrawing the elements of 40 Commando Royal Marines who have helped to secure Bagram airstrip.

The United Kingdom's contribution to the ISAF will total up to 1,800 personnel. In addition and in the short term, we are deploying almost 300 Army and Royal Air Force personnel to help repair and operate Kabul international airport. That will help us in resupplying the ISAF and will be of lasting benefit to the Afghan people. We are able to make this contribution without any impact on our other operational commitments. Our commitment as lead nation is limited in duration. The ISAF mandate is for six months; we shall hand over our lead nation status to one of our partners after three months. I am delighted that Turkey has already expressed an interest in the responsibility. That does not mean that our commitment to participating in the security force will end completely at the three-month point. Certainly, we would expect to see a significant reduction in the number of British troops deployed, but we will not ignore the need to give continuing support to whoever takes over as lead nation.

*[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]*

We and our partners have already begun to deploy the forces assigned to the ISAF. Others will follow over the next few weeks. The security force should reach its full strength by mid-February. This deployment is not easy: it can only be done by air; airport facilities in Afghanistan are limited and very basic; and weather conditions can be treacherous. Supplying the security force—also by air—will be difficult. So far, the deployment has gone well, thanks to the thorough preparatory work we have been doing over the past few weeks.

We have put together and begun deploying the international security assistance force while continuing our contribution to the coalition military operations elsewhere in Afghanistan. As I have indicated, the United Kingdom is continuing to support the hunt for Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders. The Royal Air Force is still flying reconnaissance and air-to-air refuelling sorties. The Royal Navy is now playing an important role in the coalition maritime force in the region and is patrolling in the Arabian sea to prevent those with links to al-Qaeda from escaping from the region. I pay tribute to the work that it is doing.

Neither we nor the wider international community have neglected the provision of humanitarian aid. The World Food Programme and other agencies have worked hard to ensure that relief supplies are in place for the winter months. The World Food Programme dispatched 116,000 metric tonnes of wheat in December, against a target of 100,000 tonnes. That is the highest monthly distribution into Afghanistan to date, reflecting the expansion in aid operations and improved access to most parts of the country.

The United Kingdom's commitment to the Afghan people as they set about the enormous task of rebuilding their country remains as strong as our commitment to them in removing the Taliban from power. Our contribution to the ISAF is a clear demonstration of that commitment. Our contribution could not have been made without the skills and abilities of our armed forces. I am confident that they will carry out this new task, on which so much depends, to the high standards that we have come to expect.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (North Essex): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, a copy of which I received in good time, for which I am grateful, and for his continued efforts to keep Parliament fully informed about developments in Afghanistan. May I reassure him and the House that, whatever reservations Opposition Members may express about the deployment of the ISAF, we share the hopes of the Government and the whole House that it will be successful? Moreover, the Government continue to enjoy the support of Her Majesty's Opposition for their backing of the United States in the war against terrorism and their commitment to the reconstruction of Afghanistan alongside the continuing humanitarian aid programme.

I should be grateful if the Secretary of State would clarify four main issues. First, I understand that there has been an inevitable measure of uncertainty about the timing and mechanics of the deployment. Will he express his sympathy and understanding to the families of some elements of 2 Para that have been put on 48-hour standby and then stood down many times since 11 September and more than once over the Christmas period?

Incidentally, can the right hon. Gentleman say anything about the welfare of our troops? What accommodation will United Kingdom soldiers have in Afghanistan? Will they have anything more than sleeping bags on concrete floors in derelict buildings for the coldest winter months? What access will they have to telephones and e-mails for contacting families back home?

Secondly, uncertainty inevitably compounds the effects of overstretch. I note the right hon. Gentleman's attempt to deal with that point. However, does he recall that 2 Para was in Northern Ireland last Christmas and was sent to Macedonia at short notice during the school holidays in August? After this operation, it is due to serve in Northern Ireland again next Christmas. I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman fully understands that such intensive disruption to family life is one of the factors that drives good soldiers to leave the British army. Can he set a date for the withdrawal of our main elements of the ISAF as well as for handing over responsibility to the follow-on force in three months?

Thirdly, on overall command, is it true that the Government waited for the approval of all EU states, including non-NATO members, which are not involved in the ISAF or have only a token role, such as Austria, Finland and Sweden or no role, such as Ireland, as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported on 14 December? Is it also true that our European partners objected to the principle of overall US command? Again, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported on 16 December:

"The British want the force to act under the auspices of US central command . . . Germany rejects this idea."

Why have the Government acquiesced to the demand so that different UK forces in Afghanistan operate under split command in the same military theatre? Does that explain why the Foreign Secretary tabled proposals in writing on the matter in Washington that were rejected out of hand by the Americans and had to be substantially amended? What exactly is the agreement between the ISAF and US central command?

Why has the Secretary of State allowed the shadow of the Euro army to cloud the Government's judgment? He has been determined to involve as many EU members as possible at the expense of NATO allies. That is not only my criticism; the Canadian Defence Minister can discern no other reason for the refusal of Canada's offer of help. On Monday he told a press conference in Ottawa:

"This is a European Union kind of mission. I think quite clearly European politics became a part of the decision making process."

Is the Secretary of State worried that he has created unnecessary friction with the United States and offended Canada, one of our most loyal and long-term NATO allies? As has been announced, the Canadian infantry is good enough for the Americans to deploy for war fighting around Kandahar.

Fourthly, now that our troops are in Kabul, will the Secretary of State clarify any misunderstanding about the Bonn agreement? Annexe 1 clearly states that the Afghan Government must

"withdraw all military units from Kabul and other urban centres or other areas in which the UN mandated force is deployed",

yet Interior Minister Qanooni said that that will not happen.

Does not the military technical agreement that was agreed last Friday permit the Kabul Government to maintain Northern Alliance forces in Kabul to be

deployed when they wish? How will that affect the ability of ISAF forces to intervene in cases where lives are threatened? It is all very well saying that British forces are welcome in Kabul, although I am pleased by that news, but why was a patrol of Royal Marines able to do nothing but stand aside and watch a woman accused of adultery being stoned?

We are told that ISAF patrols must defer to the Afghan police. How are they meant to distinguish between Afghan police and Northern Alliance troops, given that they are the same people? Why are we patrolling in "Kabul alone" to quote the Secretary of State, when the Bonn agreement clearly states:

"This force will assist in the maintenance of security for Kabul and its surrounding areas. Such a force could, as appropriate, be progressively expanded to other urban centres and other areas",

so why Kabul alone?

The Secretary of State must answer these questions about the political leadership of ISAF. As for the British armed forces, they are once again demonstrating their supreme professionalism, and we are confident that everyone, from the high command and General John McColl to the troops on the ground, is ready to meet any challenge that they are given. I assure them that we wish them every success.

**Mr. Hoon:** I welcome a number of the observations made by the hon. Gentleman, but he rather spoils the impact of his sensible questions by his continuing obsession with things European. He risks becoming a kind of Dr. Strangelove figure, unable to control his European obsessions, with his characteristic lack of understanding of the way in which these matters operate. Instead of concentrating on the matters at hand, about which he has some sensible questions to ask, he shows his obsession with Europe and European issues, which ruins what would otherwise be a perfectly sensible set of questions on behalf of the Opposition.

I will deal with the points that the hon. Gentleman has made in relation to the overall command of the force by referring to the statement that I have just made. Having given him the opportunity of reading it, I am surprised that he did not study the details of the command more carefully. This is a UN-mandated force, a coalition of the willing, that includes a significant number of countries—I read the list out fairly slowly for the hon. Gentleman's benefit. Countries such as Norway, Romania, Turkey, Bulgaria and New Zealand have not yet exhibited characteristics consistent with being members of the European Union. I realise that the hon. Gentleman's grasp of geography might be a little less than desirable. *[Interruption.]* It is no good Opposition Front-Bench Members sitting there saying, "This is cheap". We read the shadow Defence Minister's observations on the front page of *The Times* the other day. We know what his obsession is; he has repeated it here today. If he wants his observations on defence matters to be treated sensibly, he really ought to make sensible ones. Frankly, talking about a European army is simply a characteristic of the obsession that the Conservative party and its Front-Bench spokesmen have, sadly, been gripped by.

The force is a coalition of the willing. It works as a result of the 18 countries represented working together to provide the appropriate forces necessary to do this particular job. The hon. Gentleman asks why UK forces in Afghanistan will be under two different sets of command. The answer would be a statement of the obvious, if he had been following what has been happening there over recent months, British forces are engaged in Operation Enduring Freedom under the direct tactical command of the United States. There are now also forces involved in the security force engaged in helping to reconstruct Afghanistan. There is nothing remarkable about that, and nothing that is difficult to understand—except to someone who is determined not to understand it because he wants to make a cheap point about Europe and the way in which the forces are deployed.

I set out our position clearly on the relationship with the United States Central Command—Centcom—in the statement. There is a clear relationship agreed between the United Kingdom and the United States to ensure deconfliction between the two forces. That is a matter that any sensible Ministry of Defence would resolve, and it has been resolved entirely satisfactorily between the United States, the United Kingdom and other contributors to the ISAF.

I also set out the position in relation to Canada in the statement. Canada offered a complex battle group which, unfortunately, duplicated the kinds of forces that we had been offered by a number of other countries. In trying to provide a satisfactory solution for Canada, as well as for those other countries, we offered Canada the opportunity for its force to come in to replace a British battle group. This was a matter for Canada, and it judged that it was better for its force to become involved in the operations in southern Afghanistan. We entirely welcome that. The matter was agreed with Canada and it is not worth the comment that the hon. Gentleman chose to make about it.

On the more sensible points that the hon. Gentleman raised, I share his concern about the impact on families, particularly over a holiday period, of the change in notice requirements and the difficulties that that causes, but it is an inevitable consequence of the uncertainties that we obviously face in a fast-moving situation such as that in Afghanistan.

Work is being done on an accommodation and welfare package. One of this country's key abilities is getting forces into a theatre quickly, and we shall address the comprehensive welfare package that goes with it, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that the accommodation is the best available in the circumstances, although I do not pretend that it is not pretty robust. The Prime Minister told me this morning that he is very impressed by the efforts made by British forces, which he saw for himself in Bagram the other day. We shall continue to work on the matter.

I do not accept that there is any impact on overstretch. On the date for withdrawing the force, I referred in my statement to the time scale. We anticipate being the lead nation for three months, but we do not anticipate leaving the theatre entirely thereafter, simply because it is important that we continue to contribute to the six-month effort that the UN has mandated. We are pleased that Turkey has offered to replace the United Kingdom as lead nation and anticipate that, by the end of the three months, that will have led to a significant reduction in the number of British troops deployed.

I have previously described to the House the importance of having robust rules of engagement, but I emphasise to the hon. Gentleman, as I did then, that this

*[Mr. Hoon]*

is not a peacekeeping operation. The force is for security assistance and we are there to work alongside an Interim Administration who are engaged in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. That is a difficult and complex task, and it is a sign of the support that the international community can give that 18 countries are represented in the ISAF and prepared to put their troops on the streets of Kabul to assist.

The hon. Gentleman's questions about a wider involvement do not address the matter of the kind of force that has been and will continue to be deployed in Afghanistan. The force is there to support the Interim Administration as they struggle with the difficulties of restoring Afghanistan to the international community.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his team on the role that they have played in prosecuting the war in Afghanistan. I know that the contribution made by British forces is much appreciated. I particularly want to ask him about reports that the International Committee of the Red Cross has been unable to gain access to prisoners. Will he set out the status of prisoners being held in Afghanistan? Are they held under the Geneva convention or not? On what basis are prisoners being sent to the United States or Cuba or being held in Afghanistan?

**Mr. Hoon:** I would expect all prisoners held in Afghanistan to be subject to the Geneva convention and we would expect that, ultimately, the ICRC will have access to them.

**Mr. Michael Moore** (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for the advance copy of the statement and I welcome its content. We on these Benches continue to support the deployment of UK troops under the Bonn agreement of 5 December and UN resolution 1386 of 20 December. We congratulate the Ministry, and in particular General McColl and his team, on getting themselves into such a state of preparedness at this early stage. However, I seek clarification of certain points in the statement.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the rules of engagement are robust enough to ensure the safety of the British troops deployed in this exercise? Will he further clarify the time scale he has mentioned? In particular, has the three-month period begun; if so, at what point did it begin? He was careful to say that British troops would not be withdrawn completely at the end of the three months; what scale of operation does he expect Britain to continue to support after that?

Is the right hon. Gentleman confident that the United Nations mandate is flexible enough to allow the troops to ensure the safety of Afghan civilians? Will he also clarify the role of the UN Secretary-General? Resolution 1386 specifically asks the force to report to the Secretary-General. It is important to understand the relationship between that and the line of command to the United States.

Many of our armed forces have been in the region under Operation Veritas. When does the Secretary of State expect them to be either redeployed or returned home—or are they being retained in the area for possible deployment in other theatres, should the situation develop further?

**Mr. Hoon:** As I said on the last occasion, it is important for the rules of engagement to be robust and to provide for the safety and security of our armed forces. I assure the House that that is the case.

I expect the three-month period to run from the point at which the force becomes fully operational. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a precise date today, but I am sure that the House will be informed. It will depend on the extent of the logistical problems involved in conveying a large force and its supplies to a difficult environment within an appropriate time scale. There are uncertainties in the region at present, and it is important for us to take them into account. If all goes according to our current plans, however, I shall expect the period to start very shortly.

As I said in my statement, this is a UN-mandated force, and regular reports to the Secretary-General are of course involved. As I have also said, however, the force's role is to assist the Interim Administration. It is not there to perform a peacekeeping role, or to police the streets of Kabul day in, day out. It is therefore the Interim Administration's responsibility to ensure the safety and security of Afghan citizens, although that does not mean that the rules of engagement are not robust enough to allow our forces to intervene in appropriate circumstances.

Obviously we will have regard to ensuring that forces are replaced in theatre when that is necessary, or allowed to return to the United Kingdom or another appropriate base when the time comes.

**Mr. Ernie Ross** (Dundee, West): I welcome the statement. Other members of the defence forces will want to play their part; what implications has the deployment for our reserve forces?

**Mr. Hoon:** The impact on our reserve forces has already been clear. There has been a call-out order since last October, which allows us to call out individual volunteer reservists for operations resulting from the terrorist attacks in the United States. The process has worked very well to date, but we must now consider how to sustain our operations in the future. One possibility is limited further mobilisation, particularly in specialist areas, and I am considering that. It conforms to our policy of integrated and usable reserve forces as set out in the strategic defence review, and although we have not yet made a decision, we may do so in the near future.

**Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): Does the Secretary of State agree that we should not underestimate the difficulty of recent operations, and that all those involved in the planning and implementation of the operations in Afghanistan deserve our heartfelt appreciation? I join those who have paid tribute to the courage, determination and skill of our armed forces.

Can the right hon. Gentleman assure us that, if we continue to expose our troops to hazard in an area with a primitive infrastructure, they will have first-class medical support?

**Mr. Hoon:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his observations. He is right to say that it is a difficult theatre,

and it does not pay to underestimate the problems that our forces have already faced and will continue to face in Afghanistan. I am also grateful for his tribute to the armed forces. I have said that a British medical force will be deployed, alongside medical units from other countries, and access to up-to-date medical facilities is a vital aspect of support for any deployed force. I assure the hon. Gentleman that that will be the case.

**Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): Further to the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), can my right hon. Friend clarify whether all alleged terrorists in Afghanistan, including those held by US forces, will be dealt with in due course under the auspices of the UN, through the International Criminal Court?

**Mr. Hoon:** I mentioned earlier the UK's expectation that all prisoners will be covered by the Geneva convention. I cannot go further, because it is not my responsibility to determine how the Interim Administration or the US should deal with prisoners. I assure my hon. Friend that it is not the responsibility of the United Nations to deal with those matters either. In international law, the Geneva convention applies and that is the best statement that I can give of British policy.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): Given that we train our troops for war fighting and given—as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) said—that our troops have played a distinguished role in the offensive alongside our American counterparts in what has been a most successful operation, can the Secretary of State tell us why Canadian troops are being deployed in Kandahar to assist the Americans in the offensive activities that are still necessary to rid Afghanistan of al-Qaeda, and why our troops are restricted to their present role? The Secretary of State says that that role is not peacekeeping, but I am not sure what else it is. It certainly does not mean involvement in the offensive activity.

**Mr. Hoon:** Again, I would be delighted to answer questions on behalf of the Canadian Defence Ministry, but I am not in a position to do so. As for war fighting, some 5,000 British troops are engaged in continuing operations in and around Afghanistan. They are doing their job magnificently, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman would expect. Equally, the international community has assumed a separate responsibility, which the UK has taken on as lead nation, to assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. I am sure that with a moment's reflection the hon. Gentleman will realise that it is equally important, having dealt with the threat that the Taliban regime posed to international security, that we should ensure that the Interim Administration have the opportunity to rebuild Afghanistan, if for no other reason than to avoid a further threat from that part of the world. After all, we got into the difficulties with Afghanistan because of the failure of the international community after the Russian withdrawal to recognise that Afghanistan could pose a threat beyond its borders. We must avoid at all costs repeating that mistake.

**Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): To what extent is it anticipated that our troops will play a role in securing the distribution of aid? The Secretary of State will have seen reports that people in the interior of Afghanistan are surviving on grass, and it is important that aid reaches them as quickly as possible. Aid seems to be reaching the country, but it then appears to be stockpiled instead of being distributed in some of the more difficult areas.

**Mr. Hoon:** That will not be a responsibility of our present force. As I emphasised earlier, its responsibilities are limited to Kabul. I have read those accounts and it is obvious that there are difficulties in certain more remote parts of Afghanistan. I know that serious attention is being given to distribution, which is the problem at present. I said in my statement that more food is now getting into Afghanistan than at any time before. The problem is making sure that once it arrives, it reaches those parts of that country that are at the moment somewhat inaccessible. However, I assure my hon. Friend and the House that every effort is being made to deal with the problems right across the country.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): It was disingenuous and unworthy of the Secretary of State to attack my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on the European dimension, given that all my hon. Friend was doing was quoting the Canadian Secretary of State for Defence.

The Secretary of State will be aware that the Prime Minister visited Bagram for two or three hours on Monday. He said in his statement that British forces are on the streets of Kabul and have been for the past two weeks. Could the Secretary of State amplify his remarks on the security position within Kabul, and say whether the Prime Minister did not visit Kabul because of security reasons? Will he answer the question from my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex that has direct relation to the situation in Kabul? Annexe 1 of the Bonn agreement says that military forces in Kabul would be withdrawn where mandated forces were deployed. Has that condition now been met?

**Mr. Hoon:** As the build-up of the force continues, I indicated in my statement that we are well short of an operating capability there. Obviously we are in the process of implementing the Bonn agreement in what is a very dangerous environment. Nobody can underestimate the difficulties that our forces face in doing their job in Bagram and Kabul. I am not going to suggest to the House that theirs is not a demanding role. That is why we have every regard to the security and safety of any visitor to that part of the world.

**Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): I welcome the deployment of the force—I congratulate the Government on the part that they have played—and I wish the force every success, whatever the composition of the force, particularly if a lot of European countries are involved. On the question of humanitarian aid raised by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), there are large areas of Afghanistan where the situation is desperate and lack of security is preventing the delivery of aid. There must be some plans for the future to extend the multinational security force to other areas, to enable those people to be fed.

**Mr. Hoon:** I have emphasised the nature of the Bonn agreement and the agreement entered into by the

*[Mr. Hoon]*

international community with the Interim Administration. It is not to extend the activities of the security force beyond Kabul. That is not to say that efforts are not being made inside Afghanistan by relevant international organisations and the Interim Administration to ensure the effective distribution of aid. That work will continue and it is supported by the international community by ensuring that large amounts of aid are provided.

The issue, as the hon. Lady has quite fairly indicated, is security and distribution. She knows a good deal about the situation in Afghanistan; the problems faced particularly in the most inaccessible parts of the country were caused by the failure of three successive harvests and by three years of drought. They are not attributable to the security situation directly, or to the military conflict. That is not in any way to underestimate their seriousness, nor to underestimate the determination of the international community to help resolve them.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and I thank him for providing me with a copy before he spoke. On behalf of the Scottish National party, I put on record our support for the security force and reiterate our support for the military operations against both al-Qaeda and the Taliban. I especially support those from my constituency and RAF Kinloss who are serving in our armed forces.

I wish to reinforce some of the points made today in terms of the interaction between the military and humanitarian operations. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees this morning reported problems to do with distribution and security in Kandahar and Helmand provinces. The International Rescue Committee has highlighted an extreme situation in the mountainous northern region of Abdullah Ghan. The Secretary of State has explained that there is no possibility that ISAF's role and area of responsibility will be widened. If that remains the case, will he say how military units on the ground elsewhere in Afghanistan could help to secure the aid deliveries so urgently needed in parts of that country?

**Mr. Hoon:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's early comments, but in the end he asked a question that I have sought to answer on two previous occasions already. The security force has a particular responsibility that has been agreed with the Interim Administration. Other forces in Afghanistan that belong to the international coalition are still actively engaged in rounding up the remaining Taliban and al-Qaeda elements. I am confident that those forces will continue their particular military task until they are successful.

As far as the distribution of aid is concerned, however, the extensive support given by the international community means that there is no reason why the Interim Administration should not be able to ensure the effective distribution of aid, even in those especially difficult parts of Afghanistan that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. There remain some real dangers in and around the Kandahar area, and elements of the Taliban and of al-Qaeda are still active and dangerous in that part of the world. I emphasise that it is vital that those elements be rounded up and dealt with before further efforts to distribute aid are made.

**Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Given that the thoughts of the United States Administration are clearly turning to the next stage of the war against terrorism, what assessment has been made of the numbers and types of troops that this country might contribute to any future operation?

**Mr. Hoon:** Again, I think that the hon. Gentleman is getting ahead of reality. Obviously, efforts are in hand to address the threat of international terrorist organisations from other countries, but as I said in my statement, the focus of the United States and the United Kingdom remains on ensuring that the work that we began in Afghanistan is continued to a successful conclusion.

**Patrick Mercer** (Newark): May I begin by applauding the deployment of ISAF, and especially the work of Major-General John McColl? However, the Secretary of State has spoken about the importance of rounding up the elements of al-Qaeda that are still effective in the Kandahar area. Without dwelling on Canada's decision to deploy a light infantry battle group there, will he say why Britain has not thought fit to honour the words of the Prime Minister, who spoke of standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States? Currently, only a tiny number of our special forces have been deployed in the teeth of the enemy. Have we run out of personnel in the Parachute Regiment, the Royal Marines or special forces? Have we run out of Guardsmen and line soldiers trained in desert and mountain warfare? Or have we run out of resolve?

**Mr. Hoon:** We have not run out of any of those elements. We deploy the right types of forces to do the job that is required of us. As I said, up to 5,000 of Britain's armed forces are actively engaged in the hunt for al-Qaeda and remaining elements of the Taliban. They are ensuring that precisely those tasks to which I assume that the hon. Gentleman was referring are completed.

## Point of Order

1.59 pm

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you please have a word with Mr. Speaker and ask him if he would be kind enough to consider having discussions with those who arrange our business to ensure that, when a topic of crucial interest and importance arises, there is adequate time to debate it? I make no criticism of the 10-minute limit imposed on speeches by Back Benchers today, but the House of Lords has had two full days to debate the matter of reform. By contrast, the statement that we have just heard will limit our debate to just five hours. I appreciate that the matter is not under Mr. Speaker's direct control, but I am sure it would be much appreciated if, on behalf of the House, he could have some conversations with those who regulate our business.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal):** The hon. Gentleman has made his point, but he has already indicated that the matter is really one for business questions.

### THE SPEAKER'S ABSENCE

*Ordered,*

That the Speaker have leave of absence tomorrow to attend the funeral of Jennifer Brown, daughter of the Right honourable Member for Dunfermline East.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

## House of Lords Reform

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

1.59 pm

**The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook):** When I presented the White Paper on reform of the House of Lords, I promised that the Commons would have a full opportunity to debate the Government's proposals within the consultation period. We are within the consultation period and this debate fulfils that commitment. The contributions to the debate can inform the period of reflection that must follow the end of the consultation period.

There would not be much point in our providing this day for debate if it did not permit Members who favour a different design for the second Chamber to express those views. I anticipate that we will hear from a number of them this afternoon. The White Paper is, after all, a consultative paper. It invited views on its proposals—

**Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Cook:** I have hardly begun, but if my hon. Friend will bear with me a little, I promise to give him priority.

The White Paper invited views on its proposals and, on some questions, it set out options for discussion. However, there are two points on which the White Paper is robust and on which the Government will not compromise.

The first is that the hereditary principle has no place in a modern Parliament. In the last Parliament, the Government took the historic step of breaking the dominance of the hereditary vote in the House of Lords. However, there remain 92 hereditary peers. We are the only Parliament in Europe which still permits members of the legislature to vote on the laws of the nation on no other basis than that of privilege of birth. The White Paper finally severs the link between the hereditary peerage and a seat in the House of Lords.

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): Given the vehemence of the right hon. Gentleman's statement about the hereditary peers and the support that he has from his colleagues, will he therefore guarantee that there will be a Bill on the reform of the House of Lords during this Parliament, and that under no circumstances will he allow the hereditaries to remain beyond this Parliament?

**Mr. Cook:** I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that it is indeed our intention to make sure that a Bill is brought before the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the course of this Parliament. That, after all, is the whole point of this debate—to establish the weight of gravity that will enable us to bring forward such a Bill.

**Mr. Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Cook:** I think that I owe it to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) to give way first to him, as I promised to give him priority.

**Mr. Bryant:** I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Does what he is saying about the consultation

*[Mr. Bryant]*

process mean that if the consultation showed that people wanted a wholly or substantially elected second Chamber, the Government would then bring forward such proposals?

**Mr. Cook:** I will address the question of a wholly elected second Chamber in the course of my remarks. I have grave concerns about a wholly elected second Chamber for reasons that I shall put before the House. On the broad principle, of course we will listen to what is said during the consultation period. In the period of reflection that will follow, we will see where we can find the centre of gravity in order to move forward with reform.

The second core principle of the White Paper is that the second Chamber of Parliament must reflect the broad political balance in the country. The Conservative party remains the largest single party in the House of Lords, despite successive record defeats in general elections. I hope that, even among the Conservative party, this debate will establish that there is a consensus that a modern second Chamber must more fairly represent the balance of how Britain votes.

That is why the White Paper proposes a new statutory appointments commission that will determine independently the proportion of political appointments to the Lords in line with the distribution of votes for the parties cast at the previous general election. That will remove from the Government of the day the right to determine for themselves the political balance of new appointments. Never again will it be possible for a Government to use their political patronage to guarantee themselves a secure majority in the House of Lords, as the Conservative party did throughout its 18 years in office.

Indeed, given the distribution of votes in general elections, never again will any one party hold an outright majority in the second Chamber. That will make it a real check and balance on the majority in the Commons, which it was not during those 18 years of a Conservative majority in both the Commons and the Lords.

I am confident that the great majority of Members will welcome the removal of the hereditary principle and will support a second Chamber that is more broadly—

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) *rose—*

**Mr. Cook:** I may well turn out to be wrong. I will happily give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Howarth:** I am most grateful. If the Leader of the House wants the other place to be an effective check on this place, why has it proved necessary for the Prime Minister to appoint so many people of his own persuasion to enter that place, thereby reducing significantly its capacity to act as a check on this House?

**Mr. Cook:** I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has given me the opportunity to respond to that misconception. Throughout the Conservative years, there were two Conservatives to every Labour person appointed to the other place. Throughout the years since 1997, we have made only a minority of the political appointments to the House of Lords—a restraint that was never shown by the last two Prime Ministers.

**Mr. Tyrie** *rose—*

**Mr. Cook:** I will bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's wish to intervene, but at the moment I want to make progress.

**Mr. Tyrie:** It is on that point.

**Mr. Cook:** How can I resist?

**Mr. Tyrie:** If the right hon. Gentleman looks at the facts he will find that, until last year, it was not the case that only a minority of Labour peers were appointed. This Prime Minister was the first ever to appoint a majority from his own side in his first three years in office. Secondly, the main reason why such a small number of Labour life peers were appointed during the 1980s was that Labour refused to nominate any.

**Mr. Cook:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that he is wrong on that last point. However, he has confirmed that over the four and a half years of this Labour Government we have appointed only a minority of Labour peers. We still do not have the majority that he attributes to us in the House of Lords. We are still only the second largest party there. I very much doubt whether Baroness Thatcher would have tolerated for four and a half years her party, through appointment, being only the second largest in that Chamber.

I said that I was confident of a welcome for the two core principles. Of course, I recognise that not all Members who support reform and those principles of the White Paper will necessarily support all the solutions by which it achieves those principles. What is now urgent is to find the package that would establish the greatest consensus among those Members of Parliament and the public.

The sole reason why Westminster has entered the 21st century still dignified by the presence of hereditary peers is that those who wanted reform could never agree on what to put in its place. I have heard many references in the past 48 hours to the alliance in the 1966 Parliament between Michael Foot and Enoch Powell to halt the proposals for reform. One of them wanted more reform and the other wanted no reform. Between them, they stopped any reform for 30 years. We must not let history repeat itself. The year 1911 is so long ago that many Members may have forgotten the preamble to the first Parliament Act—

**Peter Bradley** (The Wrekin): Not in the Lords.

**Mr. Cook:** I defer to my hon. Friend's greater wisdom on that matter.

The preamble to the Parliament Act 1911 stated:

"it is intended to substitute for the House of Lords as it at present exists a Second Chamber constituted on a popular instead of hereditary basis, but such substitution cannot be immediately brought into operation".

The authors of the Act turned out to be correct. It was another 90 years before the hereditary basis of the House of Lords was broken. I do not want the next stage of reform to be delayed another 90 years because we cannot agree on an alternative.

**Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): Does my right hon. Friend envisage that the Bill that will be introduced will provide a permanent solution to the reform of the House of Lords, or will it be an interim stage towards yet further reforms in the years ahead?

**Mr. Cook:** I personally do not see much point in our introducing a Bill if it does not stand a reasonable test of time. However, no Bill introduced on any subject or any issue of public debate can necessarily be the last word. It is in the character of Parliament that we evolve over the decades and centuries. What is important is that we achieve the right balance between a Bill that pretends to be the ultimate statement and a Bill that will nevertheless stand for a reasonable period and achieve progress that those who back it regard as worth while and worth the effort.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): Does the Leader of the House agree that any Bill must clearly state the ultimate aim of proportional representation for the House of Lords but also allow for a transitional phase to enable us to see how those proportions will be achieved over time?

**Mr. Cook:** Obviously, any Bill that is presented must in its legal text seek to give effect to its purpose but, having studied the matter over the past six months, I see no way in which reform can be achieved without a transitional period. That is not to say that the Bill should not in itself state what will be the situation at the end of that transitional period.

I was saying that although there is support for the principles, we must ensure that we find sufficient agreement on one alternative to make progress. I would therefore ask those who have come to the Chamber not to praise the Government's package but to bury it at least to be clear in their mind about the alternative that they would put in its place. That applies particularly to the official Opposition.

Last night, the Conservative leader in the Lords braved "Newsnight". He was asked whether he agreed with the statement:

"Your MPs are split from what your peers are saying",

to which the noble and candid Lord replied, "Oh, absolutely."

This morning—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are pointing at us, but in these circumstances there is comfort in numbers. This morning I read in my *Daily Telegraph* that last night the shadow Cabinet decided on a policy. I would ask the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth): do tell. Let us know the new policy. For a century the Conservative party has championed the hereditary principle. In their time in government, the Conservatives never once proposed that there should be a single elected Member of the House of Lords. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, I see that some of them are still not up on the new policy agreed last night. In the last Parliament, they sacked Lord Cranborne for pulling the embroidered rug from under the feet of the hereditary peers—an action for which he deserved applause, not his P45.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst himself said in the debates in the last Parliament that he had

"no problem defending the long-standing hereditary element of the House of Lords".—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1999; Vol. 337, c. 1190.]

He and his party have a lot of words to swallow if they are to be convincing when they say that they are now the champions of a democratic second Chamber. I would only suggest that they make a start today on that process of swallowing.

I recognise that the question of composition is the issue on which there has been most debate on the White Paper. Before I address that question, we should first be clear about what we see as the functions of a second Chamber. We cannot decide on the composition of a second Chamber unless we first decide what is its function.

The Government's view is that the second Chamber should remain a Chamber of revision of legislation, of scrutiny of Government decisions, and of deliberation on public policy. It should have the capacity to recommend policy and it should have the power to delay legislation that requires second thoughts, but it should not have the right to compel the Commons to change the view of its elected majority.

If the second Chamber is to discharge those functions in the public interest, it is essential that it should contain some members elected by the public. That is why the White Paper proposes for the first time that there should be members directly elected by the public to the second Chamber.

That principle of direct elections to the second Chamber has been broadly welcomed. The precise proportion proposed by the White Paper of those to be directly elected has not enjoyed quite such a welcome. That will be one of the issues on which the Government will need to reflect in light of the views expressed in this debate and in the country.

However, I would place firmly on the record my anxiety about a wholly elected second Chamber. I have served three decades in the House of Commons and I do not wish to see the supremacy of this place undermined. The White Paper starts from the principle that the House of Commons will remain the pre-eminent Chamber. It will retain the right to the final decision on whether legislation can become law and it will retain the sole right to decide legislation on taxation. The right to form a Government of the United Kingdom will depend on whether the Government can command a majority in the House of Commons alone.

**David Winnick** (Walsall, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that when it appeared to be the case, in the late 1980s, that our party was in favour of a directly elected second Chamber, I was among those Labour MPs who argued that we should not go down that road because, whatever might be written in the powers, the fact would remain that the directly elected House of Lords would be in direct competition with this House? Will he bear it in mind, however, that if there is to be a directly elected element—I firmly believe that there should be, as I argued in written evidence to the Wakeham commission—

*[David Winnick]*

it should be more than 20 per cent. and a minimum of one third? Under no circumstances should the second Chamber be entirely directly elected; it would be wrong to take that path.

**Mr. Cook:** My hon. Friend and I have, broadly speaking, similar periods of service in the House and I fully share his concern to preserve the pre-eminence of this House and his anxiety that it would be impossible to do so in the event that there was a wholly directly elected second Chamber. No written document would be strong enough to withstand the challenge to the supremacy of the Commons by a second Chamber that felt that it had equally good democratic legitimacy. Over time, a wholly elected second Chamber would seek to approach parity with the Commons—perhaps even, as in the case of the United States Senate, to achieve more than parity with the Commons.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): Many Labour Members simply do not accept that. It is an assertion, not a statement of fact. If the powers and functions of the second Chamber are to be tightly circumscribed, what is wrong with having an elected upper House?

**Mr. Cook:** Plainly, I have failed to carry my hon. Friend with me and I must try harder. I fully admire the extent to which he is vigilant about his rights to represent the people who sent him to this place and active in using the House to pursue those interests. I ask him to contemplate how he would react if he found himself returned as a member of a wholly elected second Chamber and was then told that he had no right to vote on the taxation of his electors, no right to block—rather than delay—any law that was binding and no prospect of questioning Cabinet Ministers running the public services. I know my hon. Friend well enough to know that in those circumstances he would commence a vigorous campaign to ensure that he had the rights to do those things and to represent his people.

**Mr. Malcolm Savidge** (Aberdeen, North): I seem to remember that when we debated the Scotland Act 1998 a number of people made similar points, arguing that the Members of the House who came from Scotland would try to interfere with the Scottish Parliament. Most of us recognise fully what we are elected to this place for, and we vote on that basis.

**Mr. Cook:** I am not sure that I recognise that as a parallel case in the circumstances. I would also say to my hon. Friend and to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) that of course we can—I would be enthusiastic about it if I were ever faced with such an outcome—write down and tabulate in statute what should be the limited functions of the House of Lords. I just do not believe that that tablet of stone would stand the test of time when confronted by a wholly democratically elected House of Lords that was pressing to change it, and which might sometimes find itself pressing for changes with the support of public opinion. But there is another reason why—

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Cook:** I fully understand that many of my hon. Friends wish to intervene on that point, but I shall make progress because many of them also wish to take part in this debate.

The limited functions of a second Chamber do not require it to mirror the democratic mandate of the House of Commons. On the contrary, the second Chamber will be better able to fulfil its role of deliberation and a more valuable forum in which difficult issues can be discussed openly if its debates are informed by the expertise and authority of people with a lifetime of distinction.

Parliament can benefit from a forum that can tap the experience of people who have devoted their lives to courses other than Parliament, such as science, the arts, the voluntary sector and business. This may seem strange to me, and perhaps to some of my colleagues, but it is a fact of life that only a minority of the population actually enjoy the prospect of standing for election. If we want to preserve and improve the standing of the second Chamber as a place that can draw on the expertise and first-hand knowledge of those who have not stood for election, we need to preserve an alternative entry to the House of Lords for independent Members.

That is why the White Paper proposes for the first time that there should be a new statutory appointments commission that takes the appointment of those independent Members out of political patronage. The White Paper proposes that the commission should have the duty to appoint independent Members to form 20 per cent. of the new reformed second Chamber. There has been much media criticism of the first batch of Members chosen by the present Appointments Commission.

**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin** (West Derbyshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Cook:** No, I shall finish this point.

I invite hon. Members to consider the individuals who were brought into the House of Lords through that new transparent system. They include Valerie Howarth, chief executive of Childline, which she built up from a small charity to a national body. She has brought her expertise to proceedings in the House of Lords on child poverty. They include Mr. Amir Bathia, who has a long record of voluntary work, including as trustee of Oxfam. He has brought that voluntary sector experience to debates in the House of Lords on immigration and pre-school education.

Those people also include other distinguished members of Britain's ethnic communities, such as Dr. Michael Chan, who has a distinguished lifetime of contributing to the NHS as a paediatrician and as a professor in ethnic health. The House of Lords has benefited from his expertise in its debates on health. The truth is that those people would never have been likely to put themselves forward for election as party candidates and that they could not have taken part in those debates without an alternative entry system.

**Mr. Harold Best** (Leeds, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that such elected expertise probably exists in this Chamber and that it could equally exist in another elected Chamber?

**Mr. Cook:** As Leader of the House, I would be the last person to undermine the status, experience, expertise and

the calibre of the House of Commons. No one is saying anything other than that the House of Commons is the wholly democratically elected Chamber, on which its prerogatives rest. If we were to exclude those voices altogether, the debates in the second Chamber would be poorer, and it does not seem unreasonable that 20 per cent.—only a fifth of the total membership—should be available to those independent voices.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Cook:** I shall give way, but then I must make progress.

**Michael Fabricant:** The Leader of the House will be aware that voting shares and non-voting shares exist under company law. Why has he not considered allowing certain people—such as the Lords Spiritual, the Lords Temporal and, indeed, the Law Lords—to attend and debate in the House of Lords without having a right to vote?

**Mr. Cook:** The hon. Gentleman's suggestion has been reflected in some of the responses to the consultation exercise, and it is obviously open to us to consider and to the House to reflect on that suggestion. I am not sure whether I would necessarily wish to constitute a second Chamber in which there was a very clear cleavage between the status, standing and rights of its individual Members, but that is obviously a consideration.

For those reasons, we believe that the right solution for House of Lords reform is to have a mixed membership of elected and appointed Members. That principle of mixed membership also appears to have the support of a majority of the public. The two most recent opinion polls show that only 30 per cent. of the public supports a wholly elected membership of the second Chamber. However, that still leaves us with a very difficult judgment—it must be a matter of judgment—about where the balance should be struck between elected and appointed Members. That is why the first of the six questions posed in the White Paper is whether the proposed balance between elected and appointed members is right.

Many hon. Members have already made it clear to me—some of them on more than one occasion—that they do not think that the proposed balance is the right one. I hope that today's debate can take us an extra step beyond that by establishing whether there is an alternative that would command a centre of gravity of opinion in support of reform.

**Mr. Chaytor:** Is it not the case that the composition of the overwhelming majority of bicameral Parliaments in the world is wholly elected? Is there any evidence that those countries have worse records of government or social stability than the United Kingdom, or that there is permanent gridlock between their two Houses?

**Mr. Cook:** I considered that matter carefully last summer, when we were developing the White Paper, and it is not the case that most bicameral Parliaments are wholly elected. Many of them, probably the majority, have a significant elected element, but many draw their democratic mandate not from direct elections, but from indirect elections. Indeed, in our closest comparators in Europe, it is commonplace in France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands for the composition of the second Chamber to come predominantly from indirect elections from regional government.

I am conscious that some of my colleagues view that as a way to increase the democratic element in the House of Lords, but when the Wakeham commission investigated that option, it found no support for it among the regional or devolved bodies. One of the issues that can be resolved in the consultation exercise is whether that remains the case and whether the regional and devolved bodies would be interested in a route of indirect election as a supplement to direct elections and the democratic mandate of some of the second Chamber's Members.

There are several subsidiary questions. I shall not detain the House with them for long, but it is important to put them before the House for debate. One of the other issues raised in the White Paper is whether the 15-year term of membership proposed by the Wakeham commission is too long for the elected or appointed members. Is it necessary to change the remuneration of Members of the second Chamber from the present system of daily allowances, especially if there is a wish to elect more of its Members?

Finally, the White Paper invites views on the circumstances in which Members should be expelled from the second Chamber. Members of the House of Commons can be expelled on the grounds of imprisonment under a sentence of more than one year. No similar provision exists for the present House of Lords. If we seek a reformed second Chamber that will command respect, we must protect it against Members who bring it into disrepute.

The Government have put House of Lords reform out to consultation because we want to build on the basis of the broadest possible consensus for reform. This is the national Parliament of the British people. That is why we seek the widest consultation on the design of its second Chamber. A number of hon. Members have differences with some of the proposals in the White Paper, and we want to explore those differences in this debate, but most Members want reform to proceed, and I ask the House to recognise the far-reaching extent of reform on which the White Paper is based.

The reforms will secure four objectives of principle: they will remove the last of the hereditary peers from Parliament; they will introduce the first ever elected peers into the House of Lords; they will put the appointment of independent Members outside political patronage; and they will secure a political balance in the House of Lords that reflects the views of the British public in the most recent general election. I invite support for those four objectives of principle from all hon. Members who want a modern second Chamber—one that will not compete for power with the House of Commons, but will complement the House of Commons as a Chamber of revision and be in touch with the Britain of today, not the Britain of yesterday.

2.29 pm

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): Madam Deputy Speaker,

"The House of Lords should be replaced by an elected second chamber".

*[Mr. Eric Forth]*

These are the words of the Prime Minister in Cardiff in 1994.

"Labour will abolish the House of Lords and replace it with a proper democratically elected second Chamber with a new electoral system to go with it".

These are the words of the Prime Minister at the 1993 Labour party conference.

"I think it would be very important to avoid the perception of the biggest quango in our nation's history".

These are the words of the Lord Chancellor in 1997.

Having set the background to the debate, let me do that very modern, but for me rather uncharacteristic thing, and try to identify common ground between the Opposition and the Government.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** Does the shadow Leader of the House recall that, in 1999, he stated that he had no problem defending the long-standing hereditary element in the House of Lords? Does he still agree with that view?

**Mr. Forth:** I think that I said that in the context of our response to what the Government were then doing. My view then and my view now is that the hereditary element provided a splendidly robust and independent counterweight to the Government and to the House of Commons. I still hold to that view.

**Glenda Jackson** (Hampstead and Highgate): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Forth:** Let me answer the first intervention. I ask the hon. Lady to be patient.

The issue now is how we can best replace the robustly independent element that served this country well for centuries with something that is at least effective. I am not here today to say that we should return to a hereditary element; I am here to look forward. However, I have no hesitation in confirming that those were the words that I said then, and I have explained why I said them.

**Glenda Jackson:** Does the right hon. Gentleman's definition of independent in the context of the House of Lords apply to a body that during my lifetime—and, I would argue, for the whole of the last century and even before—was firmly tucked in the pocket of the Conservative party?

**Mr. Forth:** I wish that had sometimes been the case. Those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who had the privilege, as I did, to serve in government for a number of years will well recall that one of the primary questions asked during the preparation and passage of legislation was, "Will this get through the Lords? Will the Lords accept it?" As those Labour Members who have had the privilege of being here for more than one or two parliamentary terms will recall, the Conservative Government were, indeed, held to account very frequently by the House of Lords even when it was predominantly a hereditary body. My recollection in and out of government—as a Minister and Government Back Bencher—is somewhat at odds with the hon. Lady's.

**Mr. Savidge:** The right hon. Gentleman says that the House of Lords could be awkward to Conservative Governments, but surely he is an ideal exemplar of how awkward Conservatives are still Conservatives.

**Mr. Forth:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that high praise. I hope that I can continue to meet his description.

I was saying that I wanted to try to seek common ground between the Opposition and the Government, and I believe that there is some. We agree that there should be a second fully effective parliamentary Chamber. Indeed, we agree with the sentiments of the Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor that I quoted a moment ago when they said that the second Chamber should at least be substantially elected to give it democratic integrity and credibility. We agree with the Lord Chancellor when he said in 1997 that the second Chamber must be "above patronage". It should be visibly and palpably above criticism, not a quango.

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): When my right hon. Friend says that we agree that the majority of the second Chamber should be elected, for whom is he speaking?

**Mr. Forth:** I did not say that. I said that the second Chamber must at least be substantially elected. Those were the words I used; those are the words I read. That is why I am, uncharacteristically, going to read most of this speech. It will save me from exactly the sort of pungent point that my hon. Friend has just made.

**Mr. Chaytor:** Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House the range of percentages between which his definition of "substantially" falls?

**Mr. Forth:** No. It will not surprise you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to learn that I had anticipated that I might be asked that question, so I have armed myself with the words that were used by my noble Friend Lord Strathclyde in another place in yesterday's debate. He said that Her Majesty's Opposition in both Houses had

"accepted the invitation made by the noble and learned Lord the Lord Chancellor and laid out in the consultation; that is, that we should respond by the end of the month."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 January 2002; Vol. 630, c. 570.]

That is what we shall do.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): Perhaps I can help the right hon. Gentleman. As the originator of an early-day motion that has been signed by many Members and that refers to the word "substantially", I have discussed with colleagues what they mean by that. The overwhelming view of all those to whom I have spoken—most of the signatories—is that "substantially" must mean at least half the Members of the second Chamber.

**Mr. Forth:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and I am in substantial agreement with her. However, she and the House will learn by the end of the month what we mean by "substantially". I will not be tempted to tell her today.

**Peter Bradley:** Will the right hon. Gentleman reveal to us the temperature of those on the Conservative

Benches? I have signed the early-day motion that my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) mentioned, but I am not aware of any Conservative signing it to support the principle of substantial election.

**Mr. Forth:** I must correct the hon. Gentleman—there are a number of Conservative signatories to the early-day motion. We have gone to some lengths to allow for the opinions of my parliamentary colleagues in both Houses to be expressed and to be gathered. Meetings and consultations have been held and, in whatever direction we proceed, it will be in full knowledge of the views held by my colleagues in both Houses. That is the way in which we proceed, and that is the way in which we have proceeded in this case. I hope that all my right hon. and hon. Friends will agree that they have had ample opportunity to express their views on this matter.

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): I have read with interest the *Hansard* reports of the debate in the other place and I have failed so far to find any Conservative speaker who wished to have any elected element at all. Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that that is the case?

**Mr. Forth:** It is fair to say that the perspective of Members in another place is somewhat different from the perspective of colleagues in this place. That is necessarily as it should be, but we should always bear that in mind when we give great weight and consideration, as we will, to the views expressed in another place about its future.

**Mr. Tyrie:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Forth:** I will, but the House will want me to make progress because many Members wish to speak.

**Mr. Tyrie:** The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) might care to take a look at the speech of Lord Goschen and a number of other speeches made by Conservatives. They all supported the principle of election.

**Mr. Forth:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point.

I was about to say that we agree with the sentiments expressed in 1993 in "A New Agenda for Democracy—Labour's Proposals for Constitutional Reforms". It stated:

"a second chamber is a necessary and important check on the power of the first".

However, if I am to be criticised for going too much into the past—fortunately, it is about the only thing for which I have not yet been criticised—and for selecting quotations made mysteriously before the Labour party was in government, I shall refer to the early-day motion that the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) tabled, which has attracted 177 signatures.

The early-day motion was initiated by six of the hon. Lady's colleagues in the Labour party and, by my reckoning, more than 130 Labour Members have signed it. It states:

"this House supports the democratic principle that any revised Second Chamber of Parliament should be wholly or substantially elected."

It is in that context that we are entitled to assess the direction in which the White Paper wishes to take us.

If we take the assertions of the Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor in their earlier incarnations and the contents of the early-day motion, it is true to say that the proposals in the White Paper are inadequate. I will argue that they are incoherent and lack consistency and credibility. Eight key proposals are enumerated on page 7 of the White Paper. I could probably endorse three or four of them, but by no means every one. There is some shared ground, but I fear that there are substantial differences on the essential elements, which I suspect will be reflected in the debate.

I challenge much of the analysis that underpins the Government's proposals. It is apparent from some of the statements in paragraph 16 on page 9 where their ideas start to go astray. For example:

"General Elections return individual MPs who are expected to look to the interests of their constituents irrespective of Party affiliation."

Tell that to the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden); he did not seem to think that. In fact, he thought so little of it that he left the Labour party to cross the Floor of the House, as he said at the time, to have the freedom that the White Paper asserts should belong to all Members of Parliament.

How about the statement:

"The Party which secures a majority has the right to form a Government and . . . to carry through the programme set out in its election Manifesto"?

Does that mean irrespective of all changes in circumstances? Does it mean only the measures in the manifesto? Does it mean regardless of any revisions that may be made by the second Chamber, which is crucial to this debate? All those matters are important glosses on what appears on the face of it to be an unarguable statement.

It is no surprise to me that the Government wish to reassert so vigorously, as indeed the Leader of the House just did, the doctrine of the absolute primacy of the House of Commons. However, they have made the Commons their creature to an unprecedented extent, and they continue that process through the so-called modernisation procedure. A combination of the routine timetabling of Bills, deferred Divisions, the elimination of debates on money resolutions, timetable motions and so on, and the almost regular delay in answering parliamentary questions or the non-answers given to them, set in context the repeated assertion that the House of Commons must be supreme. What I suspect that really means in today's context is that the Government in the House of Commons shall be supreme. It is against that criterion that we have to measure the White Paper's contents.

That would be bad enough, but when we examine the Government's attitude to what they call the reformed second Chamber, as revealed on page 11 of the White Paper, we see that the upper House

"has the duty, and the power, to press the Government hard to justify its actions".

That is hardly an impressive endorsement of the powers of an effective upper Chamber. It goes on to state:

"The House of Lords is a powerful deliberative assembly".

That is hardly a ringing endorsement of the concept of checks and balances to which the Leader of the House claims he is so attached. The House should notice that the

*[Mr. Forth]*

other place is referred to not as a legislative body, but as a deliberative body. That important distinction gives an important insight into the Government's real thinking.

The White Paper goes on:

"The second chamber can question and criticise individual Ministers".

Well, that is a real concession—except, of course, that only those Ministers who are Members of the upper House can be questioned on the Floor of that Chamber, which sets a limit on that power. It also states:

"There is no case for giving specific new functions to the House of Lords."

That is an assertion; it does not make the case. I pray in aid again what Lord Strathclyde said in yesterday's debate:

"The House"—

the House of Lords—

"should not have its powers reduced, as the White Paper proposes. It should retain the power to reject secondary legislation; the White Paper proposes removing it. It should have more power to consider and advise on financial matters; the White Paper has nothing to say on that matter whatever. The White Paper is nothing to do with authority, with legitimacy, with democracy or even with the core proposals of the Royal Commission's report."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 January 2002; Vol. 630, c. 569.]

There is a case for at least looking, within the context of the balance of the powers between this place and another place, at perhaps increasing the role and participation of the upper Chamber, not reducing it as proposed.

Having said that, the greatest difficulty arises—as the Leader of the House was characteristically generous enough to accept—on the issue of the composition of the upper House. Hardly anyone seems to support the Government's proposal on that, except the payroll and some of the wannabes on the Labour Back Benches. Funnily enough, page 17 also contains eight points—the Leader of the House seems to have a thing about eight; perhaps it is his lucky number. I can agree with five of them, but that does not get the Government off the hook. The proposal for a majority of nominated Members creates the difficulties that follow in the rest of the White Paper. For example, the statement,

"It is sometimes argued that only direct election can provide legitimacy for the second chamber. This was not an argument accepted by the Commission or by the Government",

sits oddly with the repeated assertion by the Prime Minister and others, including the right hon. Gentleman today, that a hereditary element in the House of Lords is an affront to democracy. It is beyond me how the Government can go on to assert that a nominated element in the House of Lords is not an equal affront to democracy, and that has never been satisfactorily explained.

In paragraph 38, the Government argue:

"a second chamber constituted on the same elected basis as the first chamber would be superfluous and dangerous."

That may be so, but I am not aware that anyone is arguing that a second Chamber should be elected on the same basis as the House of Commons. Many people argue that the upper House could have a different electoral arrangement, different constituencies, a different electoral cycle and so on, and I suspect that we will hear those arguments today. However, the assertion in the White Paper does not deal with them; instead, it deals with the completely different argument, which I have heard no one make, that the upper House should be elected on the same basis as the House of Commons.

In paragraph 39, we get to our old friend, the bogey of gridlock in the case of

"A parallel elective basis of authority for two chambers with parallel functions".

The Government reinforce that with a further threat that if the second Chamber were wholly elected, but on a different system from that used for the House of Commons, the two elected Chambers

"within the Westminster system would be a recipe for gridlock and the Government therefore joins the Royal Commission in rejecting this option."

That is a familiar argument, and it is well understood here and in another place. In some ways, it is at the heart of the differences between the Government and nearly all the Opposition parties and more than 130 Labour Back Benchers.

Surely gridlock is not always a bad thing. It may sometimes provide an extra opportunity for deliberation, scrutiny and second thoughts before legislation is hurried through the parliamentary process. I freely admit that it would require a formal conciliation procedure between the two Houses if disagreement and gridlock arose, but that is not beyond the wit of man. We all know that the system has operated for nearly 200 years in the United States and in other contexts as well. That is not a final or definitive argument. Gridlock can, indeed, provide a safety measure if a party with a large majority in the House of Commons tries to force through a measure that is unpopular or unacceptable. That would apply whatever party was in government. In all those ways, the concept of gridlock is not necessarily the unacceptable or negative idea that is construed in the White Paper.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** For clarity, will my right hon. Friend say whether he believes, as he did a year or so ago, that we should have an American-style system, with a directly elected Senate-type Chamber? He argued passionately for that before.

**Mr. Forth:** I believe what the shadow Cabinet believes. If I did not, I would not last long in it. My thought process, as my hon. Friend knows, is legendarily dynamic. I am capable of making infinite adjustments to my view on this and other matters.

The White Paper asserts in paragraph 40 that a mainly elected chamber would mean that

"independent members would virtually disappear"

and we would

"risk losing the potential the Lords provides to bring to Parliament the expertise and experience of those who are leaders in a wide range of national endeavours".

But I notice that the Leader of the House, picking his words carefully as he always does, referred throughout his contribution only to a wholly elected Chamber.

To my recollection, the right hon. Gentleman did not address the argument about a substantially elected Chamber, which could include a significant number of independent and appointed Members, so he failed to address, as did the White Paper, what is probably the preferred option of the majority of people. Very few

people are saying that the upper House should be elected on the same basis as the lower House, and very few would deny that a substantially elected House could contain a significant number of independent Members, thus answering the point that the Leader made.

It is when we turn to the White Paper's proposals on composition, however, that we see the real absurdity, because it tries to say that there will be a limited or capped membership that will be largely nominated, which, as I said earlier, must surely be an affront to democracy in the sense in which the Prime Minister and others have referred to it over the years, but at the same time, by some process that I cannot for the life of me understand, there will be representation of political parties reflecting the votes cast in the preceding general election. I cannot see how those elements can be squared.

The White Paper goes on to talk, in a sinister way, about regional elections on the same proportional system as is used for the European Parliament. Oh, dear. If that means closed lists, then we are back, effectively, to nominations through another route. How are we to square the inherently contradictory and conflicting principles of a limited membership and a membership that reflects the result of each general election? How on earth could a House whose membership is largely nominated but fixed reflect a change as dramatic as the one that occurred in 1997? In 1974, we had two elections in quick succession, in February and October. How could the upper House reflect that degree of alteration in its composition?

The Government's most difficult task, however, is to solve the problem of transition—the polite name for the question of how we deal with the lifers while introducing the Government's proposals. In a rare moment of realism, the White Paper says:

"there will be a real challenge both to work towards a reduction in numbers and rectify the clear imbalance in strengths of the two main political parties in the Lords."

It goes on to offer, as an alleged solution,

"provision for members formally to retire before the end of their term."

Anyone who listened to the debate in the other place, as I did, and read the account of it, as Members here have, will agree that it is unlikely that Members of another place will be persuaded, even by the charm of the Leader of the House, formally to retire from the upper House before their life term naturally expires. That is one of the great difficulties inherent in the White Paper's proposals.

**Mr. Derek Wyatt** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that a solution would be for life peers to vote themselves out, just as hereditary peers had to do?

**Mr. Forth:** That is a positive, interesting proposal, which will have to be considered. I am sure that the Leader of the House will want to pursue it.

**Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews** (Medway): Before the right hon. Gentleman leaves the subject of composition, will he reflect on the following point? As I understand it, he is a substantial man, but not a total man. We all understand the rush of blood to the head that we get when we have the legitimacy granted by the electorate and the problems that it would cause in the House of Lords. Under these principles, some Members of the Lords will suffer from those urges, and some will not. We are to have two species of Member, one superior to the other. Are the appointed Members to act as a brake on those who have urges inflicted on them by the electorate?

**Mr. Forth:** That is a fair question. It will depend very much on the length of the term served by elected and appointed Members in a hybrid House, which will affect considerably their attitude towards each other. It is a legitimate question, and there are answers to it, but it remains to be seen whether different sorts of Members in a hybrid House will manage to find accommodation with each other, and it will depend on the length of term, electoral cycles and the like. Whether the appointed will envy the elected or vice versa is an interesting question to which I cannot give a ready answer.

We still believe that the way forward is to have a joint Committee of both Houses consider the matter, to see whether we can expand the common ground that undoubtedly exists and build on the contents of the early-day motion, on what has been said in another place and on what we will hear in this debate. We want to make a genuine attempt not only to find a means of having an effective, reformed upper House but seriously to consider the role that the Commons plays in the parliamentary context. Let us not imagine that that can be done by focusing on the nature, composition and powers of the upper House without looking equally seriously at the role of this House, its relationship to the Government of the day and the dynamic that is created by one Chamber of the legislature producing the Executive and the Executive being part of it.

Until we deliberate on all those factors together, it will be very difficult for the Government to find a way forward. We make a genuine offer. We would want to play a positive role in a joint Committee. We urge it to be set up because we fear that the White Paper is going nowhere. I do not want the Government to use the fact that their White Paper has so little support as an excuse to shelve any further reform of the upper House. That cannot be allowed to happen, and I ask the Leader of the House to give serious consideration to a joint Committee.

2.57 pm

**Mr. Chris Smith** (Islington, South and Finsbury): Let us remind ourselves what, at heart, this debate is about and why it is important. It is about power and the nature of that power, how it is exercised, who determines who wields it and how the people of this country are involved in that process. Surely, what we are seeking to achieve is greater democratic and representative legitimacy in the way legislation is framed and passed and the way the Government are held to account. That must be the test of any proposals. I am afraid that I do not believe that the Government's present proposals pass that test. Quite simply, the Government have not got it right.

There are some things on which virtually all of us can agree. First, there is no place for the hereditary principle in the legislative process. It must go. Secondly, I believe that the primacy of the Commons must be clearly established and confirmed. There can be no substitute for the direct relationship between MPs and their constituents. There is an important objective in avoiding legislative gridlock. Of course the Opposition like the idea of gridlock—it is a recipe for permanent Conservative bias in the system—but effective government requires that we seek to avoid, as far as possible, the prospect of gridlock.

*[Mr. Chris Smith]*

Thirdly, there ought to be a second Chamber. The Commons does not always get everything 100 per cent. right. Fourthly, the powers of the second Chamber should be broadly similar to those at present: to revise, to advise and to hold to account, but not to overturn or override the main thrust of legislation. Let us not forget that the other place has considerable powers. For example, to my grief over many years, its Members have caused enormous damage to our lesbian and gay citizens. I do not wish to remove those powers from it, but it is important to maintain its revising role, rather than a principal role of initiating and passing legislation. Finally, it makes sense to divorce the honour of a peerage from membership of a legislative assembly.

There is broad agreement on both sides of the House on all those points. Beyond that, we enter more difficult territory, but that should not deter us from making the attempt. There will be a multitude of proposals on how to proceed, but the worst thing would be for us to do nothing as a result. We should have a genuine debate about how to achieve better democratic legitimacy without sacrificing the important principle of the supremacy of the Commons.

I shall offer some basic principles for consideration. Any new Chamber needs to be substantially elected. In my book, "substantially" means at least 50 per cent; 20 per cent. will not do. Surely there is also a need for representatives to be sought from regional assemblies, national Parliaments and assemblies and local government. Their appointment or nomination should not be made by party leaders, but should come directly from local or regional bodies. Is there not also scope for seeking representatives who are drawn directly from other parts of society—business, trade unions, voluntary and charitable sectors and faith communities? In that context, we should end the unjustified automatic inclusion of a number of Church of England bishops. We should divorce the judicial system from the legislature, establish a separate highest court and end the automatic inclusion of judges. We should aim at a much smaller overall membership of the second Chamber. There is talk of 750 Members as a transitional figure, and 600 Members as a final total; but those figures are far too high.

One problem that the Government have brought upon themselves has arisen from the fact that they started from the status quo, which they tried to push, pull and squeeze in a more rational direction, rather than starting with a set of principles and working from that point. We should not let the present composition and nature of the House of Lords dictate what happens in the long term. Of course, getting consensus will not be easy and there will be different options to consider. However, the present set of proposals is not the right starting point. I urge my colleagues in government, with understanding and respect, to make another start on their proposals.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I remind Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

3.4 pm

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): I agree with a great deal of what the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said. Rather to my surprise, I found myself agreeing also with a great deal of what the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said, particularly in his peroration—specifically, we are in danger of isolating our discussion if we do not see it in the context of the reform and modernisation of Parliament as a whole.

I want to concentrate for a moment not on the role of the House of Lords, but on that of Parliament. What is its job and how can we make it more effective? I was interested that in his evidence to the Select Committee on Public Administration this morning, Lord Wakeham admitted that his remit did not permit him to consider the reform of the House of Lords in the context of that of Parliament as a whole which, he said, was above his pay grade. That was unfortunate but perhaps inevitable, because a royal commission has to concentrate on certain things, which is another good reason for a Joint Committee of both Houses to look at the issues in the round.

It is a happy coincidence that we are discussing reform of the House of Commons in parallel with the proposals. It is an even happier coincidence that the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who has a long record as a parliamentary reformer, is at present Leader of the House. I remind him that he was the joint author of an agreement with the Liberal Democrats before the 1997 general election—the so-called Cook-Maclennan agreement—in which he committed himself to

"recommendations for a democratic and representative Second Chamber".

The White Paper before us this afternoon does not fulfil that promise.

A holistic approach to the reform of Parliament, reviving and strengthening both Houses to enable us to hold the Executive to account, is the context in which we should be operating and is in the interests of the whole electorate. This is not necessarily an esoteric issue of interest only to the chattering classes. Every single citizen of this country should be interested in making Parliament a more effective vehicle for their concerns. Until now, I fear, the reform of the House of Lords has been of personal interest to the chattering classes, their friends and relatives—ermine-fringed anoraks, as it were—as it has concerned their own expectations. It should not be so; we should go much further.

Before dealing with recruitment to that body, I wish to look at Parliament's job. What is this whole place about? First, it is to represent the people, constituency by constituency, by having free and open elections. That is our principal job in this House. Secondly, it is effectively to scrutinise and influence legislation and policy proposed by the Government; both Houses should be involved in that. Thirdly, it is to hold the Executive to account for all their actions. Fourthly, it is to protect the rights and liberties of citizens and, in parallel, encourage other countries embarking on parliamentary democracy. Finally, it is to provide a reservoir of able men and women from which Ministers may be recruited.

**Mr. Forth:** Should not the hon. Gentleman have put providing the Government first on his list? Does he not agree that a genuine difficulty that we face in the reform of Parliament is how to deal with the fact that this House or legislature creates and sustains the Government at the same time that it has to hold them to account and

scrutinise their activities? The fact that we in Parliament provide the Government gives rise to some of our greatest difficulties.

**Mr. Tyler:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman; I was just coming to that point. Democracies in other parts of the world have approached the separation of powers in a very different way, but in this country we have dodged the issue for years. There is a good case for examining it in the round in both Houses; I accept the point that he made.

The reform of the second Chamber, proceeding in parallel with the reinvigoration of this Chamber, must achieve greater democratic legitimacy—surely, we all share that common ground—so that its work is complementary to that of the Commons: together we can hold the Government to account more effectively. The creative tension is not between the two Houses; that is a new Labour pink herring. The creative tension is between both Houses and Whitehall. That is what it is all about, and what it should be all about. It was extraordinary that the Leader of the House again paraded the issue of the supremacy of the Commons; nobody is questioning that. What we are saying is that the supremacy of Parliament over the Executive is critical in a parliamentary democracy.

Given that he is a great internationalist, it was not good enough for the Leader of the House to say that other bicameral systems in other parts of the world had somehow got it wrong. We in this country have a great deal to learn from other countries in that respect.

We should be seeking to complement the work that is done in each House rather than to compete. Good government and effective scrutiny go together, as the Leader of the House has said on several occasions. That means the whole of this building will be involved if we are to achieve better government.

Judged against those objectives, we found the royal commission recommendations woefully timid and desperately disappointing. However, in our worst nightmares we could not have believed that the Government would water down Wakeham. It was bad enough at the start, but to find that the White Paper is even worse is extraordinary.

Paragraph 24 has already been quoted. It states:

"There is no case for giving specific new functions to the House of Lords."

Who says? If new democratic legitimacy is being given to the other part of Parliament, why should such proposals not be considered? There may be issues that neither place currently considers properly—a point to which I shall return.

Surely, if greater legitimacy is given to a democratic assembly, the right of that part of the democratic system to do more work rather than less and to have more responsibility must at least be considered. For example, the Government are currently suggesting that the reserve power to veto—it is only a reserve power—should be taken away on secondary legislation. We need some checks and balances in the system, especially on European legislation. At the moment, that is an important part of the second Chamber's function. We should not be weakening an arm of Parliament in relation to its responsibilities to consider what the Government are up to, but seeking to strengthen it. We should again look at the Parliament Acts in that respect and we must learn from other bicameral assemblies that have done that most effectively.

**Mr. Bryant:** The hon. Gentleman referred to the reserve power being taken away on secondary legislation. Is not a three-month delay a stronger power than a veto that is never used?

**Mr. Tyler:** The veto has been used in the recent past, although I admit that it has happened only once. Hon. Members may recall that it was used very effectively and achieved a major change in respect of the government of London. As the power was rarely used and the Lords showed that they felt so strongly about the matter that it had the maximum effect, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman.

There are a number of areas where Parliament is currently failing but where the second Chamber could have an important role. It could have such a role with regard to increased use of pre-legislative scrutiny, perhaps through Joint Committees in some cases. Cross-party business planning would ensure that we did not have some of the absurdities mentioned by the Leader of the House in the context of the modernisation of this House. There could be a Select Committee on treaties. As my right hon. Friend Baroness Williams of Crosby has pointed out on a number of occasions, it is ludicrous that we have no right to examine treaties in either House. A Joint Committee may be the answer, but it is outrageous to have nobody in that role. Treaties as important as those relating to the World Trade Organisation are of great interest to our constituents, but we cannot deal with them. Perhaps there is no room on our agenda here, but there might be room in the other place.

The royal prerogative is a huge area in which Parliament is not doing its job. Gradually and incrementally, successive Governments have expanded the royal prerogative in a completely undemocratic way. There is no answerability or accountability to us. The House of Lords, especially in the sort of format that we are considering, would have a very important role in that regard. For example, it would have a role in relation to public appointments and to providing effective questioning of what quangos are doing in the name of the Government.

Finally, there is a role with regard to protection of some of the fundamental principles of our constitution. We are edging towards a constitutional settlement, with devolution to different parts of the United Kingdom. There must be some quasi-constitutional court to ensure that, in the process, our civil liberties are not severely diminished.

My colleagues and I are not suggesting a huge increase in powers, but we will certainly resist any attempt to dilute the powers that the House has at the moment and we will look for ways to improve the situation.

I deal now with the democratic legitimacy of the second Chamber. I was interested in the reference to 1911. I do not recall it, but I think that I am right in saying that it was my colleagues in the Liberal Government who had the great problem with the House of Lords at the time. I think that they were right to say that the contrast and choice were between a popular Parliament and a hereditary one. We cannot go on dodging the issue. In

*[Mr. Tyler]*

the end, either we want our Parliament to be answerable mainly—not substantially, but predominantly—to the electorate, or we will be fudging the issue. My colleagues and I believe strongly that we should proceed firmly and expeditiously to a second Chamber that takes its authority from its democratically elected mandate—full stop. By the end of the transitional period, there should be no more political appointments. Perhaps that period will be 10 years or even longer, but at the end of it we cannot have any more corrupt patronage. That must go. In the meantime, we must ensure that we are moving in that direction.

It was extraordinary this morning to hear Lord Wakeham referring to this situation. At one stage, he spoke about rejecting the idea of an appointments commission for those coming from the regions and nations of the United Kingdom. He said that the people should be the appointments commission, but then backtracked again. If the people are to constitute the appointments commission, that will reflect the logic for the majority of Members of the House to be elected. I do not deny that there is a case—although I think that it is limited—for allowing a minority of independent Members of the House to sit as Cross Benchers. Incidentally, I see that Charter 88 estimates that only 10 per cent. of current life peers in the other place have any expertise that is not already available to the House, so I think that the role is limited.

Given those circumstances, I found a recent briefing to the parliamentary Labour party extraordinary. I have a copy of the briefing and very interesting reading it makes. It states, in ringing terms:

"A wholly or largely elected second chamber would be neither right nor practical".

The last four words are underlined, which shows how strong those feelings are. I understand from a number of hon. Members that the briefing did not get universal applause at yesterday's meeting of the parliamentary Labour party. It contains no logic to follow up the statement that I have mentioned. It has been made—and, indeed, it is underlined—but there is no rationale to follow it. That is extraordinary. After all, this is the party that, for generations, and ever since I have been interested in politics, has attacked the House of Lords as undemocratic. If anything goes wrong there, there is a tendency to say, "They're unelected; you needn't take any notice of them." If 70 or 80 per cent. are still going to be unelected, that will be a very difficult problem.

I accept that there is a problem in terms of transition. Getting rid of peers at speed—let us put it mildly—will not be easy. I understand that somebody at the parliamentary Labour party meeting who was asked how many peers there should be referred to the number of lamp posts in the United Kingdom, as if stringing them up would be the quickest way to achieve attrition. I must warn the House that, even if that is thought to be too dramatic and drastic, leaving the matter to the attrition of the grim reaper will take a long time. The actuarial assessment of one of my noble colleagues in the other place—he may be slightly morbid, as well as mathematically expert—is that it will be well into the middle of this century before we get down to a sensible number. The average age of peers before they eventually decide to go not just to another place but another world is increasing. In those circumstances, we simply cannot accept the idea that a House of 700 or 750 Members will exist throughout our political lifetime.

**Mr. Mark Fisher** (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that if, like me, he supports a wholly elected Chamber, none of those problems should arise? Even if there is a transition with a small element of non-elected people, the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) that they should select their own small number, just as with hereditary peers, is a very simple solution and would work perfectly well.

**Mr. Tyler:** I agree and accept that that may be a good way forward.

We must accept that the objective for the end of the transitional period should be a smaller House, perhaps of 300 Members but certainly not much more. We should go for a House that is free of all direct party political patronage and that has minimal obligation or deference to the Executive. That point has already been made by several hon. Members. There should be no Member of Parliament clones or aspirant Members of Parliament. It has been suggested that a minimum age should be set for Members of the other Chamber. I am not sure whether that is acceptable. However, if they are to be elected, we must try to ensure that candidates do not simply want to climb the greasy pole.

What should we do? First, elections must be fixed term, and whenever possible they should not coincide with general elections. If they happen on the same day, it is almost inevitable that we shall have clones at the other end of the building. Secondly, elections must be carried out through an effective system of proportional representation, and I hope that the recommendation for the single transferable vote will be accepted. Thirdly, it is important to provide for partial changeover so that we do not have "all out" at the same time and thus make continuity difficult.

I believe that there should also be one-term limits so that, once there, Members are not beholden to the party hierarchy for their return. I believe that most of my colleagues in both Houses support that. If half the House is elected on the same day as the European Parliament, the limit should be for 10 years—full stop, fixed term. There is thus no question of climbing back into favour with the party hierarchy.

The suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) is good for the longer term. He speaks with the authority of the only former hereditary peer who sits in this House—I remind hon. Members that he does that with a democratic mandate. If elections for the second Chamber coincided with those for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Greater London Assembly, and I hope, English regional elections on a four-year cycle, and a 12-year period was allowed so that only one third was elected at any time, that would provide for consistency and continuity but free Members of ambitions for office and of party loyalty.

We perceive no need for retaining separate religious or legal representatives. The case for a supreme court is separate, and we have not examined it properly yet. However, there is no argument for Law Lords. Religious

and legal representatives might be eligible to make up some of the small number of independent Cross-Bench Members.

If, at the end of the transitional period—whether 10, 12 or 15 years—there is representation by but not from the devolved institutions, that should not replace the elected component. The former may be supplementary; there are some advantages to electoral colleges in the regions of England and the other national institutions. They could provide an extra element to the second Chamber, but that must not happen to the disadvantage of those who are directly elected.

The White Paper proposals constitute the worst sort of wishy-washy compromise. They satisfy nobody, and there is no majority in either House for them. By the end of today, I believe that we shall find that the Leader of the House is well aware that that applies to Members of the House of Commons as well as to his colleagues in the other part of the building. Almost 200 hon. Members have signed the early-day motion; most are Labour Back Benchers.

Liberal Democrat Members will work with others in all parties and in both Houses to achieve legislation that will encompass five principles. First, we should develop a comprehensive approach to parliamentary revitalisation in both Houses. Secondly, we should resist any dilution of the role of the second Chamber in dealing with primary and secondary legislation as well as scrutinising Executive action. Thirdly, we should extend parliamentary scrutiny to cover aspects of government that neither House currently examines. Fourthly, after the transitional period, we should end all party political patronage, which is no longer acceptable for a 21st century legislature. Fifthly, elections should be conducted on a PR system that gives maximum voter choice and achieves broad proportionality for voters' party support.

We are prepared to talk to everybody on that basis and we believe that there is a consensus in the House that will achieve it.

3.24 pm

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): I am worried about House of Lords reform not because I am a geek about structuring the second Chamber—I can be; I have all sorts of ideas—but because I believe that we have a specific responsibility to democracy. It is not extreme to suggest that democracy is going out of fashion; it is frail and fragile. Participation in the last general election was poor, and, as those who carry the flame of democracy, we have a responsibility to feed it. I am worried about the proposals for reform because they could do the opposite. Not reforming the House of Lords would certainly do that. It is important that proposals emerge from the debate to provide for reform that reinforces democracy.

Why is democracy important? It asserts the primacy of people in making decisions. I was interested in the contribution of Lord Norton of Louth, who said in the upper House that democracy was a bit overrated. He said that when people were asked whether they would prefer decisions to be made by an absolute expert on a subject or an elected person, 49 per cent. said that they favoured an elected person and 43 per cent., an absolute expert.

Whatever happens, we will not get a Chamber of experts on every measure, because that is not possible. However, when offered a House of experts, the majority of people would prefer Members whom they pick. We must tell people that they have the right to choose because they are good at it, and better than the Government at picking those who should hold them to account. In reforming ourselves, we should acknowledge people's ability to choose well.

Our behaviour in the Chamber is one of the reasons why people's confidence in the electoral system has been damaged. We are very tribal; our behaviour is summed up by "These guys are right, those guys are wrong." The House of Commons works on that basis. There is a role for that in politics. Sticking to a party line and manifestos keeps politicians straight, and it is important. However, it is not the only thing that makes politics sensible. When picking over detail and carefully considering measures that are part of a Government's programme, rather than forming that programme, it is good for people to point out that the emperor has no clothes, that a provision will not have the intended effect, and to suggest alternatives.

It is important that such people should be at the heart of the second Chamber. They should make the major decisions. We should encourage those who are prepared to be a bit sceptical and do not necessarily follow a party line. The Wakeham committee's proposals for long terms and not allowing people to hop between Houses provided a reasonable model for rewarding and encouraging the sceptics. Ours should be the primary Chamber. We should be the people who act as tribunes of our constituencies and as the voice of the people, but the people should choose the éminences grises, the reflectors and those who say, "Hey, hang on a minute. Let's stop and think." That should be the fundamental role of the second Chamber.

What is most depressing about the White Paper is the fact that it envisages that, in a House of 600 people, 332 will be appointed by the political parties nominating them. That number is not mentioned in most of the papers that we have been discussing, but that is what would result from the proposals in the White Paper. The White Paper and its companion documents also argue that elections are a bad thing, which is very much against the traditions of my party and of this place, and not something that we should stick to.

I welcome the Leader of the House saying that we had to work out some fundamental principles on which to go forward. There is a job to be done here, and the White Paper can be a starting point, but we have to find a way of introducing legislation. I am one of those who believe that we have to legislate, and that we cannot continue with the hereditary element that remains in the second Chamber.

The four principles proposed by the Leader of the House are a start. Let me remind the House of them. The first is to abolish the hereditaries. The second is to have elections, and in that respect I must stress that people will expect at least half the Members of the Chamber to be decided by the people, if we are to have elections with which people can engage and towards which they can make a commitment. The third principle is to reflect the political balance in the country. That is best done by elections, frankly. The fourth is to retain an independent element.

I accept that there can be a place for a Cross-Bench independent element. It should not be huge; indeed, the White Paper does not propose that. It proposes an independent element of 20 per cent., which I would be

*[Fiona Mactaggart]*

prepared to accept, if that is the way to build consensus. Those Members should be genuinely independent, and they might help to make the Chamber the more deliberative, consensual and thoughtful place that we require. We should also consider other matters, such as the scope of the work of the Chamber. We are being unconfident in not giving it more powers to reflect on issues such as the World Trade Organisation.

We have an historic opportunity here. In 1911, Parliament said, "We have to have a popularly decided second Chamber." Ninety years later, we got rid of the hereditary bit, which went half way towards achieving that, although we kept a few of them in order to get there. Now is our opportunity to create a genuinely popular second Chamber, and we must do it. If we do not, we will reinforce the process by which the people of Britain lose confidence in their legislature. If they do so, and if we contribute to that, we will damage the constitution and the fabric of the government of this country for centuries to come.

3.33 pm

**Sir George Young** (North-West Hampshire): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), and I have much sympathy with many of the points that she made.

It is almost exactly two years since Lord Wakeham's commission produced its report, a task that it was challenged to do within a year. It responded well, and no doubt hoped that the momentum urged on it by the Government would be matched by that Government. It is worth reminding the House that Wakeham envisaged the first elections for the upper House happening in June last year. In June 1999, we were told by Ministers that the Commission was

"being asked to report by the end of 1999, to enable the Government to make every effort to ensure that the second stage of reform has been approved by Parliament by the time of the general election."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 1999; Vol. 332, c. 743.]

So after a brisk sprint round the first lap by Lord Wakeham, the baton was handed over to a jogger in rather poor shape, and it has taken the Government nearly two years to produce their response, optimistically entitled "Completing the Reform." Reading the foreword by the Prime Minister, one would have thought that the Government had simply accepted the Commission's views. He summarises Wakeham and then says:

"The Government strongly endorses the Royal Commission's vision of the role and importance of the second chamber. It also accepts the Commission's broad framework for composing its membership."

There is no hint there of any disagreement.

Of course the Government do not accept the broad framework, however. They want something quite different that would undermine the legitimacy, independence and effectiveness of the second Chamber. Only when we get to the small print of the White Paper do we read some words that the late Sir Nigel Hawthorne would have enjoyed delivering:

"There are however a number of areas where further consideration of the practical effects of certain recommendations has led the Government to consider some modification of the precise recommendations so as to ensure implementation of the Commission's principles in the most effective way possible."

In a sentence, those words emasculate the Appointments Commission and propose shorter terms, undermining the independence of the second Chamber.

I want to make a number of brief points indicating the way forward. First, there has been a tendency to represent the debate about Lords reform as a two-dimensional contest between the Lords and the Commons: if one gains, the other must lose. But the true picture is multidimensional, and the real contest today is not between the Lords and the Commons but between Parliament and the Executive. In that battle, the two Houses are not rivals but partners. Without waiting for the Government to determine what to do next, the two Houses need to develop stronger links with each other.

We have an increasingly influential Liaison Committee in this House, and perhaps that should open a dialogue with the comparable body in the Lords to discuss matters of common interest. One issue about which we could talk to their Lordships is paragraph 5 of the White Paper, which says:

"Labour supports modernisation of the House of Lords' procedures to improve its effectiveness."

We have tasted some of Labour's modernisation down here, and although I do not criticise all of it, the motive has been the expedition of Government business, rather than better scrutiny of legislation. My strong advice to their Lordships is that they, not the Government, should decide how to improve their effectiveness.

Secondly, the current position of a wholly appointed Chamber is unsatisfactory. The Government have asserted that the House that we now have is more legitimate and more effective. However, there is no sign of the Government respecting the new House; nor do I think that they will until its composition is changed. When the Government lose, it is just like old times: more threats and abuse. The Lords have recently defeated the Government on anti-terrorism legislation, and quite rightly so. The Government must accept the legitimacy of criticism from an effective second Chamber, and we need a House with more authority than the present one, and a Government who respect it when they lose the argument.

My third point is on numbers. Wakeham proposed 550 Members, and the White Paper says 600. That strikes me as rather high. We have 660 Members here, a number that is scheduled to go down when we lose the presence of a number of Scottish colleagues. Even with 630, I believe that the lower House will still be too big. It is difficult to see why the revising Chamber has to have 600. No one has proposed that it should carry out the demanding constituency role that we carry out; nor is it proposed that it should provide more members of the Executive than it does at the moment. I would aim at the Wakeham maximum or below it.

The White Paper does not make it clear how we would keep the number at 600, if more peers are to be created to get the balance right after each election. To take an unlikely scenario, let us suppose that the Liberals were the largest party after the next election. They would be entitled to more peers than the largest Opposition party—that is, 222 instead of 65. But if the number of Members is capped at 600, how on earth would we achieve that proposal?

My fourth point is on composition. I believe that the new House should be one third non-political and appointed, and two thirds political and elected. I accept

that many who would be first-class Members of the upper House do not belong to a political party and do not want to fight an election—hence the one third. I also believe that no single party should have a majority in the upper House. Keeping one third of Members non-political while dividing up the political two thirds between the major parties should ensure that no party has a majority in the upper House.

There is an extraordinary passage in the White Paper seeking to reject this option which deserves quotation:

"A mainly elected second Chamber would have the following, further, practical disadvantages:

The independent members would virtually disappear."

That is manifestly absurd. In my example of one third appointed and two thirds elected, the appointed Members—the independents—could number about 200 and might form the largest bloc in the upper House.

I would like the two thirds who are politicians to be directly elected by open rather than closed lists. By definition, those people will not be political innocents and there is no reason for them not to go through the single gentle encounter with the electorate proposed by Lord Wakeham—an encounter much less taxing than anything we have to go through—which brings me to my next point, which is the British Rail argument: that produces the wrong sort of politician.

There is an unspoken view in the upper House, which is, "We don't want the rough trade from the other end of the building up here." In his speech yesterday, Lord Wakeham said that that would produce

"a second Chamber that was a clone of the other place, full of professional politicians".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 January 2002; Vol. 630, c. 582.]

Lord Longford put the point less tactfully two years ago:

"We would get the dregs."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 7 March 2000; Vol. 610, c. 955.]

The anxiety about elected Members is misplaced. Behaviour in our House is less a function of the sort of people we are and more a function of the role of a Member of Parliament in the highly political dominant Chamber to which we must get re-elected.

When the sort of people we are move from this environment to another one down the other end, our behaviour changes, and the greatest examples of that are Lords Wakeham and Hurd. When they were here, they behaved like Members of Parliament, but in the less partisan, more reflective environment of the upper House, they behave like peers. There is therefore nothing inherently suspect or inappropriate about people who want to stand for election being Members of the upper House; our former colleague, John MacKay, was one of the outstanding performers in the upper House until his untimely death last year.

That brings me to my penultimate point—the rival mandate argument: if we have a predominantly elected second Chamber it will challenge the mandate of this Chamber. The second Chamber is clearly defined as complementary, but in the end subordinate to this one. Its powers are those given it by this House, which is pre-eminent, and they cannot be unilaterally changed. The assertion is that that settlement might be challenged and that there would be tension between the two Houses if the upper House were elected, but Members of Parliament are all elected on the same day on the basis of a party manifesto and for one Parliament. We are elected to the pre-eminent House that sustains the Executive and produces the Prime Minister. We submit ourselves for re-election.

None of those conditions would exist for the upper House were it to be elected on the basis that I suggest or, indeed, that suggested by Wakeham. Many of its Members would not be elected at all and they would have no mandate, while those who were elected would be elected at different times on different mandates; so the notion that electing some or even most of its Members could lead to the conversion of the upper House into a rival assembly is unsustainable.

So what do we do next? The only sensible way to resolve the issue is by a free vote on the various options, starting with the most radical—all Members elected—and then working down. On this side of the House, it is known that there is a variety of views and I see no reason for them to be restricted by the Whips. On the contrary, it would injure the standing of Parliament if either side became heavy handed.

Thanks to the early-day motion, we know that a significant body of opinion on the Government Benches disagrees with the Government on the percentage to be elected. As a party politician, I would love the Labour Chief Whip to exercise the diplomatic skills that achieved prominence last year to dragoon her party into line, but that would be absurd, so I look forward to a sensible debate followed by unconstrained Divisions leading to legislation that passes to the statute book quickly.

3.43 pm

**Mr. Mark Fisher** (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): I believe that in a democracy the public should decide who represents them in Parliament. For that reason, I favour a wholly directly elected second Chamber, and I suspect that there is a growing and approaching consensus for a wholly or substantially elected Chamber, as the early-day motion suggests. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) chose his words carefully, but I take it that that position is about to take hold among Her Majesty's Opposition, which is right and proper. Primacy between the two Houses has been much discussed, but the real primacy in our democracy lies with the people. Strangely, however, the electorate are not mentioned in the White Paper, or in any previous document on the subject; it is all about membership, not people's right to have a say in who represents them.

Greater steps have been taken by the Government in the White Paper and over the past four years than at any time since 1911, so they should be congratulated, but by the end of the debate they will gain the impression that the White Paper is not "it". I doubt whether a single Member in any part of the House will speak uncritically in favour of the White Paper, and I am sure that the Leader of the House will note that.

I want to persuade the House of four points. First, we should consider the remit and responsibilities of both Chambers. Secondly, those, rather than the method of election or the membership, are the key to it all. Thirdly, distinct roles are possible and if we achieve them we shall avoid gridlock by design. Fourthly, we need a robust and effective second Chamber, not one that is artificially constrained because we are worried about its achieving primacy.

*[Mr. Mark Fisher]*

On the first point, we must consider the role of the second Chamber in relation to how we change the role and responsibilities of this Chamber. We all recognise that Parliament is both seen to be, and probably is, failing to impress the public with its ability to hold to account and scrutinise the Executive. The balance between the Executive and Parliament and between the Executive and this Chamber has skewed unnaturally and wrongly, and we and the Government are all the weaker for it. We must consider reforming the two Houses together, because their complementary nature is the key.

The White Paper does not take that perspective, and its other great strategic mistake, from which many problems flow, is that it asks the wrong questions. It asks how we should get rid of the hereditary element and find an alternative basis for membership rather than the crucial questions of how to establish Chambers that will perform better democratically and how to find remits that are complementary, not competitive. I welcome the Leader of the House's having made it clear that the role of the second Chamber is much more important than the debate on membership of it. That demands that we consider the roles first, then the membership.

What are the two roles? The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) rightly considered an earlier stage—the relationship between the Executive and Parliament, which has weakened—and only after such consideration can the roles of the two Houses be dealt with. The second Chamber surely must be a House of scrutiny, a point excellently described by the Leader of the House, and a better House of scrutiny than at present.

There is no case for introducing legislation in the second Chamber. This is the House of the Executive, and leaving aside private Members' Bills, it is the Government's responsibility to introduce legislation, which, first and foremost, should come from here. I hope that the Leader of the House's proposals on loosening the spill-over are accepted. If they are, the ability to introduce Bills in the second Chamber will no longer be important.

Those proposals would establish a different role and relationship, but the most crucial difference, which would solve so many of the problems that we are chewing over this afternoon, is excluding members of the Executive from the membership of the second Chamber. Ministers should not sit in that Chamber. This is the House of the Executive and our role is to hold the Prime Minister and the leading Ministers to account in person. We do not do that well enough, but that is our responsibility.

As soon as we removed Ministers from membership of the second Chamber, it would truly become a Chamber of parliamentary scrutiny. There would be no need for Members to get on the bandwagon and pursue a parliamentary career, so the Whips would be relieved of their powers. The White Paper wants to achieve an independent Chamber, but does not know how to do so. Independence would change all the balances between the two Chambers and resolve the gridlock almost at a stroke, because the Houses would become distinct. Clearly primacy is here, with the Executive, but the other House has an important scrutiny role.

I think that once that has been achieved, other developments will result. There will be a more independent House, and there will be different relationships between its Members and the electorate and between its Members and the Executive. There will be no potential Government in that House; it will be a House for scrutiny and deliberation.

I also think that the House of Lords should be far smaller. There is no need for it to contain more than 300 people. Indeed, there is no need for this House to contain more than about 400. *[Interruption.]* The House should be smaller. Anyone who does not recognise that should consider the matter objectively, leaving aside his or her own job or career. Both Houses of Parliament are far too big. *[Interruption.]*

The Leader of the House demurs. Surely our responsibility in regard to this democracy is rather wider, and rather more important, than our responsibility for our own jobs. Perhaps it is easier for those who are approaching the end of their time in this House to see that.

Both Houses are too big, and the idea that the second Chamber should contain more than 700 Members is a nonsense that must be laughed out of court.

**Mr. Wyatt:** My hon. Friend said earlier that the turnout in some elections was so low that there was cynicism among the electorate. The lowest turnout was for the European elections. Could MEPs be nominated to the House of Lords? Could they sit there for one week a month, perhaps?

**Mr. Fisher:** I often agree with my hon. Friend, but as I have made clear, I favour direct election rather than nomination. The House of Commons has experienced a system of nominations to the European Parliament, and it was not a great success.

**Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): I hoped that my hon. Friend would elaborate on a small caveat that he issued earlier. He referred to a wholly elected House of Lords, and then mentioned the possibility of a majority-elected House. I hoped that he would recognise the new context in which all democracies involved a devolved democratic process.

It seems to me that unless there is some way of allowing the devolved parts of the United Kingdom to participate in processes down here by means of a second Chamber, there will always be a problem. Those parts of the UK will see their role purely as a competitive role in relation to us. Is there not some justification for nominations allowing representation of regional assemblies in the scrutiny to which my hon. Friend has referred?

**Mr. Fisher:** I am not sure whether I am allowed time off for interventions, but in any case I will not follow my hon. Friend down that line, because I do not believe in indirect elections.

Another advantage of a second Chamber that is not based on patronage is the fact that it would have confidence in itself. The danger currently posed by the White Paper is that, to create an artificial primacy for the House of Commons, it deliberately constrains arrangements in the second Chamber by providing for fewer resources and no payment, and making a number of matters convoluted. To establish that primacy, it provides for a feeble second Chamber that would jump at its own shadow. That is not in the interests of any of us.

The Leader of the House is getting so much right. If we are to consider modernisation here together with modernisation of the other House, he should surely be responsible for the overall policy. He could then proceed much more confidently, and be assured of the confidence of the whole House.

Each of us is here only because of democracy. I believe that today we should put our trust in democracy, and ensure that the second Chamber is democratically elected—not in competition with us, and not without the involvement of the Executive—so that we can truly strengthen the scrutiny of Parliament by both Houses and ensure that they have both distinct and complementary roles.

3.54 pm

**Mr. John Maples** (Stratford-on-Avon): Along with every other speaker, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) made a powerful case for a substantially or wholly elected second Chamber; but I think that he and others have overlooked some important second and third-order aspects of their proposals that would result in a fundamental change in our constitution. This is why it has taken us 90 years to get around to the third stage of House of Lords reform. Everyone knows that it is ridiculous for us to have a House of Lords with no democratic legitimacy, but it has suited us all quite well: the lack of democratic legitimacy has enabled the Lords to survive with very limited powers. I believe that once it is given democratic legitimacy, it will acquire much more power by one means or another.

The second Chamber must be either elected or nominated. There cannot be two classes of Member. There cannot be some who have lots of democratic legitimacy because they have been chosen by the electorate and some who have none—who are there because they have been nominated as Bishop of Winchester, or because they have been nominated by the Prime Minister or my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. It must be one or the other.

It is in that regard that I consider the White Paper to be fundamentally misconceived. It seems that the Government want democracy, but do not want it quite yet. They want a bit of democracy, but not the whole lot. They want a rainbow House consisting of elected Members, party nominees, ex officio Members, a couple of bishops and some independent people appointed by a commission about which I shall have more to say.

The Government claim that they want the House of Lords to be representative of society as a whole. I do not know about anyone else here, but I do not want it to be representative of society as a whole; I want there to be some wisdom in it. The current Prime Minister appointed about a third of its Members, so if it is lacking in wisdom that is at least partly due to him. What we need, surely, are people who can credibly say to the Government, "You have got it wrong; think again." That involves two essential ingredients—independence and expertise.

If the Chamber is elected, it will be dominated by political parties. It is not possible to be elected to any organisation in this country without being a candidate representing a political party. There is no worse system for imposing party discipline on candidates than proportional representation in which people are on a party list. Proportional representation is, of course, the only system of election to a second Chamber that would produce a Chamber that might defy the Government, but I think that we are in serious danger of simply replicating the House of Commons in one way or another.

**Mr. Tyrie:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Maples:** I must make some progress. I have only 10 minutes, and I want to make a few more points.

The basis on which the election will be different will, in fact, provide for only minor differences. I think that we will find that the second Chamber is full of party politicians—perhaps people who are better than those here, and perhaps people who have failed to get here, but who are party politicians none the less, with all the party patronage and all the involvement of the Whips that accompany membership of this place.

When politicians are elected, they are not satisfied with the facilities that they have elsewhere. They want offices, secretaries and researchers. Those who do not believe that should bear it in mind that when I entered the House—I have been here for only a short time; the Leader of the House has been here for much longer—the allowance was just enough to pay for one secretary, whereas I can now employ three or four members of staff, have three computers, and have £1,000 a month left over to spend on other things.

I want more office space. Everyone does, because of all the staff they have. These people will want the same—and, dare I say, they will also want salaries. They will end up duplicating our role, to a large extent. They will start holding surgeries, writing articles in their local papers and writing to their constituents. They will start doing the same things that we do. There are already 659 of us doing that, and I do not think that we need any more. Indeed, I agree with the Members who have said that fewer could do it here.

Those people will not just want offices, researchers and secretaries; they will want more power. An elected second Chamber will have as good a democratic mandate as this place, and will not be satisfied with a revising role and the right to a 12-month delay. It may not happen immediately, but there will come a time when the second Chamber will challenge the role and primacy of the House of Commons.

Let us suppose that the Chamber was elected on a different basis and at a different time. Let us suppose that 80 per cent. of its Members opposed a Government Bill, and that the Government were in the dog days of a Parliament, lagging way behind in the opinion polls and probably heading for defeat in the next general election. The second Chamber would be able to argue that it had greater democratic legitimacy than this place—that it had a democratic right, and that it was representing the people of this country better than the legitimate Government. That represents a fundamental change in our constitution, which could result in a Government with a significant majority in this place having their legislation blocked.

Some Members may say that that would be a good thing; but if we are to move down that road, let us recognise that it would not merely represent a minor change in the constitution: it would be a move towards an American-style constitution, in which the Government would have to negotiate their programme with the legislature. If that is to be done, let us do it openly. I am

*[Mr. Maples]*

a great fan of the American system, largely because it stops Governments doing very much—and since Governments usually mess things up, that is probably a good idea. Let us not pretend that making the House of Lords wholly elected would be merely tinkering with it. It would be a very big change.

Those people who have made the case for a substantially or wholly elected House of Lords have an attractive case on the ground of democracy, but nobody has dealt properly with the second and third-order issues that, to my mind, mean that the case for an elected second Chamber has not been made.

**Mr. Patrick Hall** (Bedford): The hon. Gentleman said that an elected second Chamber would inevitably demand more powers. Surely that could not occur unless this House agreed.

**Mr. Maples:** Yes, but the case for those powers might be overwhelming. We could have a hung Parliament or significant popular demand for it could be expressed. The history of this House has been the acquisition of more and more powers over the past several hundred years, first from the Crown and then from the House of Lords. We cannot set the situation in aspic, and any new set-up will be organic and take on a life and agenda of its own. To suggest anything else is fanciful.

If we are to have an elected House of Lords—a second Chamber, or whatever we will call it—I agree with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central that it should be a proper legislature. In other words, it should have no Ministers, because then it has some chance of being really different from the House of Commons. People would not try to pursue careers as Ministers by pleasing the Whips and the party hierarchy, but could concentrate on examining what the Government were doing.

People should not be elected for 15 years and not allowed to run again. That is the worst kind of democratic representation, because people would not be responsible to those who elected them. The proposed appointments commission is a real horror. I cannot see how it would advance democracy to take away the rights of hereditary peers and hand them to a commission consisting of the chairman of a building society, a couple of goods and greats from the charity world and a partner in PricewaterhouseCoopers. Why should they have the right to decide who votes in the second Chamber, any more than the accident of birth of the 800-odd people who happen to be hereditary peers—two of whom now sit in this Chamber—should be used to decide who has those votes?

The nominations should not be made by some quango but by the Prime Minister, who is accountable to Parliament. He has to make the nominations openly, and conventions give leaders of other parties the right to appoint working peers. Conventions also give certain people—such as former Cabinet Ministers—the right to go the House of Lords if they want to and those conventions should be extended to, for example, the president of the Trades Union Congress, the chairman of the Confederation of British Industry and presidents of the royal colleges. Such people would add independence and expertise.

If we are to have ex-officio members of the House of Lords, why should that include only a few bishops and judges? There is a good argument for judges having nothing to do with the legislature, and there is no argument for just having bishops of the Church of England. I would be happy to see the ex-officio principle extended so that those members of the House who were nominated could be produced other than by nomination by the Prime Minister. However, it is farcical to suggest that we should create a quango to which we should hand over the rights of the electorate.

While a persuasive case can be made for a wholly elected second Chamber, it does not deal with the second and third-order issues, which make the proposals a far more fundamental change to our constitution than its proponents recognise. I would prefer a nominated House without the hereditary peers—for whose presence there is no justification—with the same limited powers that it now has. The only way to provide the independence, expertise and—if I dare say it again—wisdom is to have a nominated, not elected, House.

4.3 pm

**Mr. James Plaskitt** (Warwick and Leamington): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), my constituency neighbour, but I disagree with most of what he said. It is becoming evident—if it was not easily anticipated—that the White Paper is in some trouble. That is because it is a mix of principle and old-fashioned political fixing. The problems arise when constitutional reform is more of the latter than the former.

The best constitutional reforms in history are those that proceeded from a core principle, such as devolution. That was achieved by this Labour Government from clear first principles, was well established and has taken root as a settled part of our constitutional arrangements. However, when constitutional arrangements are changed as part of a political fix, they tend to be unstable, fail to take root and do not work. The White Paper is a mix of the two.

When my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House introduced the White Paper, he was on solid ground because he referred to core principles that are not negotiable—such as getting rid of hereditary peers. That is the easy part. However, the White Paper slides too quickly from certain principles into political fixes, and that is where the problems start. We need to achieve as much of the reform as possible on the basis of clear principle—why we are reforming the second Chamber and what its purpose will be. If we are clear about those principles and work from them, we will be able to achieve good and lasting reform, which will not happen if we mix up principle and political expediency.

All constitutional reform—and certainly this reform—should attempt to tackle the lack of esteem in which Parliament is held. I refer my right hon. Friend to his excellent document, "Modernisation of the House of Commons: a reform programme for consultation", in which he says, in the final paragraph:

> "There are many factors which have contributed to the decline in turnout at the General Elections, but one of them has been the long term decline in esteem for Parliament."

That is right, and in reforming the House of Lords we are reforming Parliament. I therefore urge that we heed the message of the 59 per cent. turnout in the general election

and the point that my right hon. Friend makes about esteem, and link our reform of this House with what we wish to achieve through reform of the upper House. If we think of the reform of Parliament in its entirety, we will do better than if we try to keep the reform of the House of Lords in a separate box. That is why we are heading towards difficult territory.

The public have a problem with Parliament. They see it as outmoded, and in large part irrelevant and weak. Some of that perception is about this Chamber, but it includes the House of Lords. The public understand and support us when we reform on principle—such as putting an end to the hereditary peers—but if we are to concentrate on the esteem of Parliament, we should consider how the public will perceive our reform of the upper Chamber. Will they understand our aims if we get rid of the hereditary peers but retain a majority of appointed members? I do not think that we will take the public with us on that. They want us to continue reform, but it must be on broadly acceptable terms. The public will simply be baffled by the complex reforms proposed in the White Paper.

We are trying to rebalance the legislative and executive branches and addressing issues of accountability. Democracy must be the default position. We must start from the assumption that a house of a legislature should be elected unless a good case can be made for it not to be elected. The Government have two key arguments in favour of the White Paper. One is the gridlock argument and the other is the loss of independence and expertise. They are important points and worthy of consideration.

The gridlock problem arises only if the two Houses have similar powers. It is clear that they need not do so. The White Paper gives the example of America when it mentions the problem of gridlock, but that is an unfair point because the American constitution is fundamentally different in its structures and principles. That is not a valid defence of the point about gridlock. We can resolve the issue by having a clear definition of the functions of the two Houses. They will not be duplicate functions. The second Chamber will have a scrutiny and refinement role that is quite different from that of this place. The Executive will remain enshrined in this Chamber and the money power will rest here. Even if there is conflict between the two Houses, we are not incapable of devising ways of resolving that. Mediation processes can be brought into play.

We have not heard a lot about the second point: the argument about the loss of independence and expertise. Why is that deemed important? A number of reasons emerge from a reading of the White Paper, including the volume of legislation and the complexity of governing in the modern state. That is prayed in aid of the need for expertise if scrutiny of legislation is to be effective. But in this Chamber, we legislate and scrutinise, and yet the argument about bringing in independence and expertise is never used in respect of this House. We are deemed adequate, as elected Members, to write legislation, but somehow when it comes to scrutiny, there has to be independence and expertise brought to bear. There is some inconsistency in that.

The problem arises because the Government are trying to fit independence and expertise into membership of a legislature. Independence and expertise are needed to support the work of parliamentarians, but they do not have to be inside the Chamber. In the context of parliamentary reform as a whole, we must ask what we do to support ourselves with independence and expertise in all the scrutiny work that this Chamber does and that an upper Chamber would do. We can provide Select Committees—of this or that Chamber alone, or joint Committees, or pre-legislative Committees, all of which are needed and envisaged in the context of Commons reform—with permanent standing committees of experts and advisers on whom they can draw. There is a role for that, but we start to get into problems when we argue that that expertise has to be contained within a Chamber, rather than working in support of that Chamber. There is an answer to that impediment as well. The points about gridlock and expertise are fair, but if we think coherently and stick to the democratic principle, they can be overcome.

I am concerned about the inherent instability of the White Paper's proposals, which will not bring an end to the argument about what the upper Chamber should be like. There is nothing inherently logical about having 20 per cent. of the Chamber elected, or 33 per cent., 50 per cent. or 66 per cent. If it is not a simple, clear, logical and coherent solution, it will be the subject of permanent argument. If we get stuck on that, we will get distracted from other things, and we will not do anything to help rebuild esteem for Parliament, which is what we should be in the business of doing.

4.13 pm

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Plaskitt) made a thoughtful speech, but I am bound to say that I found the speech of his neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), a very much more convincing one. My hon. Friend outlined the real dilemma that faces the House today: because of the Government's inept and clumsy handling of constitutional matters, we are—rather like the Irishman—not where we want to be, but we are here and we have to face facts. The facts are as was lucidly annunciated by my hon. Friend.

If we are to reform Parliament, we have a choice. We either seek to improve what we have or we seek to create something entirely different. The logic of the former position of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), the shadow Leader of the House, was entirely right; indeed, it was impeccable. He believed that we needed to re-write—or, indeed, to write—our constitution. He believed that we should have a second Chamber that had real power and was directly and wholly elected. He believed that the relationship between the two Houses should be broadly similar to the relationship between the two Houses of Congress in the United States. That is an impeccably logical position and a perfectly honourable and honest one.

It happens to be one with which I do not agree. I am an evolutionist. I believe that we should concentrate on improving what we have and not create something different. I do not want a wholly written constitution. I recognise that if we move towards a wholly elected second Chamber, all the consequences to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon referred, and many others besides, are inescapable. At a stroke, we would move towards the disestablishment of the Church of England and towards the establishment of a supreme court, both of which may be desired by many Members.

*[Sir Patrick Cormack]*

I am not seeking to argue that they are not logical things to want, but the House must face up to the consequences of its own actions and proposals.

It is fatuous to suppose—my hon. Friend was again entirely right on this—that we would be able to create a wholly elected second Chamber that was permanently and perpetually subordinate to this House. If we had people of real calibre seeking election to that place, and if they had a mandate, they would, over time, inevitably come to challenge us. If they were elected on the same day, we would merely have a replication—two elected Chambers, one subordinate to the other. If they were elected at a different time, we could have an unpopular Government of the day, wanting to get what they considered essential parts of their mandate through, while, at the other end of the Corridor, we had people with mandates stretching many years ahead who believed that they could overturn and challenge that. The prescription for gridlock, and worse, is there and we have to face up to that fact.

I believe that it would be far better to go down the road referred to by my hon. Friend. I would prefer a wholly nominated House. I do not believe that one can dismiss as pleasantly and lightly as did the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington the question of expertise. I do not believe that it is sufficient to have experts who are merely advisers to Select Committees and individual Members. I believe that it is right and proper to have people of real intellectual quality and ability in the other place. The country as a whole does not regard us as being less than admirable because of the activities at the other end of the Corridor; it does so because of the activities at this end of the Corridor.

I also believe that the argument about legitimacy is spurious. If we look around the world, we see that many second Chambers are not directly elected. Nobody questions that France is a democracy, but it has an indirectly elected second Chamber. The same is true of Germany. In Canada—where the second Chamber has the power of total veto—there is a wholly appointed second Chamber, with senators serving for 15 years. In my view, we would be far better building upon what we have, and having a second Chamber that is wholly nominated.

Such a Chamber would not be illegitimate. When one goes around the world, nobody suggests that this country is not regarded as a democracy. Indeed, we are held up in many places as being the fount of democracy. We hear—it is frequently misquoted—that this is the mother of Parliaments. It is not; the Bright quotation is that England is the mother of Parliaments. Other countries look upon us as a great democracy, and they do not believe that that position is invalidated for half a second because we have a second Chamber that is not directly elected.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** Yes, they do.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** I am sorry; I do not think that that is the case. As I have said, there are many second Chambers around the world that are not directly elected.

I agreed completely with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst on one point: we must remind the Government of their oft-repeated promise that a Joint Committee of both Houses would be established once the first stage of reform had been completed. That Joint Committee would look at all the implications and possible varieties and permutations of change. It is incumbent on the Government to honour that promise, which seems to have been forgotten and abandoned.

We should have a Joint Committee of both Houses, but there is no hurry about the matter. The second Chamber exists and functions effectively. The Joint Committee should look carefully at the various options. We should decide whether to have a written constitution in this country, which would entail a reorganisation and reordering of the respective powers of the two Houses. If that is the decision, we should move towards having a wholly elected second Chamber. If we decide that what we have is too good to throw away totally, we should safeguard and improve it. The only sensible way to do that is to follow the advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon.

Hon. Members talk about elections as though the public love them, but a certain election fatigue has set in. People expect Parliament to scrutinise, supervise and hold the Government to account. They vote for us to do that, but far fewer people voted last June than in previous general elections. The percentage polls for the number of people voting for other assemblies such as local government or the European Parliament invite several questions. Do we really think that people would vote for the sort of second Chamber envisaged in the White Paper? That directly elected Chamber would have no more powers than the Government were willing to allow.

Would that directly elected second Chamber attract the necessary calibre of candidate or the enthusiasm of the population? It would not. Would a derisory turnout of 25 per cent. confer great legitimacy on that body? Would not having directly elected people in the second Chamber give more power to the political parties than even the patronage system gives? After all, everyone in the second Chamber would owe their position to one party or another.

I urge the House to approach this matter with great caution. We are talking about the constitution of our country, and we must get it right. The Government have not been especially helpful in setting us on the right road, but we can still redeem the position. However, we will not do so by going for the gimmick, or by rushing something through before the next general election.

4.22 pm

**Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews** (Medway): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Members for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) and for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), who spoke earlier. Their Thermopylae speeches, if I might call them that, were as fine a defence of the indefensible as it is possible to imagine.

Before I continue, I shall do as I did in 1999. I shall come out straight away and say that I am an unreconstructed, unrepentant and practising unicameralist. I do not believe that there is a need in modern democracies such as ours for a second Chamber. However, I am also a realist, and I understand as well as anyone that unicameralism, like

heavenly bliss, is not for this world; at least, it is certainly not for this Parliament, so other matters need to be addressed.

**Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North): My hon. Friend has at least one supporter in the Chamber—me. Does he agree that the speeches made today make our case even stronger than it was before?

**Mr. Marshall-Andrews:** Yes, I do. However, before I deal with that I wish to make a brief plea for the unicameralist position, if only to ensure that the argument does not go by default. It has always seemed to me that having a single Chamber would avoid in the most dramatic way the false dichotomy involved in deciding whether a second Chamber should have too much legitimacy by being all elected, or whether it should have no legitimacy because it would be the product of nepotism, croneyism, patronage, or whatever one wishes to call it.

Secondly, in the limited time that I have been in the House it has always seemed to me that the existence of a second Chamber is often used as an alibi for this House's inadequacies. For example, we had some fine debates in this House on jury trial. There was considerable resistance among Labour Members to the proposal to remove the right to trial by jury. In the end, 80 Labour Members either abstained or voted against the measure.

The overall effect of that vote may have been slight in this House, but the effect on the House of Lords was more considerable. A considerable number of Labour Members told me how deeply worried and distressed they were about the legislation. Weeping through the Lobbies is a well known characteristic of new Labour Members, who said that they would support the Government because they knew that the House of Lords would chuck out the proposal in the end.

We should consider what would have happened if the House of Lords did not exist. Those Labour Members would have gone ahead and voted against the Government, and there is a good chance that the Government would have been defeated. Who knows what would have come from that sudden outbreak of testosterone among Labour Members? Who knows what would have been the long-term effect of the House taking control of the Executive for the first time?

I turn now to the White Paper. The real iniquity in its proposals is that 80 per cent. of the membership of the projected second Chamber would be chosen by a system of patronage. Patronage in any guise is the curse of the British political system. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) made a compelling point when he said that patronage had its roots in the system that we have. We select our Executive, by a system of patronage, from the legislature. The result is an immediate and obvious conflict of interest, which is well overdue for review. The most crude manifestation of that conflict was evident in the disgraceful attempts to manipulate the Select Committee system.

Patronage in this House has always had a corrosive effect, on Government and on individual Members of Parliament. However, I have considerable sympathy for my fellow hon. Members. A few of us came here late in life, having had the enormous fortune—in my case, the good luck—to pursue reasonable careers beforehand. We happy band of brothers do not give a fig about preferment of any sort, and would not accept it if it were offered. In my case, that is very lucky.

However, we are comparatively few in number. I understand very well that other hon. Members are professional politicians, and much younger than I am. Their entire careers rely on the fact that they are bound to that form of patronage, which colours and configures their behaviour as Back Benchers. There is no dishonour in that, but patronage represents the only chance that such hon. Members will have to serve.

The same applies to the House of Lords. Many hon. Members will have noticed, as I have, what happens when senior Members of this House discover that they are not going to be the junior Minister in charge of paper clips, or that they do not want to hold such a post again. In their case, the power of patronage is exerted in respect of elevation to the House of Lords. Anyone who has not seen that happen with senior Members of this House over the past five years must be very myopic indeed. We must set our collective face against the principle of patronage.

Finally, I want to explode the idea that a wholly elected second Chamber would in some way conflict with the primacy of this Chamber. That proposition has been touched on by several Labour Members. It is a specious argument. This House sets the parameters and the circumscriptions for that House. We may not get people of the highest possible calibre standing for election if they know that the House of Lords has very circumscribed powers. So be it. My bet is that we will, but that does not matter much. The principle is the main thing.

Of course people may want an office, a telephone and a secretary. I appreciate that those things matter to the patrician side of the Conservative party. They may even write to the local newspapers about it, and that will not conflict with me at all. In any event, we will have a proper and duly elected assembly.

The worst thing is to have part and part. What happens if part of the second Chamber is elected and part of it is not? We all get a rush of blood to the head when we suddenly find that we represent real people, we get the urge to take on the Government, or anybody else, and to make trouble, if necessary, on behalf of our constituents. What happens if part of the House of Lords suffers from that malaise and affliction and the other part does not? What happens if there is an alien body in the soft belly of the House of Lords that is permanently for insurrection and usurping the House of Commons? That only needs to be said for us to realise the absurdity of the position. I agree that one option or the other must be chosen, and it can only be one. The overwhelming view and wish of the people is that we should have a wholly elected second Chamber.

The Government have a choice. They can change the Bill markedly and substantially. I have never said this before, and I hope that I will be taken seriously, but it is my perception that if they do not they will lose it, for the first time ever, notwithstanding their majority. Alternatively, they can push it through as it is or they can sulk and say that even if we do not like it they will not bring it back. That was touched on by the Lord Chancellor yesterday or the day before.

*[Mr. Marshall-Andrews]*

I hope that the Government do not take that option and that they listen to this debate. Most of the contributions have been outstanding. I hope that we will ultimately have a Bill that will give us an elected second Chamber of which we can be proud.

4.32 pm

**Mr. Archie Norman** (Tunbridge Wells): I agree with many of the points made on both sides of the House, particularly those of my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young). I am not in complete agreement with the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples). However, he made the powerful point that whatever we do in reforming the House of Lords will represent a substantial constitutional shift. I believe that that is long overdue and should be embraced. That is the historic opportunity with which we are presented.

Many right hon. and hon. Members will believe that the constitutional shift should be minimised. The change in the composition of the House of Lords is inextricably bound up with what it does, and we should face that as part of the process. That is where the White Paper falls short.

Along with other right hon. and hon. Members, I recently listened to the Leader of the House give a very erudite and wholly convincing exposition to the Hansard Society on the need for change in the conduct and proceedings of the House of Commons to deal with the fact that we are facing a decline in democratic respect for, and legitimacy of, the public process. His trenchant remarks, with which I wholly agree, seem not to have been applied in the same way to the White Paper on the process of reform. Perhaps his thoughts have moved on since the White Paper's publication. If he could provide the same vision of and enlightened approach to the reform of the House of Lords that he provided for modernisation, we would all be much better off.

The test that should be applied to reform of the House of Lords is whether it provides for the 21st century an increase in respect for Parliament, the public processes and democratic representation, whether it provides the required balance between the power of the Executive and that of the state, whether it provides us with greater ability to attract men and women of wisdom, ability and talent into the public process and whether it can be achieved with a reasonable degree of consensus, which transparently does not exist at the moment. The White Paper fails on all counts.

I do not want to dwell on points that have already been made, but when it comes to respect for Parliament, this peculiar concoction of various manners of appointment to the House of Lords will be greeted with perplexity and derision by the public. I would find the White Paper very hard to explain to my constituents—it needs a White Paper to do that. It is too complex, but the worst thing about it, and the essence of the problem, is not that it proposes a primarily nominated House, for which a respectable case can be made, but that the bulk of it entrenches the power of patronage of the political parties. There is no respect or support for that in the country at large.

We should be asking not whether patronage of political parties should be predominant in this process but whether it has any place at all in appointments to the House of Lords. I am in favour of a largely elected House of Lords, but that is only one way to go. The central point is that entrenching the power of the political party in this demeaning process of patronage, which the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) referred to, should be abolished once and for all. It has been abused in the past by political parties on both sides and it will be abused again in the future.

More seriously, my concern is about the failure to address in any substantive way the roles of the House of Lords and the House of Commons. We are on the slippery slope, and the White Paper gives no sense of a permanent stopping place; it is simply the start of the process. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House would rather face the issue now and have a substantive debate to see whether we can arrive at a solution that will endure at least for some years to come.

It is beyond dispute that this House has primacy. However, primacy is not as absolute as some Members have sought to pretend. For decades, the House of Lords has acted as a restraining and redirecting influence, and if we have a more capable House of Lords, so should it do in the future.

We have a system of government that is far more centralised than those of many of the countries that have been mentioned. Because of that, there needs to be an appropriate counter-balance. It is, I believe, a shared view that our system of government tends to produce too much regulation which is complex and often conflicted. There is a failure to confront the archaeology of regulation, by which I mean regulation that was produced many decades ago upon which are layered other forms of regulation. We never pull it up by the roots, review it and establish a comprehensive and simple process that meets today's needs.

Bearing in mind the media in this country, we are far more subject to the influences of short-term political pressures that can produce legislation that does not stand the test of time. The role of the House of Lords should be to address each of those issues. That has to do with far more than scrutiny; it is to do with limiting and constraining the supremacy not just of this House but of the Executive as a whole. Instead of reinforcing that process and addressing it, the White Paper diminishes the powers of the Lords. It removes the veto on secondary legislation, and although I understand the issues surrounding that, the House of Lords has a role to play in secondary legislation. The White Paper fails to provide a mechanism for amending ministerial regulation, of which there is more and more. It fails to address the failure of both Houses to scrutinise adequately the way we put European directives into practice. It does nothing to enable the Lords to instigate reviews of outdated legislation and to put forward proposals for simplification of the legislative process, and it fails to provide any enhanced role in protecting individual liberties and the vexed question of future changes to the constitution.

All those are, fundamentally, missed opportunities. The reality is that the proposed House of Lords will lack respect and influence. If one has a Lords that is not doing

anything substantive and that lacks respect and influence, one will not attract people of wisdom or talent to participate in it—even in the core process of scrutiny.

The failure to attract talent is a broader issue in public life today. We are seeing a narrowing of the political class. As the hon. and learned Member for Medway said, fewer and fewer of us come to this House with a prior career. There are still some of us, but we are something of a dying breed.

In amending the role of the House of Lords, we should enhance that process. Some hon. Members see that as an argument for nomination. I do not. The truth is that what will attract people to serve in the House of Lords meaningfully is the belief that they will have a meaningful role there. What puts people off coming into public life after a career? It is the futility of participating in a process in which their talents are not used or valued, the domination of the party machinery, the imposition on their family and lifestyle and the fact that they are often under-resourced and incapable of doing a good job.

Many former business colleagues of mine, as well as peers and people from other walks of life—men and women of achievement—will willingly stand for election to the House of Lords, particularly if there is a simplified election process in which they will not have a narrow constituency as we do, if they believe that they will have a substantial role to play and a fixed term of office and if they are not subject to quite the extent of democratic scrutiny that we are. The Wakeham proposal went some way towards meeting those criteria, but I am afraid that the White Paper does not.

The White Paper is short on vision and disappointing in its scope. If implemented in this form—I am sure that it will not be because there is clearly no consensus for it—it will represent a further step in the decline in public life and respect for it. The time has come, therefore, to have a rethink. That should not simply be a question of negotiating on the finer points of the arithmetic of the elected membership; it should be about the whole nature of the Lords, the balance between the two Houses and how we make that Chamber important and meaningful.

4.42 pm

**Mr. Harold Best** (Leeds, North-West): Like my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), I had a career before I arrived in the House. I worked as an electrician. I have not come across another electrician in the House. Something that could be said for elected democracy, among other things, is that many different types of people are elected to office.

It is important to bear another factor in mind when we discuss the possible role of the second Chamber and how it might be made up. I was first elected to office a long time ago as the shop steward on a large construction site. The first lesson that I learned was that being elected to office did not mean being elected to power. Being an office holder was one thing; exercising power was another matter altogether. We must realise that we are talking about the exercise of power—where it might be exercised and by whom. It is almost like swearing in church to mention power on these occasions, but the debate is about that very subject.

I have never been sure whether I favour a second Chamber. There are powerful arguments for the abolition of that Chamber and for strengthening it in the way that many hon. Members have described. I tend to favour maintaining the second Chamber, but I want it to be democratised. The difficulty is with that problem area. How do we democratise the exercise of power? How do we ensure that the powers that this House wants to retain can be shared in any way with another House? What role will that other House play in any amelioration of the exercise of power if it is done in an arbitrary and unfair fashion? Those are the important issues and we should face up to them.

I regret that the White Paper proposes that the second Chamber should still be dominated by the unelected—those whom some call the good and the worthy. There are the virtuous people there too: the good bishops of the Church of England and the judiciary represented by the Law Lords. There are also people who are said to be independent or politically neutral. The elected people proposed in the White Paper would form a minority of the membership of the second Chamber. In short, the proposal would amount to very little, if any, real change to the social, economic and political interests that exist in the other House. In reality, we are talking about continuity in the exercise of power.

I find it difficult to accept the notion that there are independent people—independent of thought and judgment. That isolation of intellectual activity I have always found interesting as an idea but it should not be followed through in practice, unless, of course, these people are like God and have an abundance of knowledge, if not total knowledge, and a judgment system to match. Perhaps, these independents come from some other place, such as Mars. The idea that they are somehow more virtuous is interesting. It has not been my experience that people who are "independent" are any more virtuous when it comes to the exercise of power than people who obviously and manifestly show the colours on which they seek election.

The political independence and influence of the dominant socio-economic forces in our society will continue, whether here or in the other place. I have always found the idea of political neutrality interesting—from my time as a shop steward right through to the level of activity in which I am now engaged. Neutrality says more about the neutering of political activity than a neutral position, and, again, that is relevant to the exercise of power. How are we to manage that power and have a reviewing body? The White Paper has failed miserably in its proposals for meeting the needs of a second Chamber, which on balance is a system that I would favour.

In the 1980s, I had the pleasure of serving as a member of the police authority of West Yorkshire. Another member of that authority was a first-class Tory councillor called Kenneth Davison. Sadly, he died about 10 years ago. He was an amazing character and working with him was an enlightening process for me. He was diametrically opposed to me, politically, in many ways. However, we shared a great deal. Since I came to this place in 1997, I have discovered to my pleasant surprise that Opposition Members hold views about democracy and how it might be exercised with which I can concur. I find the liberal, right-wing view very attractive sometimes. That exercise of liberal democracy has something to be said for it.

Ken Davison told me that no magistrates should be allowed to serve on the police authority. I asked why and he said, "Because they are unrepresentative, unelected and unaccountable, and they have no place in a democratic

*[Mr. Harold Best]*

society." It seems to me that if Ken was around now to make observations about the House of Lords, he would be able to make a similar comment, as he would if the White Paper's proposals were to be enacted. If those proposals were enacted, we would have in the upper House a majority of people who were unaccountable, unelected and unrepresentative of the people that they claimed to act on behalf of.

I am of the opinion, therefore, that only one course of action would be acceptable to the people of the United Kingdom. Hon. Members should understand that we are talking about democracy and the exercise of power. If we had an elected Chamber just down the hallway from here and an elected Chamber here, they would both be elected democratically. We are really talking not so much about the democracy, but about who will exercise the power—where the final decision will be taken and who will take the decisions behind the scenes. We all know that that goes on.

Our democratic process needs to be enriched. That can be done by abandoning the White Paper proposals and ensuring 100 per cent. elected representation in the other place, or getting as close to that 100 per cent. as possible and acknowledging that, as has been said, other aspects of democratically elected government might reasonably find a place in that Chamber. I am thinking of representation from regional government, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and so on. I favour such an extension of democracy, influencing the distribution and exercise of power.

I look forward to the Government's adoption of what seems to be the dominant view in the House at the moment and is likely to be so for the foreseeable future—that the present proposals are thoroughly inadequate and do not address the needs of the people of the United Kingdom.

4.51 pm

**John Thurso** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Before being elected to the House this year, I had a career in the hotel industry, where our greatest desire was to achieve the highest possible degree of customer satisfaction. In our training programmes, we developed what became known as Thurso's law of satisfaction, which is, simply stated, that satisfaction is the difference between delivery and expectation. When I read the White Paper, I thought that it was extremely unsatisfactory, in part because the expectation had been so high and in part because the delivery, when it came, was so timid.

When the Leader of the House opened the debate this afternoon, however, he quite properly called on us all to look for the areas of consensus, and he enunciated two core principles and asked hon. Members to support them. I am happy to assure him that, regarding those two core principles, I shall support whatever legislation is introduced, not because I believe that the legislation will be satisfactory, but simply because some legislation is much more satisfactory than none, and because I believe that reform of the other place is an iterative process and that whatever steps are taken now can be built on in future.

The opportunity that we have in this process in the House and in the other place is to address the problem that several hon. Members have spoken about: the democratic deficit that is growing between the political process in the Westminster village and the way in which the electorate perceive it. This is an opportunity to start to build back the public trust in the system.

To ensure that there is no doubt, let me make clear where I stand. I have absolutely no doubt that the second Chamber will be wholly elected one day, and I believe that that is absolutely right. I do doubt whether that will occur in this century or the next. I only hope that I live to see considerable progress towards that end.

Before the reform of 1999 there was a very real consensus for reform and on what that reform should achieve. First, there was a consensus in favour of abolition of the hereditaries. There is no defence for the hereditary principle in Parliament. It works fine for breeding livestock but it does not work very well for delivering legislators.

Secondly, there is a broad consensus in favour of a bicameral system. There is a convincing and powerful intellectual argument, made by the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), in favour of a unicameral system, but I believe in a bicameral system and I believe that there is a broad consensus for such a system.

Thirdly, there was a consensus that whatever we did should produce a second Chamber that was a fit and effective Chamber for a 21st century Parliament.

The consensus seems to be in danger of breaking apart, because of the weakness of the White Paper, which results from the weakness of the Wakeham commission report. That report was a great lost opportunity; rather than clearing the fog of detail, it added to it. It is a great shame that we went down the royal commission route and did not opt for a Joint Commission of both Houses at that time.

I should like to pull back from the detail to what I believe to be the single most important thing that reform of the other place should achieve, and it involves a very simple test—the test of legitimacy. Too often in another place, and now in this place, I have listened to Members plead the simple fact that the other place is illegitimate as a sole argument for not voting against something of which the Government are in favour. That cannot be the right way to run any parliamentary system. Therefore, whatever we decide to do—whether the second Chamber is wholly appointed, wholly elected or a mixture of the two—we must be able to say that what we have achieved is legitimate. We should never again be able to criticise the legitimacy of the other place here, in the media or in the country at large. If we can pass that test, we shall have done a great deal.

I shall break from the general consensus that appears to have emerged during this debate on one issue—what is described as the supremacy or the primacy of this House. I do not believe that this House needs to inflict primacy or superiority over the other place. The two Houses should act as partners. This House naturally will be the senior partner; it represents constituencies, delivers the Government and bears the result of general elections.

Because of that and because of the differences in the way the two Houses will work and the different functions that they will be required to carry out, this House will always remain the senior partner, but it should not be the dominant partner and it should not have supremacy. The other place should not be like a Victorian wife and be

asked to honour and obey; the partnership should be much more equal. The conventions of the two Houses and the way in which they work will allow that to happen; legislation is not needed, and I shall briefly touch on some of the details in that regard.

The other place does have certain strengths. Anyone who has sat through debates in the other place will recognise that the quality of debate is strong there and that, very often, the decisions that it takes—in particular, on less controversial matters—are wise and add to the legislation passed by this House, which is so often rushed and perhaps not digested so well as it could have been. Much of the reason for that lies in the manner, customs and way in which the other place works and is composed.

First, the Whips have no power in the other place. They ask Members very nicely whether they would mind coming in to vote and whether they would be kind enough to vote in the way that the party proposes. If the Members say no, the Whips say, "That's absolutely fine." I have heard that things may run differently in some parties in this House, although I have not yet experienced that in my own. The reason why the Whips have no power in the Lords is that membership does not end there, except in rather obvious, strange circumstances. Basically, at the moment, its Members are there for life, so they can ignore the Whips if they choose do so. That helps to provide some of the essential flavour of the House of Lords.

The second reason is the age of those in the House of Lords. It is important that its membership is of a certain, more mature age than is perhaps found in this House. That helps to create a more deliberative and less combative style there. In any solution—my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) has already reflected my views on that—Members should serve for one fixed term as that would remove the problem of the Whips that I have mentioned. Although I am not hung up on any particular limit, that term should be reasonably long. I suggest a term of 12 years, because that figure is divisible by three and one could have one-third rolling elections.

Marrying elections to the other place with elections to the European Parliament would be a great mistake. The elections should be aligned with those to the national and regional assemblies, because they would then be more likely to attract a much stronger turnout.

Ultimately, I would like the entire membership of the second Chamber to be elected. Much has been said about the independence of the Cross Benchers and how wonderful it is to have the great and the good in the other place. My experience suggests that the Cross Benchers are somewhat overrated. In my time in the other place, the hereditary Cross Benchers were largely closet Tories and the great and the good were so great and good that they did not always bother to turn up. It is important to realise what actually happens. Many Members on the Cross Benches are excellent, but overall, they are not quite as great as everyone makes out—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** Order.

5.1 pm

**Jane Griffiths** (Reading, East): I do not plan to speak for long in what has so far been an excellent debate. I also do not plan to speak more than is necessary about how pusillanimous and wrong the proposals in the White Paper are. Instead, I intend to return to first principles and to show how this debate, which must be the start of a considerable process and is perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, might lead us to the conclusion that we should have a wholly or substantially elected second Chamber.

I remind hon. Members that last June saw the lowest turnout at a general election since 1918. Last year saw the lowest turnout in a by-election since the second world war and the last European election showed a record low turnout as well. The Government's response is to suggest that there should be fewer elections—that the people are not be trusted. Instead, according to the proposals in the White Paper, our second Chamber should somehow be made up of placepeople.

Several hon. Members and people in debates elsewhere have expressed the view that the people who run the country—legislators and the Executive—should look around more. They should not be inward looking but should listen to what the people are saying. The analogy used—I think first by President John F. Kennedy—was that we should look out of the windows of the aeroplane. This analogy was also famously used by Vaclav Havel in his new year's day broadcast to the people of the Czech Republic—Czechoslovakia as it was then—on 1 January 1990, an important day for democracy to which I shall refer again.

To set that point in context, people in the Czech Republic had been used to broadcasts telling them how happy everyone was and how the five-year plan for tractor production had been exceeded. Those were the old certainties. However, Vaclav Havel's broadcast was the first new year's day broadcast since the velvet revolution and his election on 28 December 1989. I believe that the following excerpt is relevant to our debates today.

Vaclav Havel was talking about how the totalitarian system had been

"a sin we committed against ourselves".

He went on:

"If we accept it as such, we will understand that it is up to us all, and to us only, to do something about it. We cannot blame the previous rulers for everything, not only because it would be untrue but also because it could blunt the duty that each of us faces today, namely the obligation to act independently, freely, reasonably and quickly. Let us not be mistaken: the best government in the world, the best Parliament, cannot achieve much on its own. And it would also be wrong to expect a remedy from them only. Freedom and democracy include participation and therefore responsibility from us all."

The importance of that quotes lies in the last sentence. We cannot underestimate the importance of participation and responsibility to freedom and democracy.

Our response to the perceived lack of faith in our democracy, as shown by the fall in turnout at elections to date, has not, up to now, been fewer elections. The Government have a proud record of introducing devolution for Scotland and Wales. In those countries, the answer has been to trust the people more and to give them a greater say in the running of their affairs.

Britain also has a proud record as a country with one of the oldest Parliaments and oldest franchises. That does not mean that we know everything or that we cannot learn from other countries. Sometimes we can learn from countries that are new to democracy. Just over a year ago, I had the privilege of visiting South Africa as part of a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association group. It was

*[Jane Griffiths]*

a privilege to talk with people who had campaigned and fought so long for something about which we have become so blasé. Who can forget those pictures of the first democratic elections in South Africa—people queuing for hours to vote? That is unthinkable in this country at present.

I cannot forget holding conversations with people from the African National Congress who were interested in our second Chamber. They asked, "How do you manage it? How does it work when people are appointed? Where do you find them from? What about corruption?" They were rightly concerned about those matters. I was humbled, though, talking to those people who had seen members of their family beaten or killed before their eyes and who were now sitting in Parliament opposite people who had been responsible for those beatings and killings. They did so because they knew that it was best for their democracy and their country to sit down with people with opposing views.

I am a democrat. I believe that our freedom and democracy are the responsibility of us all and that participation is the most important part of that responsibility. We are told, and a number of hon. Members said this today, that if the second Chamber is wholly or substantially elected that will challenge the primacy of the House of Commons. I may not be a constitutional expert, but I know that many countries have a second Chamber without having such a conflict. I know of times when there has been conflict between the different Chambers here. I believe that we can learn from examples from around the world.

I cannot believe that it is beyond our abilities to establish a system with a wholly or substantially elected second Chamber in which there is no in-built conflict between the two. I do not want to propose options and get into the detail of the White Paper, because that would bog down the debate; but if the Government are concerned about a crisis in legitimacy between two elected Chambers, it would be reasonable to have a single-Chamber Parliament. I am not a unicameralist, but that would at least be the logically coherent thing to do. We do not prevent a conflict between two Chambers by having one of them stuffed full of people who are placed there under patronage.

In conclusion, I return to Vaclav Havel, because I believe that we can learn from him. He finished his broadcast by saying:

> "I want to be a President who will speak less and work more . . . To be a President who will not only look out of the windows of his airplane but who, first and foremost, will always be amongst his fellow citizens and listen to them well . . . The most distinguished of my predecessors opened his first speech with a quotation from the great Czech educator Comenius. Allow me to round off my first speech with my own paraphrase of the same statement:
>
> 'People, your government has returned to you!'"

Let us learn from the new democracies in South Africa and eastern Europe. Let us have an elected second Chamber as part of our Parliament. Let us return our Government to the people.

5.9 pm

**Mr. Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester): I have believed for a long time that democracy is the right way forward for the second Chamber. I will not rehearse all the arguments in favour of that now. Nor will I go into the manifest shortcomings of the White Paper, because others have already done so. I want to make only one point.

Contrary to what many people thought, to what the Prime Minister suggested yesterday in the House when he said that there were as many views on Lords reform as there were MPs, and to what the Leader of the House said today when he implied that lack of agreement might be a basis for preventing any change at all, consensus is emerging in the House on the most contentious issues. Many hon. Members have alluded to that fact, including the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and the hon. Members for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso), and for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) and the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), with whom I had the pleasure in the last Parliament of jointly sponsoring an early-day motion on this issue that secured widespread support throughout the House.

What are the most contentious issues? First, do we really want a second Chamber? Secondly, what powers should it have? Thirdly, what composition is required to enable it to exercise those powers effectively? On the first issue, there used to be complete disagreement throughout the House. There were many unicameralists, but now even the unicameralists are saying that they are prepared to be realists. The hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), who is no longer in his place, has made a welcome conversion to that position, and as far as I know, he was the last remaining significant unicameralist in the House. The Conservatives have always been bicameralists, and we seem now to have been joined by the whole of the Labour party. On the first fundamental issue, therefore, there is widespread agreement.

There is also widespread agreement on powers. We do not want radically to alter the existing powers. The plain fact is that the House of Lords does not feel able to use the powers that it has at present because it does not have the moral legitimacy to do so. It rarely uses the power of delay. It has used its power under the Parliament Acts only three or four times this century, and there is very little chance of its wanting to do so again on a major issue. I would like to see some of its powers increased. I would support the beefing up of the second Chamber's role as a constitutional longstop, but I would not go to the stake for that if it were the price of getting a measure through. We largely agree, therefore, that the existing powers are roughly right.

Composition is the key issue. What composition of the Lords will enable it to fulfil a bicameral role in our constitution? In the 21st century, only a House that has the legitimacy of the ballot box behind it can hope to play a meaningful role in this country. The truth is that a wholly appointed House of Lords is no more than a consultative quango. It is not a House of Parliament, and to argue that we should retain an appointed House is really an argument for a form of unicameralism. Only a largely elected House can hope to take on the Executive in this place.

That is the central flaw of Lord Wakeham's proposals. He wants an appointments commission to deal with the problem of patronage. Perhaps it would be possible to create such a body to prevent the growth of patronage, but at the very best an appointments commission would

be a self-perpetuating oligarchy of the great and the good. It would command no more moral authority than the existing House. That is also the fundamental flaw in the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), who argues for a House appointed by patronage, with the Prime Minister retaining all his powers of appointment. Such a House also would have no moral authority.

Many hon. Members have alluded to crucial objections to the argument that I have just made. I will not rehearse all the arguments, but I will deal with two. The first is that an elected House of Lords could duplicate what goes on here, and the second is that there is a risk of gridlock. Both those arguments are largely false. There will be duplication only if the electoral system and the terms of office are the same, but nobody is suggesting that they should be. We will of course elect Members of the Lords on longer terms—I favour non-renewable terms—and as a result the Lords will have a fundamentally different culture. In any case, the House of Commons will remain the major source of Executive authority, as the Government are formed from its Members. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central would like to beef that up by removing Ministers from the House of Lords altogether; I support that.

The gridlock argument is also false. We have the Parliament Acts and there is no practical chance of them being removed from the statute book. We shall therefore get our way after a year at worst; this House will remain supreme. I urge people who disagree to look at the detailed argument on this set out by Lord Mackay in his report; he concluded that the gridlock argument was "a sterile debate" and I largely agree.

I have outlined quite a lot of consensus on powers, composition, functions and bicameralism. There is also growing consensus on the practical steps to take us from where we are now to where we want to be. Most Members on both sides of the House would be prepared to accept the setting up of an all-party consultative body such as those established in 1948 and 1968. In 1948, consultation led to further amendment of the Parliament Act, but in 1968 it failed. However, the Government are rejecting all possibility of a joint Committee, which I deeply regret.

Once we have thought about it a bit, most of us would be prepared to accept a long transition to a substantially—that is the favoured word these days and I am a "substantially" man—elected House of Lords. There is no need for brutal or instant expulsion of current Members. People have said that the existing members of the House of Lords will be around for a long time if we do not do something more brutal, but they probably will not. There is a low drop-out rate among life peers with an average age of 70, but if they are not replaced, they start falling off the shelf rather faster once they get to 80.

**Mr. Bryant:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Tyrie:** If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not.

In any case, the participation rate of the over-80s is well under half that of the rest of the House of Lords. We should be prepared to compromise on the period of transition.

Most important of all, most of us are prepared to compromise on the size of the elected element. I am a "largely" man, and favour an elected element of 80 per cent. or so. There is a role for a small remaining element that is appointed or, better, co-opted. I am prepared to compromise on that, but the elected element must be more than half to command moral authority in the country.

There has never been greater consensus than we have now. The majority of the Labour party, but not those on the Government Front Bench, want to go down the road of much more election—at least 50 per cent. The majority of the Conservative party want to go down the same road, but not just yet our Front-Bench Members, although I am optimistic that they will. An overwhelming majority of the wider public want to go down that road.

I am afraid that for much of the 20th century, Parliament—both the Lords and Commons—behaved as if it were in the 19th century. We now have a tremendous opportunity to take advantage of growing support on both sides of the House and in the country to create a second Chamber for the 21st century; let us not miss that opportunity.

5.18 pm

**Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): I shall not use my full 10 minutes, as I know that many colleagues wish to contribute to our debate. However, there are a number of things to which I wish to draw attention.

Labour Members are being told by their own Government to support the White Paper; we are told that the Labour party supports the conclusions of the Wakeham report and will seek to implement them as effectively as possible. I do not believe that; I do not think that there is a majority in the parliamentary Labour party—I do not know, because we do not vote in the parliamentary Labour party—in favour of the Government's proposals and, indeed, those in the Wakeham report. I suspect that there is no support whatever in the wider Labour party for what is being proposed. Yesterday, however, the Lord Chancellor, opening a debate in the other place, said:

> "We have not followed every detail, but we believe our basic approach to be the commission's."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 January 2002; Vol. 630, c. 563.]

What a strange state of affairs. The Government are saying that they agree with the royal commission, while Lord Wakeham is repudiating their response to his report. On page 21 of today's *Daily Mail*, there is a picture of Lord Wakeham in all his robes with the Government's plan, which we are being invited to support. He states:

"Labour would create a second Chamber of cronies"

and then gives his reasons for saying so.

I do not think much of the Government's White Paper, and I did not think much of the Wakeham proposals either. My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Plaskitt) said that it was a fix. We all know that what has been proposed for the other place was just a fix. The fascinating thing now is that it is all beginning to unravel. We are getting suggestions from the leadership that nothing is preserved in aspic or set in stone and that the Government are now going to listen. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that they were going to search for the centre of gravity. That is great. They should have done that searching and looked for a consensus ages ago, because a consensus does exist out there.

What is my position? I have always believed in a small, directly elected second Chamber. We do not need an interim House of 750. What a joke. That could never be

*[Mr. Gordon Prentice]*

sold to people outside. We do not need a House of 600. That is another joke. We need a small second Chamber. If the United States Senate can get by with 100 Members, why can we not get by with a second Chamber of 100 or 200 Members? We certainly do not need what is being proposed. I want a separate supreme court. I want the bishops to be invited to leave the other place. I definitely disagreed with Wakeham—this proposal has been turned down by the Government—that the second Chamber should be opened up to religious representation in terms of the Buddhist, the Baptist, the Jain and the Jew. We do not need that. My politics are entirely secular. What a perverse consultation exercise it must be that proposes religious representation in this day and age in a Chamber of the Houses of Parliament. Most of all, however, I was against the proposals because I am sick of the patronage state. Many of my Labour party colleagues say that it is corrupting. It is not only corrosive but corrupting that there are people here who think that if they want to get into the second Chamber, they must religiously follow the Government line even when they know that the Government are wrong. It is corrupting and completely wrong.

I want the House of Commons to retain its primacy. It is perfectly possible for it to do so, as long as the powers and functions are properly defined. That has been mentioned by colleagues in all parts of the House. Yet we get fed this stuff from the Front Bench saying that we cannot do anything too radical. I exclude the Leader of the House from that, as he is an ally. *[Laughter.]* I think that I have fatally wounded my right hon. Friend. Yes, I think that we need a second Chamber and I am relaxed about giving it some additional powers. I am relaxed about scrutiny of public appointments. The Liberal Democrats recommend scrutiny of World Trade Organisation treaties. Why not? I am completely relaxed about that. I do not go to bed at night saying, "We must retain all the powers that we now have in the House of Commons." I am chilled out about it, and I believe that that applies to many Labour Members. I do not accept the assertion that the Commons would be fatally undermined.

I believe that we shall move towards a largely elected second Chamber. The Liberal Democrats want 80 per cent. of it to be elected and 20 per cent. nominated. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), who is not in his place, and other Conservative Members said that 75 per cent. of the Conservative parliamentary Labour party—that was a Freudian slip; I meant the parliamentary party—want a wholly or mainly elected second Chamber. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire, who carries a great deal of weight, said that his personal preference was for direct election of two thirds of Members of the other place. Although it is denied by a few at the top of the Labour party, a huge majority of the parliamentary party supports a wholly or substantially directly elected second Chamber.

How do we get there? I was disappointed in the Government when it was not possible to establish the Joint Committee. I took up the matter some time ago with the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), who said in a parliamentary reply:

"it was not possible to reach agreement with the other main political parties as to the terms of reference for the Joint Committee."—[*Official Report*, 6 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 508W.]

The Government were saying that they would set up a Joint Committee if we supported their position. It is understandable that the Conservative party and members of other opposition parties refused to participate on that basis. The shadow Leader of the House said that he was relaxed about the establishment of a Joint Committee. I want the Government to participate in that Committee and not set parameters and terms of reference that so bind other parties that it will never get off the ground.

If the Joint Committee gets nowhere, and Government obfuscation and foot dragging mean that it runs into the sand, Labour Members should demand a Bill to reform the other place. Opposition Members would support that. I would prefer a multi-option Bill. We have been down that road with Sunday trading and hunting. Such a measure would allow hon. Members to vote on an issue about which we have been prevented from expressing an opinion for years because that is not what new Labour does.

I want to end with appointments.

**Michael Fabricant:** The hon. Gentleman has run out of time.

**Mr. Prentice:** Those comments will have to wait for another time.

5.28 pm

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): I do not know how I can follow that act, apart from agreeing with most of the comments of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice).

It is useful to recall the way in which we reached the current sorry state of affairs. I have been looking at other Parliaments and other nations that have gone through such procedures. We all know about the long, hot summers in the 1780s and 1790s in Philadelphia when the American constitution was discussed. I have recently come back from Australia, where Australians have been celebrating 100 years of federation. I took the opportunity to find out how they reached the current position.

The Australian constitution was written by delegates to the 1897 federal convention, which was open to the press and to the public. Its work was reported, debated and subject to public criticism and, at its completion, copies of the constitution were sent to the electors to be voted on. That was the democracy practised in Australia.

What are we doing in the United Kingdom? The second sentence of the Prime Minister's introductory remarks to the White Paper states:

"The Government began reform of the House of Lords two years ago with the removal of the rights of the hereditary peers to an automatic seat in Parliament."

How was this achieved? My personal bible is Andrew Rawnsley's book, "Servants of the People", in which he describes the process rather well. I shall read a few sentences from the relevant chapter:

"Irvine was sanctioned to up his offer to the survival of seventy-five of the hereditary peers pending the second stage of Lords' reform. 'We really do want a deal.' Cranborne had come down to 100. To bridge the gap between them, the Viscount wondered if the government would throw in the fifteen hereditaries who held offices. 'I'll talk to young Blair,' replied Irvine. The next day, Cranborne heard from Irvine: 'Done.' Cranborne asked: 'Will you give me the Earl Marshall and the Lord Great Chamberlain?' Irvine: 'Done.' The Viscount and the Cardinal, these peers of

the realm, bargained about the future composition of one half of parliament with the sophistication of a couple of used-car dealers. Thus was British constitutional history made."

This is where we find ourselves today, discussing the future of the other place.

I have to be honest and say that if it had been up to me, I would not even have embarked on this change. I have a sense of history, and I believe that if something works, we should not try to fix it and we should not break it. I have heard the arguments that the House of Lords did not work, that it was not fair and that it had an in-built Conservative majority, but I have also heard arguments, which I know to be true, that on many occasions during Conservative Administrations, the House of Lords blocked legislation coming from the Conservative Government.

I argue that the House of Lords did work, but I accept that the caravan has moved on and that we cannot turn the clock back. There now has to be reform of the House of Lords. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) asked whether there had been consensus in today's debate. There has not been consensus; there has been unanimity, on one issue at least: that the White Paper is wholly unacceptable because it is neither one thing nor the other. Accepting realpolitik, and the fact that the House of Lords must be reformed, I have no option but to say that it now has to be wholly elected. There is no other choice, because it needs legitimacy.

The Leader of the House asked how it would be possible for the House of Commons to have primacy if the House of Lords were wholly elected. Others have argued that that could be made possible by enshrining the appropriate provision in law. The Leader of the House argued back, "Ah, but if you make laws here, and the people are elected there and have some legitimacy, they will argue for change, and change will come about." That is merely a question of detail relating to how we structure the House of Lords. It could be structured in such a way that, even though it were democratically elected, it would not have quite the legitimacy of the House of Commons, in which we represent constituencies.

A number of people have mentioned the Senate in the United States. One possible example—I do not suggest that it is the only one—of how things might be done would be to say, "All right, we will elect one or two people per administrative area, per county or per unitary authority, regardless of population." That would involve democratic election, but because there would be an imbalance between the number of people electing each representative, such representatives would not have the legitimacy that we enjoy here in the House of Commons.

The point is that there is a range of formulae by which we can contrive to elect people to the other place, give it legitimacy and give it fairness while ensuring that primacy remains here in the House of Commons. I believe, however, that the House of Commons can have its own legitimacy only if the House of Lords is also a respected organisation, and that cannot be the case if only 20 per cent. of its Members are elected or, indeed, even if two thirds are elected.

I intervened on the Leader of the House to raise an argument that I want hon. Members to consider. There is considerable expertise in the House of Lords among hereditary and life peers and we would be unwise to reject the influence that they can have on our lives, so will he seriously consider this option? If we have a wholly elected House of Lords, which I would like, and if those elected Members have a vote, will the right hon. Gentleman introduce an arrangement, which might be only transitional, giving existing Members, for as long as they are alive and able to make a useful contribution, the right to attend debates and present their arguments without having a vote?

I do not see why people should be frightened of that proposal. I accept the argument that the Leader of the House put to me when I made my intervention—that it would result in two classes of Member, voting and non-voting—but there are precedents for that in other Chambers and in company law. There is no reason for not retaining current Members of the House of Lords with expertise during the transitional period so that they may participate in debates but not vote. If nothing else, that would ensure a smoother transition than any abrupt change.

At the beginning of the 21st century, it would be unacceptable to have another Chamber in this Parliament to which only 20 per cent. of members were elected. Any figure that we may announce, whether it be 20 per cent. or 80 per cent., will be merely arbitrary. Furthermore, whether we like it or not and whether we choose 80 per cent. or not, the figure will be transitional—eventually, it will be 100 per cent. Therefore, I say to hon. Members on both sides of the House that we must accept that the caravan has moved on, whether or not we admit that the House of Lords worked as it was and whether or not we liked or admired it. There must be a wholly elected Chamber and let us move forward on that basis.

5.38 pm

**Andrew Bennett** (Denton and Reddish): I am grateful for the opportunity to address the House. The White Paper, deservedly, has had a pretty bad day and I cannot recall a single speech in favour of it. Even the Leader of the House was somewhat hesitant, so I suspect that the best future it can expect is that of a sand castle on a beach as the tide comes in—it will be washed away. However, I hope that my right hon. Friend has the courage to put it on firmer foundations and bring it back. Whatever the arrangement for achieving that—a joint committee, for example—we must consider the issue in the round. We must think about not just changing the House of Lords, but what Parliament does, because, in a sense, what we do down here is just as important. It is also part of the balance with what may go on in a second Chamber.

The House must recognise that, since the 1911 settlement of powers between the two Houses, much of the power in Parliament has drained away. It is no good us saying that that is a matter of presentation or of methods. It is a fundamental fact that this Parliament no longer has anything like the power it had in 1911 to influence the behaviour of and opportunities for constituents. We must recognise that democracy needs power to energise it. Any one who has tried to run a school council or works council, in which people have no genuine powers, knows that making democracy work in such circumstances is extremely difficult.

A declining Parliament is inevitable, because so many of the decisions that affect our constituents are no longer local or United Kingdom issues. We must face the fact of globalisation, and accept that many of the issues affecting

*[Andrew Bennett]*

our constituents are now controlled by world organisations such as the United Nations and its agencies and the World Trade Organisation, or by multinational companies. Much as we would like to democratise such institutions, it will not be easy, so we must concentrate on trying to make Parliament relevant to circumstances in which so much of the power has drained away.

It is in those new circumstances that we want to make Parliament effective. Its energy has seeped away not just because of the changing, globalised world but because it has often allowed successive Governments and Prime Ministers to reduce us to lobby fodder. We must do something about that.

The fundamental duty of Parliament now is to consider reforming all our procedures rather than merely tinkering with the House of Lords, and certainly rather than giving even more power and privilege to Prime Ministers or party leaders, as the White Paper seems to recommend. We must bring about change in order to create an effective democratic process.

Many of my hon. Friends would say that electing far more people to the House of Lords would work, but I fear that that would be a fourth or fifth-rate solution. If necessary, I will probably vote for it on the ground that it is the least-bad option, but I feel that we should ask ourselves whether, in a changing world, we need more than 1,200 parliamentarians split between two Houses. That strikes me as a ridiculously large number. It may have been perfectly all right in 1911, when MPs were not paid, most were part-time, and people did not have the opportunities we have now; but if we want an effective Parliament, 600-plus is more than enough. We could have a very effective Parliament with just one Chamber—this Chamber—if we ensured that it performed properly the job that is now done ineffectually by two Houses.

I would not go quite as far as abolishing the House of Lords. I would leave it with a residual function—the supreme court function—along with powers to allow this House to extend the life of a Parliament beyond five years, albeit only in exceptional circumstances. I would also leave it with the power to insist that this House spend sufficient time scrutinising legislation, and that sufficient time should be allowed for effective scrutiny outside. Given that simple limiting of the powers of the House of Lords, I think that we could do everything perfectly effectively here. We do not need two Chambers.

That means, however, that this House must change its attitude. We have tried to make it increasingly exclusive; we should be trying to make it inclusive. I do not think that anyone here remembers an occasion on which someone has come to the Bar of the House to address the Chamber, but in the past—quite a long time ago—people had an opportunity to do that, and even now Select Committees ask witnesses to address them. We could take some of the expertise that—allegedly and only in small quantities—exists in the House of Lords and make it available to this House, if we wanted to.

I plead with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to examine the situation as a whole and to decide that we need a small, effective legislature, directly accountable to the electorate. That body should have the self-confidence to be inclusive and not exclusive. My right hon. Friend should take away these proposals and come back with a new look at Parliament that would make it effective for the 21st century.

5.45 pm

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett). Although I disagree with much of what he said, I agree that this is a Parliament issue and not only a House of Lords issue. The Leader of the House said that he is counting heads and seeking to find a new equilibrium and a new approach. My views on that correspond closely to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), who made an excellent speech. At the beginning of the debate, I assumed that I was in a minority of one and it is good to know that others oppose, in principle, any elected Members in the House of Lords.

I strongly support the two key parameters laid out by the Leader of the House. In particular, it has been clear for a long time, despite the badinage between the two sides of the House, that the day of the hereditary peer has gone, although some would provide good service in a reconstituted House of Lords in the future.

We should begin with the question of what the House of Lords is for. Its role as a revising Chamber has become increasingly important in recent years. The Government have rightly said that pre-legislative scrutiny is becoming more important, and we need better scrutiny of Bills, which are often ill thought through when they come before the House and are not necessarily improved in Committee. Such Bills would benefit from pre-legislative scrutiny and the expertise of the House of Lords. Another function of the House of Lords is to act as a brake on this Chamber, but it should not be a definitive one. It can also, in certain circumstances, provide constitutional protection. Those are all beneficial functions, but the House of Lords should not challenge this House.

I fear that the Government's proposals are a dog's breakfast. They could have proposed a senate with 100 members and a House of Commons with 400 members, and I strongly agree with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) that our number should be significantly reduced, because there are far too many of us. However, if the Government's proposals are accepted—amended by what appears to be the majority view in the House—we would have more than 1,000 elected legislators, and that is indefensible.

Wider reforms have led to elected parish councils, elected district councils, elected county councils, elected regional councils, an elected Parliament in Scotland and an elected Assembly in Wales—not to mention the European Parliament—but politicians have become less and less respected by their constituents, as everyone acknowledges. If the answer to any question is that we need more elected politicians, we should look more carefully at the question in the first place.

The proposal for a mixed membership, part appointed and part elected, is—as several hon. Members have said—the worst of all possible worlds. Of course the elected members down the Corridor will press for more powers—including ones that this House would not be willing to cede—but having two different types of members would be a recipe for disaster.

The great benefit of the House of Lords as presently constituted is the quality of expertise that resides in it. As a Parliamentary Private Secretary to a Lords Minister

many years ago, I often went to watch debates in the other place and I was genuinely astonished by the sheer quality of expertise. In debates on defence, for example, field marshals, generals and other senior former service men were taking part. In debates on education, we had vice-chancellors and others from the educational establishment speaking. There was also expertise in debates on medical matters. These were high-quality debates that are not always replicated in this House. We should not lose sight of that.

The great strength of many of those down the Corridor is that they have expertise, but, unlike all of us, they would recoil from the hustings and would be deeply unwilling to stand for election. If we were to proceed on the basis of an elected second Chamber, I ask colleagues: who will stand for election? It will not be the repositories of great expertise that are in the other place at the moment.

The point was well made by the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman). Not enough people come into this place with genuine and deep experience of trades outside of politics. The blunt truth is that the House needs more people like the hon. and learned Gentleman and my hon. Friend.

I spent two years as the vice-chairman of the Conservative party in charge of the candidates department. The difficulty in getting people who are not part of the political scene or the political groupings in society to come into politics and take an interest is enormous. All three of the main political parties find that to be true. We will have more and more professional politicians trying to come down to Westminster, and it will be those who cannot get in here who will proceed down the Corridor to try to get elected to the House of Lords. We will have a Chamber of research assistants and special advisers; we will have an assembly of the skimmed milk of British politics. That would be a serious danger.

I am against any election to the House of Lords, for the reasons set out so excellently by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon. Remarks made about Lord Wakeham this afternoon have, on reflection, been wide of the mark. The great thing that he achieved was a consensus, from which the Government have now departed. Mention was made of a quote from Lord Wakeham, but the whole quote was not given. I would like to place it on the record, because he was right. He said that an elected Chamber

"would inevitably compromise the role of the other place as the United Kingdom's decisive political forum. It would produce a second Chamber that was a clone of the other place, full of professional politicians and dominated by the political parties."

He said that, in taking evidence

"nobody—but nobody—thought that that would be a desirable outcome. Such a chamber would either be a compliant rubber stamp for Government legislation or a source of legislative gridlock."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 January 2002; Vol. 630, c. 582.]

I do not agree with Lord Wakeham's proposals for a limited election, but to achieve that consensus he came up with a far-fetched scheme. I do not believe that it is the right way to proceed, but in order to get the consensus, no doubt he did.

Ultimately, legitimacy comes from democratic election, but democratic elections are not the only source of that legitimacy.

5.53 pm

**Tony Worthington** (Clydebank and Milngavie): Like all my right hon. and hon. Friends, I was gravely disappointed by the White Paper. Like many, one of the reasons that I came into politics was to enhance and extend democracy. The White Paper does not do that but extends the very damaging system of patronage that runs through our system. Rightly, we are throwing out the patronage of the past by discarding the hereditary peerage in Parliament, but we are replacing it with the patronage of the present.

At least 60 per cent. of the Members of the new House of Lords will be chosen by party political leaders without reference to the parties or to the people at all. That totally ignores what Wakeham said, and not enough detail has been given of some of the other changes proposed in that respect. The present life peers are there for life, by definition. Some go back to the early 1960s, and have been appointed by eight different Prime Ministers. Some have come through a party political route, but many have come via other routes. It is sometimes difficult to see the links that life peers who are registered with a political party have had with that party in the past.

The proposed powers of the Prime Minister and other political leaders are worth examination. The number of nominated political Members in the second Chamber will probably be 332, and page 21 of the White Paper makes it clear that the Government want them to serve for terms of only four to five years.

If it had been established in time to reflect the pattern of voting at the last election, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would have been required to find about 140 Members of the proposed new House of Lords. The Tory leader would have had to choose about 100 names, and the Liberal Democrats would have had to find more people than they have MPs. I was therefore delighted to hear the Liberal Democrat party disown that possibility.

The Prime Minister personally would have to appoint more than 140 Members of the House of Lords over a period of four or five years. The appointments would be short term and subject to the Prime Minister's definition of good behaviour. The appointments would also be subject to the whim of the electorate in terms of increased or decreased share of votes. A party could do well in the polls but people could lose their places in the Lords because one voter—the party leader—did not reckon them.

As at present, Members of the new House of Lords would receive no salary, only expenses. There would be no pension or resettlement allowance, so Members would be totally dependent on the patron. The motto would be, "Vote with me, or you're out. I shall not renew your licence."

In my view, that is far worse than the rotten borough system—at least Old Sarum had seven voters. For 140 Members of the future House of Lords, there would be one voter. He or she would decide whether a Member remained in the other Chamber.

Who would receive such appointments? To be appointed, people would have to be known to the Prime Minister or the party leader of the day. How does one get to know such people? I do not imagine that too many citizens of Clydebank and Milngavie will ever get to know a Prime Minister and thereby be appointed to a new

*[Tony Worthington]*

second Chamber. The power proposed to be given to any future Prime Minister or party leader does not honour the Labour party's manifesto commitment.

I do a lot of work on international development and creating constitutions for developing countries. If people in such a country as Afghanistan produced a proposal like this, they would be laughed out of court. The moral to that story is that I hope that the good Lord Irvine is never sent to Afghanistan as a peacemaker, as that would only cause more problems.

Another of the major flaws in the White Paper deserves mention. It is rightly accepted that the nations and regions of this country should be recognised in the membership system of the House of Lords. It is proposed that one fifth of the Chamber—120 Members—should be elected on that basis. That election would probably happen at the same time as a general election and be based on European election constituencies. Scotland would therefore have eight Members, Wales four and Northern Ireland three.

I think that that proposal is deeply flawed. The whole membership of the House should reflect the nation and all its regions, not just 20 per cent. of it. It is inevitable that a system of personal patronage for 60 per cent. of seats will mean that political appointments will reflect the networks and friendship patterns of London. Appointments will go to people who operate around Whitehall and are known here. Having a separate box for the nations and regions is an example of tokenism, and it exposes the realisation that the appointed Members would be based, overwhelmingly, in London and the south-east.

Also, large constituencies, such as the European constituencies, have proved disastrous when it comes to preserving the link between politicians, people and parties. They have failed for Europe.

I know that Members of a second Chamber should not do the same job as MPs, but that can be dealt with by sensible legislation and administrative rules. The list system is deeply unpopular with political parties and with the people, as it is seen to centralise power and increase patronage. Also, I am sure that the role of the party leaderships would remain evident in the regions and nations if we went down the route of having a list system. An alternative exists, however, in respect of both regional Members and of those chosen by patronage.

After the culling of the Scottish MPs, we will have about 640 Members of this House. One of the simplest ways of dealing with this would be to have one Member of the House of Lords for every two Members of Parliament. The House of Lords would then have about 320 Members which I think is too big, but many people have referred to the ludicrous system of having 750 or 600 Members of a revising Chamber. However, I do not believe that the representation of regions and nations should be dealt with in a separate box.

What is most objectionable about the proposal is the idea of patronage. We should reject it. The consensus that is emerging is the only way forward. The whole second Chamber, or a substantial proportion of it, should be made up of people who are elected in the normal way.

6 pm

**Pete Wishart** (North Tayside): On behalf of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru, I welcome this debate on Lords reform. I share the views of many who have spoken about the lack of democratic accountability in the proposed new House of Lords.

We see this as a lost opportunity for the Government. If they had been clever, Lords reform could have been used as an exercise to re-engage the electorate and show that the House is concerned about voter apathy and the perception that the political institutions are beyond the control of the British public. Lords reform was the Government's big opportunity to show that they are prepared to address what is seen as a widening democratic deficit between the governing Executive and the governed electorate.

With Lords reform, we could have started to re-engage the public with the whole process of government. What do we have in its place? It is proposed that the institution will have only a small minority of its membership directly elected. The unelectable House of Lords will be transformed into the indefensible new Labour house of cronies.

We already know what the public think. Only some 14 per cent. of the public support the White Paper's proposal that the second Chamber should have a majority of appointees and only a minority of elected Members. It is easy to see why. The public do not like the idea of political carve-ups and fixes in smoke-filled rooms behind closed doors. When the public have no say in who inhabits our political constitutions, it leads to immediate alienation. When the public have no sense of public ownership of our political institutions, they view them with justified suspicion.

The majority of places in the new House of Lords will be decided by a statutory, independent, Appointments Commission. Am I the only one to see that as a fig leaf for extended prime ministerial patronage? The majority of people who will serve on the commission will be Labour party members who, I suggest, will be informed by the Government. Is there any real difference between Government and prime ministerial patronage? If there is, I should like to hear what it is.

We can also presume that there will be no place for minority parties on the commission. We in the SNP and Plaid Cymru are the main Opposition parties in our nations, yet we have no meaningful role within the United Kingdom Government. I am not making a pitch to be involved in part of the process but simply showing that, given the House's careless establishment approach, any new Chamber must be a decision for the public and not subject to a centralised decision-making process.

The one question that has to be asked and which has been missing from the debate, other than being put by the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), is whether there is a need for a second Chamber at all. If we asked the public what their predominant image of the House of Lords was, I would wager that a majority of the responses would describe a belligerent old soul napping while listening to an interminable speech by a fellow octogenarian. The belief that the House of Lords is viewed with any great affection is misplaced. There is genuine bemusement as to what it does and what function it performs.

*The Scotsman* helpfully reminded us recently of the chorus of the peers, as sung by Gilbert in "Iolanthe". It goes:

"The House of peers,
Throughout the years,
Did nothing in particular,
And did it very well".

The House of Lords has excited in the public an unusual and curious form of dismissive apathy. That is why I find some of the views of some Conservative Members curious. There is no Conservative Front-Bench view of what should happen with the new House of Lords, but we see from their 18 years in government that that House was sometimes presented as a paradigm of democratic virtue. I can understand why some Conservative Members feel that way. For a long time, they have had a large Conservative majority there. Even now, when their membership of this House is at its lowest and their poll ratings are at an all-time low, there is still a Conservative majority in the other place. If that is democracy Conservative-style, we are well rid of it.

Do we need a second Chamber at all? Let us look at the experience elsewhere in the world. Bicameral legislatures are in the minority. A comprehensive survey of national Parliaments undertaken by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 1995 identified that, of a total of 178 state legislatures, about 127 were unicameral. Indeed, bicameralism seems to be some strange historic throwback to pre-democratic days—often, as with the existing House of Lords, a desire to reflect deep class differences. It is even argued that originally bicameralism was a means to incorporate different classes in government. The lesson of bicameralism that the United Kingdom has to offer is that it has ensured the maintenance and accentuation of class differences. It has done little to ensure that the Government and Executive of the day are held to proper account.

Lords reform is also an important issue for the self-government and independence movements of the United Kingdom nations. We are faced with the possibility of another layer of elected Government. In Scotland, for example, we will have elections for this place, for the Scottish Parliament, for the European Parliament, for the local authority and for this new House of Lords. The SNP's solution for this democratic smorgasbord is to have direct elections to a normal, independent Scottish Parliament and to the European Parliament, with scrutiny provided by strong pre-legislative committees in the Scottish Parliament.

The committee system of the Scottish Parliament shows that unicameralism can work. That system is one of the Parliament's main successes and, because of it, Scotland does not require a second Chamber to scrutinise the large Scottish domestic health, education and criminal justice Departments. Pre-legislative committee scrutiny means that most of the work is done before the legislation even reaches the Chamber.

Pre-legislative scrutiny by powerful committees can allow for expert witnesses to be called and for a proper examination of all the issues involved. Powerful pre-legislative committees could combine the roles of the Standing and Select Committees of this House. They could be given extra powerful functions. Those committees could initiate their own legislation, scrutinise primary and secondary legislation and conduct inquiries into matters as the Administration and Executive require.

That is a modern, 21st-century solution that would eliminate the need for a second Chamber. It is an illustration that what is needed is not Lords reform, but Lords abolition. I appreciate that abolition is not an option for this Government. It is a long time since there was a strong abolitionist wing in the Labour party. However, we are not too far from the days when the Labour party believed in a fully democratic second House. In its 1992 manifesto, the party promised

"the replacement of the House of Lords with a new elected second chamber".

The Labour party constitutional committee, which was co-chaired by one Tony Blair MP in 1993, reported that "proper democratic elections" should be introduced for the House of Lords.

The main line of argument that is now deployed by Ministers is that a full and democratic House of Lords would be a challenge to this place. Why did they not think of that when they were in opposition and they were suggesting full democratic elections? Why did it only occur to them when they came to government?

Furthermore, the argument is fundamentally flawed because the proposed plan for the second Chamber is to diminish its powers and not to strengthen it. If this House cannot, and should not, withstand the challenge from another element of the parliamentary system, why should we bother with a second Chamber at all?

We live at a time when the right to choose or dismiss our rulers is beginning to be seen as under threat. It is the standard refrain that the electorate are too bored or too cynical to vote. We only need to think of the turnout at the general election last year to realise that that may be the case. There is a world of difference, however, between the voters choosing whether to exercise their franchise and the politically weak using that fact as a justification for curtailing it. It would be better to have no upper Chamber than to have one that entrenches the political cronyism that is in danger of becoming such a trademark of this Government.

It is difficult to know what is being attempted by the second Chamber. It will still be a House of Lords but it will be dissociated from the peerage, and those who sit in it will not be Lords but will still be MLs—Members of the Lords. It seems to be the worst of both worlds: a Chamber that is neither democratic nor fully meritocratic.

Modernisation has proved something of a difficulty for the self-styled modernising new Labour Government. Modernisation, whether in this place or in the other House, seems to have been one long-drawn-out fudge with no focus or any clear attempt to define what it is hoped to achieve. Scrutiny is important, but so is democracy. What is proposed for the second Chamber is a shabby compromise, which will satisfy absolutely no one.

6.10 pm

**Peter Bradley** (The Wrekin): I cannot pretend to be able to pack as much into 10 minutes as the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) did, but I will do my best.

Until I heard the speech by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), I did not think that I would hear one that actually strengthened the arguments for the proposals in the White Paper. However, whatever the deficiencies in the proposals, about which we have

*[Peter Bradley]*

heard plenty from Members from both sides of the House, we should pause and reflect, and concede that we would not even be debating the possibility of Lords reform were it not for the Government, and that they deserve some credit for that.

The Lords has required reform since the day of its inception, precisely because it has provided privileged access not just to wealth but to political power, irrespective of the merit of those who wield it and irrespective of the will of those over whom they have exercised it. It must be said that it has been a privilege that has been largely upheld, and indeed shared, for centuries by the Conservatives—those same Conservatives who have opposed Labour's attempts to reform the House of Lords for the past 100 years.

Now the caravan has moved on and we cannot turn back the clock, as was memorably said this afternoon, and the Conservatives are yet again demonstrating their unerring instinct for survival in the face of constitutional change. I welcome that, and Opposition Members have made some thoughtful and important contributions to the debate.

This is an historic opportunity, which brings with it historic responsibilities. It is not, in my view, a time for tinkering. It is not, in my view, a time for equivocation, or for incremental change that will require yet more hand-wringing and anguish and further incremental change year on year. We have a duty to get this reform right. We have a duty, indeed, to bring about a radical break with the past that shows that this Parliament—and the broader society that we represent or seek to represent—is forward-looking, confident and progressive. If that means that we must find ourselves in conflict with vested interests, whether the Law Lords or the bishops, that is unfortunate, but so be it. In the House of Lords, or the second Chamber—or the house of correction or whatever it is known as in future—no one should enjoy privileged access to their seat in our legislature.

The Government have a right to be proud of the programme of constitutional reform that they have pursued over the last four or five years and of the way in which they have ceded rights and influence to people outside Westminster. They have been much more radical than they have received credit for being. We have had the Human Rights Act 1998. We have had devolution to Northern Ireland, to Scotland, to Wales and to London. We have had the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We have had the first crucial phase of Lords reform. But in most of those measures—certainly in devolution to Wales and to London, and in the Freedom of Information Act—there has been a real difficulty for Government in simply letting go. This White Paper is constipated beyond most people's experience of anal retention.

There is a flaw at the heart of the White Paper. At paragraph 15, it poses a rhetorical question. It says:

> "'Whom do you choose to govern you?' The UK's political system is built around that principle."

That is absolutely right, but if it is true of one Chamber it must follow logically that it is true of the other. However, the thesis of the White Paper seems to be to ask, "Why should the upper Chamber be elected?" rather than, "Why should it not be elected?" The proof that has to be the test of the quality and legitimacy of the second Chamber is whether it is elected, and an exceptional case has to be made for its Members who are not elected. Unfortunately, the White Paper puts that proposition the other way around.

The second Chamber has to embody some key principles. It must be distinctive in its role and function, as many hon. Members have said today. It must not replicate, imitate or duplicate the work of the House of Commons. It must be complementary, not competitive, so it must inevitably have subsidiary powers. It must be legitimate, and much of that legitimacy will come through election, whether whole or substantial. It must be representative of society and the nation at large. Indeed, it must be efficient. There have been many arguments for a smaller Chamber than that proposed, which would be in the interests of efficiency, as well as those of democracy and accountability.

The problem with the White Paper is that it would not confer legitimacy of election on 20 per cent. of the membership; nor would the political patronage that it would preserve. It is absurd to claim that introducing democracy to the second Chamber would somehow undermine the democratic credentials of the first Chamber. It would strengthen the legitimacy of Parliament, and it would be good for the second Chamber, as well as for the House of Commons.

As many hon. Members have suggested, introducing such democracy would strengthen not only the confidence that the electorate have in their Parliament, but their rights to hold Parliament to account. Too little has been said not only about our vested interest in holding the Executive, the second Chamber or Parliament to account, but about the interests of the people who send us here.

Election, not appointment, must be the principle on which the second Chamber is founded. It is perfectly possible to preserve the democratic principle of election without challenging the primacy of this place. The latter is the chief argument against election made in the White Paper.

What makes our legitimacy special is the constituency link. We are elected by and accountable to defined communities, which we seek to represent. It is perfectly possible to elect people indirectly in a way that confers a legitimacy on them that is not confrontational or equal to our own in this place. However, I accept the role of appointment in improving and extending the representativeness of the second Chamber to encompass not just the regions and nations of this country, but the various walks of life and professions, whether those involved are humble—perhaps I should not use that word—or are engineers or professors of medicine.

Representativeness is important, but we know that the vagaries of the electoral system cannot guarantee it. We complain and wring our hands in this place, saying that we are not sufficiently representative of the community at large, so there must be a role for appointment, but no more than a third of the second Chamber's membership should be appointed. I agree with much of what the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) said in that respect.

If the second Chamber were to have a membership of 450—I suggest that it should be smaller, but 450 is the upper limit—on the basis of the national share of the vote at the general election in June there would be 122 Labour, 95 Conservative, 55 Liberal, 28 other and 150 appointed

Members. Even the governing party would have no overall control, and the largest group would be appointed and, no doubt, independent Members. That would preserve the electoral principle, but it would also secure the principle of subsidiarity, representativeness and, indeed, independence.

Finally, we need a truly modern second Chamber. I spoke earlier about the need for radical reform. If we ask people to sit, or if they ask us to allow them to sit, in our legislature, they should regard that as their principal occupation, and they should be paid for it. They should be expected to attend or face disqualification. In no way should the bishops or the Law Lords believe that they have a moral entitlement automatically to be given seats in the legislature, but there is nothing to prevent them—as nothing prevented the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso)—from putting themselves forward for nomination or, in theory, election; and the same applies to all current peers.

All the peers should go, but if they wish to seek election or nomination, they should be free to do so; otherwise they should be given the same severance payments as Members of Parliament enjoy when we retire or are defeated in the polls.

The warning that I would issue to my colleagues is that we must build a consensus that goes beyond the consensus that simply opposes the White Paper. As has been repeated in the debate, previous reforms have foundered precisely because of lack of agreement about the shape of the second Chamber. That is the last defence of those who support the White Paper.

We should also warn those who support the White Paper that there is agreement on one issue: that the White Paper does not provide the basis for reform.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal):** Order.

6.20 pm

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk): This has been a fascinating debate in which not a single speaker has spoken in support of the proposals in the White Paper. I suggest that that point also extends to the views of the Leader of the House. It is rare for a set of Government proposals to achieve the distinction of uniting virtually everyone outside their payroll in opposition to the proposals. The Government say that they seek consensus and, ironically, they are achieving consensus—one that circulates around something very different from what is proposed in the White Paper.

I wish to challenge a specific point that the Leader of the House made in the debate on 7 November and which he repeated today. He sought to justify the proposals on the composition of the second Chamber by praying in aid the claim that many second Chambers throughout the world are made up of a mixed membership. That is true, but in virtually all cases the balance is predominantly in favour of the elected element. I accept that, in some cases, indirect election plays a part, but in only 15 countries worldwide is appointment used as the predominant means of selection to the second Chamber.

The only western industrialised country that has a wholly appointed second Chamber is Canada. Its second Chamber is based on our House of Lords, so it is hardly the model that we want to follow now. As Meg Russell of The Constitution Unit put it in her 1999 study of second Chambers, the main problem in Canada

> "is the lack of public respect for the senate due to its appointed basis. It is not seen as democratically legitimate. Appointees are seen as recipients of cynical patronage."

We should listen carefully to those wise words.

The same study identifies only two countries—Malaysia and Swaziland—that combine a significant number of appointees with fewer elected Members. Those are the models that the Government seek to follow with these proposals.

The extent of patronage could be even worse. If the 20 per cent. elected element is elected using the closed-list system that operates for the European Parliament, the power of patronage would apply not just to the political appointments but to the elected element as well. The party bosses would determine who was top of the list. The second Chamber would be almost entirely created by patronage and appointment.

I want to deal with the arguments of the Leader of the House about the concern in the shift of power from one House to another. Much has been made of the Government's fear of a significant shift of power from this House to a more legitimate second Chamber. Their solution appears to be to ensure that the proposed second Chamber lacks legitimacy and, therefore, power. Experience from other countries suggests that that fear has been significantly overstated and is without substance. The assertion is made without any evidence to support it.

We all want an effective Parliament; we do not want endless gridlock. However, the correct balance can be achieved by properly designing the role, functions and powers of the second Chamber rather than by neutering it by way of membership by appointment and patronage. The net result of the proposals is not to shift power from one House to the other, but to further that shift from Parliament to the Executive, through the power of patronage. That must be fought at all costs.

Such is the opposition to the White Paper that three options are possible. I cannot imagine that the Government will legislate on the basis of a 20 per cent. elected element. The first option, therefore, is for them to rethink their case in its entirety, to listen to the developing consensus and to return with coherent proposals for reform of Parliament as a whole, including this place, to make us more effective, more democratic and more accountable. That would attract the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The second option is to attempt to buy off internal opposition by increasing the percentage marginally. The third is to withdraw the proposals with no commitment to return with an alternative. The last two options worry me most. There has been much talk of the buy-off option in recent days, with an increase in the elected element of, say, 30 or 35 per cent. It is a common ploy to start with something that will not secure support, because it can lower expectations and set the context for debate. However, the opposition would have been the same had the Government proposed 35 per cent. as a starting point. That is subject to the same criticism of being undemocratic and dominated by patronage and appointment.

To a large extent, we have to rely on the reformers in the Cabinet—if there are any, apart from the Leader of the House—and Labour Back Benchers to stop a

*[Norman Lamb]*

stitch-up. Well over 100 Labour Back Benchers signed the early-day motion supporting a second Chamber that is wholly or substantially elected. Please let them not go back on that principle. The country is relying on them to hold fast on that.

We also know that the Leader of the House wants something more radical. He was, self-evidently, a signatory to the Cook-Maclennan agreement that gave clear support for a democratic and representative second Chamber. The proposals do not match that test. Today the right hon. Gentleman set himself against a wholly elected second Chamber, but I listened carefully and he did not say that he is against a substantially elected second Chamber. I hope that he will lead the fight for something that is very different from what is set out in the White Paper.

The third option of keeping the status quo appears to have been threatened in the past couple of days by the Lord Chancellor. Most people would find that option abhorrent and it must be resisted. Indeed, it would directly contradict the principle, as stated today by the Leader of the House, of removing the hereditary element in its entirety.

We have an historic opportunity to reform the second Chamber, but we must get it right. There is a great deal of legitimate talk about a loss of trust in the democratic process, as demonstrated by a falling turnout and disillusionment with politics and politicians. Nothing would do more to reinforce those trends than to pack the second Chamber with political appointments. Imagine the turnout for the elected element of such a Chamber. The Cook-Maclennan report stated in 1997:

"There is today a pressing need to renew democracy in Britain."

That is as true today—if not more so—as it was then. Let us consign the White Paper to the dustbin and start again with something that is more legitimate.

6.29 pm

**Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak in the debate, not least because I think that I am the only new Labour Member to have been called. I am aware that many others would like to speak.

The case for reform was made cogently by hon. Members on both sides of the House. That is why, above all else, I hope that the Government will not come away from the debate thinking that the situation is impossible and that they cannot introduce reform that will carry the day in this Chamber, proceed to the House of Lords and create a new system.

We need reform because Britain needs a parliamentary system in the totality of which the people can have confidence. My constituents do not have confidence in the whole parliamentary system. They have worries about this House, but they have far more worries about the other House, which they see as a wholly undemocratic and unrepresentative body that regularly acts as a bar to their legitimate political aspirations. Under the new proposals, that situation would not be improved. There is an urgent need for reform because there is only one other country in the world that has the same system as us, and that is Lesotho. It is about time we struck out and joined countries that have a more open, democratic system.

As many hon. Members have said, the Government's proposals are misguided and wrong. First, the figure of 20 per cent. for the second Chamber's elected Members is marginal and paltry. To offer the people of Britain a 20 per cent. share in the country's democracy is to waste an opportunity. The turnout for such elections would be pathetically small; indeed, we would almost be asking people not to bother to vote. The Government's proposals would lead to a House that was far too large. Surely a second Chamber should have no more than between 250 and 300 Members.

A couple of Members talked about the period of attrition, and I must correct their figures. I am afraid that I must tell the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that the Liberal Democrat actuary is incorrect, and the rate of attrition would be a little faster than he stated, but then Liberal Democrat figures are often inaccurate. Every year, 18 Members of the House of Lords are gathered up into a place that is, I suspect, rather similar to the Lords, so the grim reaper paces rather faster than the hon. Gentleman believes. None the less, under these proposals, we would be facing at least 10 years in which the second Chamber dwindled into gagadom. The period of attrition would mean also that the Prime Minister would probably not be appointing anybody but the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Chamber in the next 10 years.

Another problem with the proposals which has already been mentioned is that although at the moment we have the same system as Lesotho, we would change to a system the same as those in Malaysia and Swaziland. Surely Britain, as the mother of Parliaments, should be able to devise a better system for the 21st century.

One of the most profound points in the debate was made by the Leader of the House when he asked for a centre of gravity. What we have seen developing today is more a centre of gravity than a consensus. It is fair to say that there is no consensus because people want to make their own specific proposals, but a clear centre of gravity is developing, first and foremost, around the idea that we should have a second Chamber, and secondly around the idea that it should be a small Chamber. Everybody who has referred to the size of the second Chamber has said that it should be small. Thirdly, the Chamber should have no more than secondary, revising powers. I do not see why it should not be called the second Chamber as a means of emphasising its secondary role. It is time we ditched the term "House of Lords". It would be particularly bizarre to call it that if it no longer contained traditional peers.

Another idea around which a centre of gravity has formed is that of offering some measure of redundancy to Members at the other end of the building. As someone in the parliamentary Labour party said yesterday, if we want our turkeys to vote for Christmas, we must offer them a lot of cranberry sauce.

**Mr. Forth:** What about stuffing?

**Mr. Bryant:** That's an idea.

I am quite happy for Members of the Lords to have club privileges. They can wine and dine there until the day they die, if they want. I am happy for them to receive some money, although perhaps we should base it on their attendance in the past two years. That would help us to get from A to Z.

Finally, on issues with a substantial centre of gravity, nearly everybody has spoken today about a largely elected second Chamber, which means more than 50 per cent. If the Government introduced proposals for a second Chamber with a 50 per cent. elected element, they would find considerably more support among Labour Members and, I suspect, across the Floor of the House. As a footnote, I should add that I prefer openness to a closed system; I hope that the system for electing Members of the European Parliament will be changed to an open one at the next election.

Many Opposition Members have raised the issue of the challenge to the Commons from a Chamber with a significant chunk of elected Members. That is a red herring and a simple mistake. Any new Chamber that is created, even if its Members are solely nominated, will start to challenge this one. Anyone, even if only the 20 per cent. share of elected Members, will start to challenge the moral authority and legitimacy of this Chamber, but that does not mean that they will have the power to overturn decisions made in the Commons, the bedrock of our democracy, which is based on constituency membership.

There is no reason why a strengthened Parliament Act could not make clear the exact powers of a secondary, solely revising Chamber without the need to write a new constitution, and differentiate them from those of this Chamber. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House was wrong to say that a majority of two-Chamber Parliaments are not directly or indirectly elected. In fact, 31 of the 58 second Chambers are wholly elected; in none of those Parliaments is there a major problem with rowing between the two Chambers.

In conclusion—and only one person in the Chamber could say this—as a former priest in the Church of England, I think that it is time the bishops were given their marching orders. It is unlikely that the Government will include in their proposals any suggestion that they will take on the whole Church of England, but since they have moved away substantially from the Wakeham proposals, which would have created Lords Spiritual of various Christian denominations, it is time to have more courage and get rid of the whole Bench of bishops. The days of the rochet and chimere are surely over.

I hope that the Government take the opportunity to return to the House in the near future with proposals for reform. There is a potent argument in favour of reform. My constituents do not often discuss the House of Lords, but they find it bizarre that the House of Commons can vote several times with enormous majorities on issues such as foxhunting and the age of consent, yet their decisions do not become law. We need to change many aspects of the way that we do business in the House so that we can do it better. However, we need to change the House of Lords as a matter of urgency, and I hope that the Government will give us the tools to do so in the next 12 months.

6.38 pm

**Mr. Andrew Rosindell** (Romford): I make no secret of the fact that I oppose reform of the House of Lords. There is a valid case for retaining the strong traditions that have kept our parliamentary system great for so long, including the hereditary principle on which the monarchy itself is founded.

I agree with many of the previous speakers—not least my hon. Friends the Members for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) and for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack)—that the Government are proposing not a second Chamber, but more of a House of cronies with more elected politicians, as if we have not got enough already. [HON. MEMBERS: "Resign!"] I was a Tory gain, so I shall not be resigning. Equally, I understand that there appears to be no going back on the idea that we should have an elected element in the newly constituted second Chamber, but I believe that this new element should incorporate as many of the existing traditions of the House of Lords and the British Parliament as possible. It seems to me that the Government's proposal lacks a basis of democracy, popular support and international precedents. Their proposals suggest far more sinister motives: a cynical, electorally motivated desire to produce a second Chamber that will be an enfeebled stooge.

I hope that the House will consider alternative options, one of which I should like to suggest now. I believe that the second Chamber should be reorganised on the basis not only of the traditional elements, but of an elected territorial element. I refer not to any notion of the units designed by Labour for regional government or to the artificial boundaries contrived for the House of Commons and European elections, but to the nation's historic counties. With representatives elected from each of the historic counties, using their traditional boundaries, the second Chamber would restore pride, vitality and diversity to Britain's over-centralised system of government, giving electors local links to those in the second Chamber and possibly rekindling a sense of local patriotism without challenging the representative status of their Members of Parliament. Middlesex, Westmorland, Rutland and Huntingdonshire are just a few examples of the counties that could be restored. What an opportunity we have to do that.

The same basis can be extended to our great cities, such as Birmingham, Glasgow, Canterbury, York, Cardiff, Belfast and, indeed, London. The second Chamber could also give a voice to the overseas territories—a point that was first mooted by my hon Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) in the 22 November debate on the overseas territories. Why should not Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands and all British people have representation in this, the Parliament of the United Kingdom? I would also include the Crown dependencies. Indeed, territorial representation in a second Chamber would be a counterbalance to the population-based representation of the Commons, as the United States Senate is in relation to the House of Representatives.

A second Chamber giving voice to the nation's historic counties would be democratic, historically relevant and easily understood and supported by the public, and would have international precedents. It would also make geographical sense. I hope that hon. Members and especially the Leader of the House will consider my proposal. I urge a radical rethink of this most important of issues so that we get a second Chamber that is representative rather than one that merely speaks the voice of the Government.

6.44 pm

**Mr. Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire): The debate has been interesting but all too short. The Government should have allowed more time for our deliberations. Those of

*[Mr. Greg Knight]*

us who have been part of the usual channels were not surprised that the Government conveniently scheduled a statement today, thus further curtailing our debate. The Opposition would have viewed favourably a proposal by Leader of the House to suspend the decision to end the debate at 7 o'clock.

The reasons for not holding a longer debate or a two-day debate such as that in the House of Lords are clear from Labour Members' speeches. The debate is of the Government's choosing on proposals of their choosing and at a time of their choosing. Despite all that, how many Labour Members spoke in support of the White Paper? Twelve Labour Members spoke; not one supported it. That is unprecedented in my experience. Even in the days when Lady Thatcher and John Major proposed measures that were considered unpopular in the Conservative party, there was always an element of support in the Chamber. As the debate progressed, we could see some of the edges of the White Paper's pages turning green.

It is not only Labour Members who are unimpressed with the Government's proposals. Lord Richard, the Prime Minister's first appointed Leader of the House of Lords, has described current proposals as "half-baked" and no more than "tokenism". The reason for producing such a dog's dinner was provided by Lord Stoddart, a Labour politician—[HON. MEMBERS: "Former Labour politician."]—who complained this week about the Prime Minister's "control freakery".

If today's debate is anything to go by, the Government's preferred method of House of Lords reform is rightly lying on the Floor in tatters. The proposals have been universally condemned. No new Labour project has received such a bad press from across the media spectrum. *The Mirror*, which is usually an enthusiastic cheerleader for the Labour party, stated on 9 November:

"Robin Cook made a reasonable fist of presenting New Labour's 'reforms' of the House of Lords. Which is all the more surprising, say Labour MPs, because the Leader of the House doesn't believe a word of the script. This mish-mash of patronage, rigged elections and gerrymandering has gone down like a cup of cold sick. It is a transparent attempt by the government to swap the old permanent Tory majority in the upper chamber for a permanent New Labour majority."

**Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give the House the Conservative alternative to the White Paper?

**Mr. Knight:** The White Paper allows until the end of the month for the conclusion of consultations. We have a position, but it has not been published yet. It will be made clear before the end of January.

On 8 November, *The Times* stated:

"Tony Blair has secured his place in history already as the most prolific dispenser of prime ministerial patronage in the House of Lords since life peers were created, in 1958 . . . In his brief four and a half years of power, Mr. Blair has appointed 248 peers, easily more than the 216 created by Baroness Thatcher in her 11-year tenure. In a House of Lords containing just over 700 peers, more than a third owe their places in Parliament to one Prime Minister."

The *Evening Standard*, which supports reform, has been no less critical. On 7 November, it stated:

"a principally nominated House can never command serious authority as the second chamber . . . Any government will feel free to override its views at will. Second, the House of Lords will be increasingly dominated by peers appointed because of their relationship to the political leaders of the day . . . Such figures have always existed and often been honoured, but their role will now be expanded."

Many interesting points have been raised in the debate, but, sensing the difficulties that lay ahead, the Prime Minister yesterday appeared to justify his proposals by saying that there was no clear-cut alternative and by implication that the existence of a wide spectrum of views meant that the House should accept the package, warts and all. That is an interesting theory, and it reminds me of the curate's egg—an appropriate metaphor in this case.

The Prime Minister's statement reminds me of the bishop offering the curate an egg that is good in parts and bad in others. The curate must eat the egg, so as not to offend the bishop. I think that the Prime Minister was hoping that the House would do something similar today. I have to tell him that many Opposition Members do not want to eat that egg at all. On the other hand, many Labour Members are so afraid of offending the bishop that they would eat almost anything put before them. This issue, however, represents one rotten egg too far for many Labour Members. I believe that the majority of Labour Members are prepared to say, with us, "We like eggs, but we would like one that is primarily not bad, one that is substantial and that is worth waiting for. Take this away and bring us another!"

6.50 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg):** Lacking a public policy, my shadow chose not to address any of the issues that have been raised in today's debate. I have 10 minutes in which to try to do so. This has been a very constructive debate, and I am pleased to be responding to it on behalf of the Government. We have heard some excellent, thoughtful speeches from both sides of the House.

Constitutional reform has been one of the greatest achievements of this Government since we were elected in 1997. We have introduced the Human Rights Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the restoration of elected city government in Greater London, opportunities for communities to opt for local, directly elected mayors, the setting up of the Electoral Commission, and legislation going through Parliament at the moment to enable political parties to take positive action to increase the number of women candidates.

The goal of removing the hereditary principle from the House of Lords is one that this party has striven for since our foundation more than 100 years ago. I remember people saying to me before 1997 that, once elected, we would not proceed with constitutional reform or with the first stage of Lords reform. Well, we did. I remember, once we had completed that first stage, we were told that we would not proceed to the second. Well, we are doing so.

I welcome the fact that the Conservatives are now engaging with this issue, and that some have converted to the cause of reform. As recently as the 1997 general election, they were still defending the hereditary principle in the upper House of this Parliament, and for

18 continuous years of Conservative government, no proposals for the reform of the second Chamber were introduced.

**Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Twigg:** No, I have very little time.

We are told that the Tories have secret proposals that will be published soon. In today's debate, three Opposition Members called for a fully appointed second Chamber, three called for a wholly or largely elected second Chamber, and the hon. Members for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) wished that we had not started the reform process. Indeed, I got the impression that the hon. Member for Romford hankered for the good old days before the signing of Magna Carta.

Certain basic principles have been accepted by all speakers in the debate—or certainly by most. They are that there should be two Chambers; that we should remove the hereditary element; that we should assert the pre-eminence of the House of Commons; that we should have a second Chamber that reflects the balance of public opinion between the parties; and that there should not be a fundamental change in the powers of the two Chambers.

Like many who have spoken today, my personal instincts have been in favour of a fully elected second Chamber—[HON. MEMBERS: "Aah!"] Hold on a sec! I have another six minutes to fill. The argument that persuaded me against that is that an appointed element brings expertise to a second Chamber. A number of speakers on both sides of the House made good arguments about the expertise that comes into the second Chamber via appointment, whether through party appointees or Cross Benchers.

**Mr. Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk): Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Twigg:** No, I have only five minutes.

Secondly, an appointed element ensures the pre-eminence of the House of Commons, which is very important. Finally, it plays a part in achieving a Parliament that looks more like the public whom we serve and, in particular, in ensuring proper representation of women and diverse communities in our country. No speaker addressed that issue. I would prefer election to secure such representation, but we have only to look around us to see that election alone does not have a track record of delivering proper representation of women and minority ethnic communities. The appointed element may play an important role in that.

Wakeham proposed in option B that 87 of 550 second Chamber Members be elected, while the White Paper proposes a slightly higher proportion—120 of 600. Nevertheless, I accept that it is clear that Members on both sides of the House strongly support the proposals involving a larger elected element. I take that on board and shall feed it back in, but I want to respond to some specific points during the debate in the Government before bringing proposals before the House.

A number of Members raised the question of the method of election and spoke in favour of open lists, including the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) and my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant). I believe that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House of Lords is on record as saying that we have no closed mind on closed lists. This is clearly a matter still to be resolved.

There is also the question of the length of an elected Member's term and the debate is between the desire for independence as set out in the Wakeham proposals, which suggest a very long term, and the need for those elected to Parliament to be accountable. I think that a 15-year term without the right to stand again would reduce the accountability of the democratically elected element in the second Chamber, so it makes far more sense to have shorter terms for Members with the right to stand for re-election. That is a more democratic way to ensure that there is an elected element in the second Chamber.

The White Paper raises the issue of indirect representation in the new second Chamber, and various Members made proposals for achieving it. The difficulty is that, although there are Assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland and a Parliament in Scotland, there is no regional representation in England. However, the proposal is worthy of consideration as the debate moves forward.

Let me briefly address the question of prime ministerial patronage and appointees to the new second Chamber. The Government carefully considered Lord Wakeham's proposal that party political appointments be made by an independent commission, but we do not believe it appropriate for party political rather than independent representatives to be appointed in that way.

There has been a great deal of talk in the debate about prime ministerial patronage, but the proposals in the White Paper represent a significant reduction in those powers: the elected element would be 20 per cent., 20 per cent. would be appointed by an independent commission and about 55 per cent. would be appointed by parties, with most of those being appointed by opposition parties.

Currently, the majority of new Members of the Lords are directly appointed by the Prime Minister, so the proposals represent a significant reduction in the powers of patronage. *[Interruption.]* I recognise from the noises coming from behind that it does not go quite as far as many of my colleagues would like.

This is an important debate and, as many people have said, it is about not just the future of the other place, but the reform of Parliament itself. The purpose of reform, both here through my right hon. Friend's modernisation proposals and in the Lords, is to create a Parliament that is more effective and more representative of the people we serve. The 59 per cent. turnout last year is a clear warning to us all: renewing our political institutions is not some sideshow and it strikes at the heart of why we are here in Parliament.

This Government are listening to the concerns expressed here today and in the other place yesterday. The public consultation will continue for another three weeks and the debate is an important contribution to it. I am grateful to all Members who took part.

*It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.*

## SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

*Motion made,*

That, following the Order of 20th November 2000, Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Frank Cook and Mr. Edward O'Hara be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

## PETITION

## Missile Defence

7 pm

**Valerie Davey** (Bristol, West): The petition of the Bristol and West region of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, to which I add my support, declares:

We believe that an attempt by the United States to build a missile defence system will lead to increased instability and provoke a new nuclear arms race, are alarmed at the likely involvement of facilities at Fylingdales and Menwith Hill, and that a petition of over 520 signatures expressing similar concerns has been presented to the Prime Minister. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government not to allow the use of the bases in a United States missile defence system. And the petitioners remain, etc.

*To lie upon the Table.*

## Armley (Asbestos Compensation)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

7.1 pm

**Mr. John Battle** (Leeds, West): In October 1995, two families from Leeds, one itself a victim of deadly mesothelioma, won a ground-breaking compensation case against Turner and Newall. They proved that the company was the responsible owner of the old J. W. Roberts Armley factory that had polluted our neighbourhood.

In earlier debates here, since I first raised the issue in November 1988, I have also raised the profile of the struggle for justice for mesothelioma victims from Turner and Newall—a company that initially refused to admit it had anything to do with the J. W. Roberts factory. We showed that it owned the factory. Turner and Newall then declined to release any documents or records, arguing that it could not find them or that they did not exist. Despite denials for four years, and court orders and appeals, the company was forced to release more than 27,000 documents and records, a few weeks before the crucial trial began in 1994.

I recall the words of Mr. Justice Holland at that trial, in the Leeds High Court. In 1995, he took the unusual step of criticising the company for

"using any means possible, legitimate or otherwise . . . to wear"

the plaintiffs

"down by attrition".

That is from the transcript.

The judge awarded Mrs. Margereson and Mrs. Hancock £115,000 damages between them against Turner and Newall, ruling that although mesothelioma could not have been foreseen as a consequence of the asbestos dust that was blown out of the factory into the neighbouring streets until it closed in 1958, some form of pulmonary injury should have been anticipated by the company and it was therefore liable.

We had won the case—or we thought that we had won. Needless to say, Turner and Newall immediately appealed against the judgment, claiming disingenuously that it was "unsound" on the basis that a distinction could be made between "guilty" and "not guilty" bits of dust—claiming that it was just some kind of lottery when people inhaled.

That grotesque appeal, as Geoffrey Tweedale called it in his scholarly account "Magic Mineral to Killer Dust: Turner and Newall and the Asbestos Hazard", was thrown out of court, but it was another delaying tactic that bought the company a bit more time before they paid out to the plaintiffs. Tragically June Hancock died in 1997, not many months after her long heroic struggle through the courts.

Throughout the case, Turner and Newall has striven to delay and hold back future claims, trying to deny other victims the chance to claim a precedent; but the case was won, and it was forced to pay compensation.

Mr. Justice Holland referred to attrition. In 1995, I thought that the courts had settled it; but the war of attrition against the victims, sadly, is still going on.

Turner and Newall was taken over by an American company, Federal Mogul, in 1998. On 1 October last year, Federal Mogul filed for voluntary chapter 11

reorganisation in the United States and for administration under the Insolvency Act 1986. From that moment, Turner and Newall ceased to respond to or pay out any asbestos disease-related claims. Even cheques issued for cases settled before 1 October have bounced according to solicitors, and one former employee, 74-year-old Thomas Harrison, deposited a settlement cheque for £38,000 that was returned cancelled.

More than 60 Armley neighbourhood cases since 1995 have been completely settled through the courts; some are still in the process of settlement and some are still waiting to be filed. In other words, hundreds of cases are still outstanding. Turner and Newall now refuses to deal with them.

Federal Mogul, the parent company, employs 52,000 people in 25 countries and owns famous brands such as Champion, Glyco and Ferrodo. It is far from being bankrupt. Third quarter sales in 2001 were more than $1,289 million, and sales for this financial year are likely to be more than $5 billion. According to the brilliantly researched *British Asbestos Newsletter*, issue no. 45—I pay tribute to Laurie Kazan Allen's tireless and selfless campaigning on the matter—Federal Mogul's newly elected chairman and executive officer, Frank Macher, claims that despite the insolvency

"Federal Mogul will continue to serve its existing customers, fulfil current contracts and secure new business."

On 15 October, a corporate press release boasted that Federal Mogul had secured four new contracts, valued at £20 million, from auto manufacturers and suppliers. The chairman reiterated:

"Federal Mogul is continuing business operations without interruption and with the full support of our major customers."

On 11 February, there will be a meeting of the creditors of J. W. Roberts and of Turner and Newall to carry that process of administration forward. Only the creditors can attend to stake their claim. The meeting is closed and is aimed at working towards a long-term global solution to all the company's asbestos claims. It is likely that the UK cases will simply be overlooked at this stage and the result will be legal paralysis for many years.

In a written reply recently, the Economic Secretary stated:

"Since 1 October, Turner and Newall have been operating under an Administration Order and as a consequence all legal actions against the company have been stayed. They are continuing to trade. We understand the driver for the administration is to crystallise asbestos claims in the US and UK in a consistent and fair manner so the company can arrange for their payments."

I submit that "crystallise" is an infelicitous choice of word in this case, and it can take years for crystals to form. It can also take years to allocate funds to pay out claims through administration procedures. What will the victims be left with?

The Economic Secretary's reply continued:

"The administrators are exploring ways of trying to resolve this problem, and if necessary will seek direction from the courts".—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 330-31W.]

But in the Armley cases, we have already had crystal clear direction from the courts. The unequivocal order was, "Pay up now." In other words, the resort to administration looks like a rearguard action of complex corporate gamesmanship to avoid responsibility for paying out legitimate court-won compensation awards. It is not therefore a question of establishing liability, but simply of whether the company has the means to pay.

Federal Mogul cannot claim that Turner and Newall had no money to pay its compensation debts. If it had remained a UK company, Turner and Newall would without doubt have continued to pay out. Why, we are entitled to ask, was Turner and Newall made insolvent? It was a perfectly viable company in the UK. What information was presented to the judge in arguing the case for administration? Could it be that there is a massive question mark over Turner and Newall's insurance cover? Any lack of insurance cover must be of major concern.

In the past, there were doubts about insurance cover. I have the minutes of the board meeting of Turner and Newall on 10 February 1977, which spelled out that it recognised it was not covered. The minutes say:

"When the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act came into force we found ourselves in some difficulty."

They key question is whether the company has been properly covered since that time.

As I understand it, in 1996—after the trial—an insurance policy package was agreed with a consortium of European reinsurers to cap Turner and Newall's asbestos liabilities. The company paid for £500 million of cover, which kicked in after it had paid out a certain amount—I think it was some £373 million—from its own funds. This top-up cover was announced after the verdict on the Margereson-Hancock case in Armley. We are entitled to ask what has happened to that fund. What will happen to it now that we are in the administration process?

At the time, the chairman of Turner and Newall, Sir Colin Hope, said:

"The proposals are intended to bring to an end the uncertainty surrounding the asbestos issue that has overshadowed the group for so many years. Together with the provision already in the balance sheet we now have over £1 billion of cover—about three times the central estimates of the present value of liabilities."

Why do my constituents and other victims not now have access to that insurance fund with their claims? Should they not have first claim on that fund? They have gone through the court procedures to get justice. They have legal proof that they are entitled to compensation for negligence, and they ought to receive first call on that insurance money immediately. Where is it? Why cannot it be ring-fenced and made available?

More recently, Turner and Newall has claimed to be "self-insured", or covered by what I understand is called captive insurance—its own in-house arrangements. According to solicitors, before the administration order on Turner and Newall was approved, the company paid out the asbestos claims itself. The cheques were issued by Turner and Newall, not by an insurance company. That is unusual. In other words, the company's insurance cover is indeed like murky water—far from transparent.

Furthermore, questions about that insurance cover have now been ruled out of order as commercially confidential. Even under administration, why cannot the insurers be traced, named and contacted by the victims' representatives? This issue is crucial: has Turner and Newall provided proper insurance cover for itself, or not?

If it has not, why has the company not been investigated for failing to comply with the law? Why is it allowed to sidestep its legal insurance responsibilities? Did it ever apply to Government Departments for exemption from insurance? If it does have insurance, why are payments to those owed compensation now being denied?

*[Mr. John Battle]*

Why should funds set aside to pay out to victims who take the company to court and win compensation be held back now in administration? Surely that is a defiance of the legal process for justice. As it is, lawyers representing victims cannot contact the insurer. Turner and Newall claims that it is self-insured and it is in administration. This is tantamount to an insurance self-protection racket.

Turner and Newall should have proper cover and should be able to pay. If not, it seems that we are facing devices to reassure investors rather than to protect and compensate victims. No wonder the insurance industry weekly journal—called the *Post*—is proclaiming in its headlines "Asbestos purse closed". This is not about benevolent funds and donations; it is about justice, and justice that has already been won against the company in the courts. Obviously, the war of attrition goes on; resisting the pay-outs to reassure the funding markets seems to be the priority.

I wish now to put some specific questions to the Minister of which I have given her notice. At the time Turner and Newall was purchased by Federal Mogul, were any investigations undertaken by Government Departments into the terms of the sale? With regard to insurance, although several solicitors representing asbestos plaintiffs have attempted over the years to see copies of the certificates issued to the company under the Employers Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969, they have not succeeded. Why is it not possible for claimants' representatives to see the certificates? Why cannot we know about the history of Turner and Newall's employer's liability coverage? Has the Health and Safety Executive over the years been satisfied that Turner and Newall has had insurance that is compliant with legislation? Who were the insurers? What were the dates and nature of the policies? Can the insurance information be put in the Library of the House of Commons so that I can see where my constituents stand?

Does the arrangement under which a company is self-insured and has a so-called captive insurer comply with the Employers Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969? Finally, under the administration order, why cannot insurance funds be ring-fenced so that UK victims of UK companies who have won their cases in court can have first call on it? Is it lawful to bounce compensation cheques when a company is still trading? Is there any way for funds to be released so that claims can be paid out in cases that have been won?

I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to give detailed, chapter-and-verse answers to all those questions, which serve to highlight the issues. However, I should like her to tell me that her Department is to set up an immediate public inquiry into all the issues arising from the application to put J. W Roberts and Turner and Newall plc into administration in the UK.

The effect of that action has been to prevent victims from getting justice. A public inquiry is needed to unlock any funds specifically set aside now, as asbestos victims are both vulnerable and totally innocent. Mesothelioma means that they die of the worst form of cancer imaginable. They do not bring that on themselves, and they deserve compensation. Tragically, those victims do not have years to live and cannot afford to wait.

If a company such as Federal Mogul has found a way of using administration and bankruptcy procedures to ditch its asbestos liabilities and to refuse to pay anything more to victims, that is a scandal that the Government must address. Making the polluters pay obviously means not only that responsibility must be proved, which we have done, and that the moral and legal arguments must be won—we have done that too; it now means taking on the high-level, international corporate gamesmanship that continues the war of attrition against asbestos victims.

I shall close with words from the heartfelt letter that I received from Mrs. Hancock's daughter. She wrote:

"The recent announcement that Federal Mogul has filed for Bankruptcy has, as I am sure you will understand, come as a great shock to myself and the rest of June Hancock's family. To call this a scandal is an understatement and I am writing to urge you to take immediate Parliamentary action on behalf of those innocent victims of Armley who have died, or who are suffering, who will die in the future, as a result of exposure to asbestos that Turner and Newall have been legally held responsible for. My mum battled through her last painful years to achieve legal recourse for compensation for those exposed to environmental asbestos . . . how can it ever be acceptable for a company to ring fence its assets while at the same time using . . . a convenient loophole for washing its hands of its well known asbestos liabilities??? Federal Mogul are clearly very proud that they are 'continuing to serve its existing customers, fulfil current contracts and secure new business'. What about the human suffering? I know, sadly, too well the pain and grief caused by the deadly disease mesothelioma because I have lost my Mum and Grandma to it . . . victims cannot be left in the position of not being able to take legal action, is that not a violation of one's Human Rights?

The situation must be addressed by your Government now, and I would ask you to use your position and influence to bring this local, national and international disgrace to the forefront of the political agenda."

This is a struggle for a just society that must be won. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to move the whole machinery of Government to see that justice is done as well.

7.18 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson):** I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on securing the debate, and on the way in which he continues to represent his constituents in this most important and serious matter. The Government fully understand the concerns that he raises. Those who suffer from this dreadful condition have my utmost sympathy, as do those who may have come into contact with asbestos in the past and who still live with the uncertainty that they may be affected in the future by its potentially lethal legacy. I fully recognise the anxieties of those affected, and I welcome this opportunity to respond to the issues raised by my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend spoke about Turner and Newall. I can confirm that, on 1 October 2001, partners of the accountancy firm Kroll Buchler Phillips were appointed by the court as administrators of 133 out of 182 of the Federal Mogul UK group of companies, as part of a global rescue plan in parallel with chapter 11 proceedings in the United States of America. The company known as Turner and Newall Ltd. is the largest trading company in this UK group of companies.

The Federal Mogul group, which I will refer to as the FM group, is an automotive and vehicle parts manufacturer which carries on business from approximately 295

locations in 53 countries. It is the sole-source provider of one or more critical components for most automobiles produced in the USA and Europe. The business, as my hon. Friend says, is indeed profitable. Global turnover for 2000 was approximately US$6 billion, with 31 per cent. of the total sales made in Europe. The UK group of companies had a turnover in the year to 31 December 2000 of approximately £400 million. It currently employs about 4,500 people.

I understand that the FM group's involvement in the UK commenced, to a significant extent, with the acquisition of Turner and Newall Ltd. in November 1997. That acquisition greatly increased the FM group's exposure to asbestos-related claims from claimants in both the USA and the UK. It is my understanding that those actual and contingent asbestos-related liabilities are threatening the solvency of the FM group. As of 30 June 2001, the FM group estimated its future total asbestos-related liability at US$1.6 billion.

The administration order has been made for the purpose of achieving one or more of the following—the survival of the company and the whole or any part of its undertaking as a going concern, the approval of an arrangement or compromise with creditors, and/or better realisation of the company's assets than would be achieved on a winding-up.

Administration is a collective insolvency procedure involving all creditors and giving all creditors a say. Proposals are put to creditors for their approval in the initial stages. Creditors also have ongoing rights during the course of the administration procedure. They may set up a committee to represent them, for example, and the committee may require the administrator to attend its meetings to give it information.

The creditors also have the power to apply to the court if they consider that the company's affairs are being managed by the administrator in a manner that is unfair or prejudicial. In this case, the administrators of the UK group consider that it is in the best interests of the creditors that the companies should survive so that they can pay their debts from future income—as I have sketched out, there is clear future income and profit in this case—and that the companies should continue to be managed as a group.

In consultation with the administrators, the FM group intends to commence discussions in relation to the development of an agreed global plan or reorganisation, designed to be approved by all classes of creditors. It is expected that this plan will provide a mechanism for managing the asbestos liabilities and propose an arrangement for payment or compromise of all claims.

I am told that the FM group decided to file for chapter 11 protection in the USA because of a growing number of asbestos-related law suits in which the plaintiffs claim to have suffered injury owing to exposure to products containing asbestos. In most cases, the defendants are companies that were acquired by the FM group through merger and acquisition.

In the USA, those members of the FM group that have the bulk of the asbestos liabilities, including Turner and Newall, are defendants in more than 300,000 pending asbestos-related personal injury claims, as of 30 June last year. Additionally, Federal Mogul Corporation, as the current corporate parent of these entities, is named in certain of these law suits, as are several other companies in the FM group. Certain members of the FM group, particularly Turner and Newall, are also defendants in a substantial number of asbestos-related actions in the UK.

I make these points because I understand that the increasing amount of litigation has been due to a number of factors, including the filing of chapter 11 petitions by numerous other parties alleged to be potentially responsible for the injuries suffered by asbestos plaintiffs; many of the former are co-defendants with the FM group in numerous lawsuits. The resulting stay of litigation against such parties has placed increased financial pressure on the group in the form of higher settlement demands from plaintiffs as well as efforts to force it to cover the contributions of now bankrupt co-defendants in existing settlement agreements.

As I said, as of 30 June 2001, the FM group estimated its total asbestos-related liability at $1.6 billion for claims pending and those that can reasonably be expected to be asserted in the future, with $350 million of such liability payable within the following 12 months. The FM group further estimated that more than $900 million of that amount would not be covered by insurance.

The point of going through the detail is to show that, on that basis, it is not difficult to see that the cost of the litigation could overwhelm the FM group. I am told that the magnitude of the litigation left it with no realistic alternative but to seek reorganisation under chapter 11 of the bankruptcy code in the United States and administration under the Insolvency Act 1986 in the United Kingdom.

I understand my hon. Friend's concern and his arguments about attrition and the history of the case. However, there has been a change and I have set out the circumstances that now face those who are trying to achieve their just compensation.

The costs faced by the FM group are greater owing to the approach adopted by the US legal system. It allows individuals to receive compensation even though they are not and may never become ill—there is a marked difference between the US and the UK, as here, only those who are ill receive compensation. Furthermore, in the US, the cases of those who show no signs of illness are grouped with those who have been diagnosed and already show signs, in the hope that juries will sympathise with and award compensation to all, which cannot happen in the UK. Also, large punitive damages to punish a company's activity are awarded in the US even though asbestos production stopped in the early 1970s, which does not happen in the UK. Those factors all drain money away from that available to pay people suffering from asbestos-related illnesses, both in the US and the UK.

I appreciate the fact that my hon. Friend is representing many people who are already suffering the effects of the illness.

**Mr. Battle:** I appreciate the detail in my hon. Friend's response, but what worries me is that cases won already in Leeds and elsewhere will be swamped by those yet to come in America. Will it be possible for her, perhaps with her officials, to meet the lawyers who represent people who have already won cases, to see if we can find a way through this? Administration can take between two and 11 years and all the people claiming will be dead before they get any further forward.

**Miss Johnson:** I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern about the urgency for those affected. Initially, I will be

*[Miss Johnson]*

happy to meet him and discuss those matters in further detail. He has made a number of points about the nature of administration. The compensation cheques that are already outstanding bounce even though a company can still be trading. When a company goes into administration, all payments to creditors are stopped. That is a feature of the administrative arrangements.

I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern about the fact that the administration could take a long time, but we believe that it is in the best interests of all those with outstanding claims for the company to continue to trade, and that a way is found through administration for that to happen.

I cannot say much about the insurance position, which is extremely complex. My hon. Friend endeavoured to sketch out some of that. The legal specialists are working hard to resolve it. There are a number of possibilities and I am assured that the administrators will make a formal announcement as soon as they can. The Employers Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 made it mandatory for certain firms to take out policies when it came into effect in 1972. I understand that Turner and Newall has assured the administrators that it has always complied with its obligations in that regard. The administrators are working hard to establish the full position as regards both employer's and public liability insurance.

I would like to restate that the Government understand and sympathise with the concerns expressed in the debate about those who are suffering from asbestos-related diseases. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that the group is profitable and successful—I believe that we have both said so—and that the interests of claimants will not be served by driving it into liquidation.

The approach adopted by the FM group seems to us the most sensible in the circumstances, but what is important is that the administrators and those representing the interests of all concerned get on with the job quickly. With that in mind, I have asked my officials in the Department's insolvency service to keep me in close touch with the progress of the case, and in response to the arguments that he has made, I invite my hon. Friend to come and discuss further with me in the Department the aspects to which he wants to draw attention.

*The motion having been made after Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour,* MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

*Adjourned at twenty-nine minutes to Eight o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Friday 11 January 2002*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

PRAYERS

## Mr. Speaker's Absence

*The House being met, the Clerk at the Table informed the House of the absence of* MR. SPEAKER *from this day's sitting, pursuant to leave given yesterday.*

*Whereupon,* SYLVIA HEAL, THE FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS, *proceeded to the Table and, after Prayers, took the Chair as Deputy Speaker, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

## Pension Annuities (Amendment) Bill

*Order for Second Reading read.*

9.34 am

**Mr. David Curry** (Skipton and Ripon): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

When I was re-elected to the House, I made three serious, early mistakes. The first was to apply for a private Member's Bill, the second was to be successful, and the third was to choose probably the most complicated subject on offer. I regret that burst of intellectual vanity which led me to decide to choose a measure about which I knew nothing but which I thought would represent an intellectual challenge. At least I was not disappointed in the challenge that it represented, but the lesson to be learned is not to try to accommodate the Whips, because that leads to an enormous amount of additional work and effort.

I have also had to learn not merely a new language, but a new science. Not being a mathematician, I have encountered the science of stochastics. Hon. Members may not be immediately familiar with the word stochastics, but I am told that it means the assessment of probability against standard deviations, which ought to be a mandatory discipline for anyone aspiring to serve in any Whips Office or to be Leader of the House.

I acknowledge the enormous support of the Retirement Income Reform Campaign, in particular Mr. Stephen Lock, who must have wondered what he had got stuck with when the first question he received from me was, "What is an annuity?".

Many hon. Members will have received an enormous amount of mail on this subject. Some people are seriously concerned and I could easily spend an hour relating hardship cases and the anxieties of individuals, but I shall not do so because we need to get to the substance of this business. I could have brought a series of bulging ring binders into the Chamber, all of which would have provided evidence of the urgency of the matter that I wish to address.

It is not a startling insight to say that the pensions industry is in flux. Employers are retreating from final salary schemes, partly because of the impact of the new accounting requirement FRS 17, which requires companies to state their pensions assets and liabilities.

The Government are attempting to create accessible private pensions for people on modest earnings, but there is evidence that they are having only faltering success. Nicholas Timmins in Wednesday's *Financial Times*—that excellent newspaper for which I worked for 10 years—wrote an article with the headline "Compulsory pensions draw closer." We all know that the structure of pensions provision is in flux and is likely to move towards greater obligations on people to make provision to give them security in their old age.

Today, we have the final vote on what may bring to a close the Equitable Life debacle, which has affected the confidence of and faith in the insurance industry. On top of that, there is recognition of the fast-approaching crisis in private pension provision, because of the impact of changing circumstances on the annuity rules.

**Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): My right hon. Friend mentions Equitable Life. Does he agree that, if he is successful with his Bill, a crisis such as has occurred with Equitable Life could not happen?

**Mr. Curry:** I agree with my hon. Friend. I would also assert that, if the Bill is successful, the crises that would have descended upon us in future years will not happen—not merely the crises that individuals will have to face, but those with which the Government will have to deal.

**Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): I am interested in what the right hon. Gentleman said about Equitable Life. I declare an interest as an Equitable Life policyholder—in many ways I wish I was not—and I know that many other hon. Members are also policyholders. The right hon. Gentleman has just asserted that his Bill would prevent a repeat of the problems that have occurred in Equitable Life. Will he expand on the reasons why?

**Mr. Curry:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will listen attentively to the two and a half hours that remain of my speech, during the course of which he will receive a full explanation. If he is not satisfied then, the obvious answer is to take the Bill into Committee, where we will have a much greater opportunity to debate those issues.

The annuities crisis is commonly acknowledged. There have been parliamentary attempts to reform the rules, court action on human rights grounds, and the promise of a Government consultation paper on reform, which we are always told will turn up next week. I think that this time it may be next week, and we will wait with interest to see what it says.

There is a choice. We can try to squeeze a bit more performance out of the old banger. We can put in a new set of plugs, tighten the fan belt, put some new tyres on it, replace the cassette player with a CD player, and hope we can get another 10,000 miles on a wing and a prayer; or we can seek thoroughgoing reform.

I have doubts about how much more performance we can squeeze out of the existing system: because the difference between the best and worst annuities is 0.5 per cent. of yield, the extent to which achieving a better performance would deliver the long-term benefits that people are concerned about remains to be seen, so my Bill sets out a radical reform and I make no apologies for that. However, I emphasise equally that it does so in a deliberate spirit of seeking co-operation with the

*[Mr. Curry]*

Government, unashamedly setting out to meet their legitimate concerns. Indeed, it specifically requires Government action to achieve its full architecture, notably the introduction of certain tax measures, which would give it complete effect.

I have no ideological fixation—that has often been one of the accusations levelled against me—and my interest is in achieving reform that will work. If better and more achievable ideas emerge, I shall recognise them, but I am offering the Government a partnership in Parliament to secure the reform that we all know is necessary.

Why does the current crisis exist? Because people are locked in a one-off no-escape mechanism that no longer serves the purpose for which it was devised. People buy private pensions and receive tax relief on those contributions before the age of 75, but, with the exception of the tax-free lump sum of 25 per cent., they must then commit the whole fund to annuities. The purpose is to secure income in old age to keep the pensioner free of state benefits or welfare.

I agree with that proposition. I do not dispute that it should be central to the legislation. I reject completely the notion that, having benefited from support from the public purse, the pensioner should be acquitted of any obligation to make provident provision for old age, so let the first accusation not be that I am merely seeking to exploit a tax break without repaying the benefit of it.

The problem is not theory or principle, but practice. There is only one source of absolutely secure investment—Government stock. The vast majority of pensioners invest in an annuity that provides a flat-rate return, which cannot be inherited by a spouse, and is ravaged by inflation. Even in the benign environment of 3 per cent. annual inflation, an annuity's value halves over 20 years.

**Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many hon. Members have received letters from constituents urging them to support his Bill, which is one reason for so many of us being present? I have received a letter from my constituent Mr. Desmond Williams, who says:

"Would you please give Mr. Curry's Bill your support. This reform is very overdue as it is very unfair that those people such as myself who have saved and put money into pensions should be forced to take an annuity at very low rates. If I should die, my wife will receive no benefit."

That is exactly my right hon. Friend's point.

**Mr. Curry:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because he has given a single example of the predicament in which people find themselves that could be multiplied thousands of times.

If annuities yield about 12 per cent., the problem is manageable. Such rates were available when the rule was devised following the introduction of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, but the situation has changed dramatically. The House of Commons Library points out that gilt yields have fallen sharply over the past decade with nominal yields on 10-year gilts falling from 10 per cent. throughout the 1990s to 7.5 per cent. in 1996 and 4.5 per cent. in 2000.

The reason for that is obvious. First, the structure of Government debt has changed. I remember the debates when the Chancellor decided that the revenue from the so-called 3G mobile phone auction should go towards eliminating debt. People said, "Is this wise? What will it do to liquidity in the gilts market?" The Government chose to reduce their debt, however, which means that there is less debt to purchase and the supply has shrunk.

Secondly, demand has grown. The Treasury estimates that 4 million people are in personal pension schemes, with 1.4 million in occupational money purchase schemes. The size of the annuities market stood at £8.5 billion in 2001, but it is estimated that it will hit £12 billion in 2005 and £35 billion plus in 2035. People are living longer, both men and women. However, from a starting point of 60 years of age rather than birth, life expectancy is much closer between the two sexes, which means that annuities become more expensive as dependence on them as life support schemes increases.

**Mrs. Angela Browning** (Tiverton and Honiton): I support my right hon. Friend's Bill, but I have one concern, which may simply be a matter of clarification. The principle of equality between men and women in annuity rates is worthy, but in actuarial terms men end up subsidising women because of the differential in life expectancy.

**Mr. Curry:** That is a perfectly valid point, but we made a deliberate decision to have a system that, to use an abbreviated term, may be described as unisex, because women suffer much more severely than men. *[Interruption.]* They may live longer, but that is not a sin, I hope, although it does mean that they receive much worse benefit from the schemes. We have anticipated the trend of international law, which is constantly against such differentiation between men and women. We deliberately built that aspect in, so, although I plead guilty, I am unapologetic over my hon. Friend's charge.

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): My right hon. Friend pleads guilty unnecessarily. Although current actuarial tables show that life expectancy for those in their 20s is greater for women than for men, once people reach 65, which is the age we are discussing, there is little difference between the life expectancy of both sexes.

**Mr. Curry:** I am extremely grateful for that mitigating evidence from a former policeman.

**Bob Spink** (Castle Point): My right hon. Friend has indeed pleaded guilty before being found guilty. The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) is a good one, but it is mitigated by the Bill's excellent inheritance clauses.

**Mr. Curry:** I am grateful for that anticipatory applause, which I shall be happy to receive again when I reach the appropriate point in my speech. Furthermore, when my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton intervened, I was about to say that those factors add to the sharp fall in gilts, which particularly hits women as they pay a premium owing to longer life expectancy.

The substantive point is that the rules are no longer delivering the security to the pensioner or the guarantee to the state for which they were designed, so while the

pensioner is trapped, the state is equally trapped owing to the looming requirement to provide welfare for people who may no longer be able to meet their own welfare needs. The Government admit that. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) asked about

"the size of a pension fund which would generate an annuity capable of establishing eligibility to an element of pension credit on its introduction in 2003".—[*Official Report*, 5 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 431W.]

The Government replied that the sum required in a single flat-rate scheme, which is the most common, is £36,000 for a man and £39,000 for a woman. The figures for an index-linked single life fund rise to £48,000 and £52,000. That again shows the differential between what men and women must pay to secure equivalent benefit.

The Government have also given figures to show that a 40-year-old woman would need £100,000 to buy an annuity at 65 and stay off income support, even with the state pension. The pension credit will of course alter benefit entitlement, but it will not reduce the volume of savings required to keep off benefit. Equally, a single man with £100,000 in savings in annuities will be eligible for income support by 2017, sooner for women.

There is no real difference in the analysis of the problem. Change is needed, and the Government recognise that. The Inland Revenue has approved a scheme to overcome some difficulties—the so-called London and Colonial scheme, which provides for a fund that may be inherited. The problem is that the fund is offshore, high cost in its fees and requires a minimum of £250,000, so if any Labour Members are thinking of saying that I am engineering a scheme designed purely for the better-off, I hope that they will pause for thought before levelling that accusation.

**Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): On that point, does my right hon. Friend agree with my constituent Mr. B. L. Harris of Willingdon Road that many of the people who are suffering are those on lower and middle incomes? He asks why people like him should start making provision in their 20s and 30s and take the risk that, some 50 years on, they will be caught by a very low rate of annuity.

**Mr. Curry:** That is precisely the point. When my hon. Friend's constituent began his scheme it would have been indexed in the expectation that it would keep him in a relatively comfortable, but not exaggerated, lifestyle in his old age, but he may well find himself slipping towards income support, and that is the nub of the problem that we are trying to address today.

My scheme is aimed at the middling saver and at achieving a pot of between £80,000 and £150,000, but I include specific suggestions to allay the Government's concerns and to prevent abuse of the scheme, such as its use to promote tax evasion. My scheme would provide an option. If people wished to remain with the scheme provided by existing legislation, they would be able to do so, with one exception. I am not requiring a change; I am making a change available to those who want it.

My scheme would retain the 25 per cent. tax-free lump sum. There are intellectual arguments about whether the lump sum is sensible, but many people depend on it to pay off an endowment mortgage, and I doubt that any politician in the House has the courage at the moment to suggest that the option should be removed. I put down an intellectual marker that, at some stage, logic may require scrutiny of that.

By the age of 65—I repeat, 65—people would have to buy an annuity to keep off welfare, taking the state pension into account. The Government have to fix that level annually, so I am not pretending to do that. Today, making a reasonably generous calculation, we estimate that the amount would be about £140 a week, again including the state pension. The fund needed to generate that would be about £55,000, and the Bill describes that as the minimum retirement income. The annuity would be indexed, and it would be unisex. The key point is that what was left—not everybody would have anything left—could be invested in a retirement income fund. In other words, people could break out of the obligation to invest the whole sum in low-yielding bonds delivered in what is, in practice, a monopoly marketplace.

There are of course alternative mechanisms. One could prescribe the size of the fund to deliver the minimum income. We chose income rather than capital so that it would be easier for regulations to bring together the pensions pot, benefit under SERPS and defined benefit pensions. We thought that it would be easier, administratively, if we had the same genus, as it were, of provisions.

Under these proposals, drawdown schemes, in which people take income and capital from a fund up to the age of 75, when the fund is annuitised, would no longer be possible, although existing arrangements would run their course. If people were given the freedom over their funds, they would have first to satisfy the obligation to provide for support to remain free of benefit. That is one of the underlying principles of existing provision, and I would retain it. I am sure that there is common accord that that is necessary.

**Mr. Steve Webb** (Northavon): We shall support the Bill, but I am concerned that those who have a small pot and who now simply buy an annuity of their choice would be forced to buy an indexed annuity. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that that would restrict choice, as compared with arrangements at present?

**Mr. Curry:** I accept that it is a restriction, but I would argue that it is a wise move to make in any event. I am trying to move the debate on a little. I accept that there will be elements of the Bill that people will dispute, and that is another reason for the Committee stage. In Committee, we can discuss precisely those modalities, to use, rather riskily, a word imported from the European Union.

**Mr. Waterson:** Just when you thought you were doing so well. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr. Curry:** Few of us thought that pension annuities were a subject so redolent of humour. I hope that it continues.

It should already be clear that I am not inventing a permissive wheeze to let rich people get away with tax murder. The constraints that I have built in are obvious, but the Government should also build in stringent tax provisions—provisions for which I have been attacked on the grounds of, for example, bending over too far

*[Mr. Curry]*

backwards to meet the Government's needs. Once again, I am unapologetic. I think that people must provide for their old age, and I do not intend to resile from that and give people a further benefit when they would already have received a benefit in the form of tax concessions. They should not be able to pocket that benefit without making reciprocal arrangements to protect their position in old age.

I suggest the following tax regime. First, there would be an exit tax on the fund of 35 per cent. at death, unless it was passed on to the spouse, partner or dependent children. The residual fund would be counted towards the estate for the purposes of estate duty, which of course the spouse does not pay. That would be double taxation, and people may want to criticise that, but I am trying to acknowledge the Government's need to make sure that people make adequate provision and to address, in anticipation, the fear that a lot of new money would be going into schemes that would qualify for tax benefit and from which the Government would have no clawback.

I am suggesting measures to prevent the fund being wrapped up into a trust. The Bill seeks to make the trust incapable of assignment, which should effectively close off that option. I suggest that the Government may want to change the rules on gift or inter vivos donations, again to prevent the possibility of exploitation of the scheme to benefit dependants outside the former rules that I explained.

Who would benefit? Aberdeen Asset Management argues that 1.2 million people, or 7.5 per cent. of people between 35 and retirement age, would be assisted. It is estimated that someone starting a scheme today would need to save 11.4 per cent. of net average earnings to reach the minimum income through the annuity—less than the existing arrangements demand.

What would the Government get out of this? I keep emphasising what the Government would get out of my proposals, and I am becoming almost ashamed of how much I am trying to help them. *[Interruption.]* I am delighted to hear that murmur of dissent. First, the Government would get continued annuitisation to get the minimum income, with a kick-off point at age 65 not 75, and therefore the possibility of more taxable income from the payment of the retirement income fund. Secondly, the drawdown scheme, which can diminish the capital available for annuitisation, would end. Thirdly, the Government would get a tax resource to recover their investment, although there may be a time lag. The Treasury should applaud the Bill, and even the dour Scottish spirits at the Department for Work and Pensions should toast me in a wee congratulatory dram.

What are the criticisms of the scheme? The first is that only the rich would do well; the poor would still have to invest in an annuity that mopped up all their savings. But that is what happens now. It is an inevitable consequence of the Government's demand that a fund accumulated for tax benefit should deliver the income for which it is intended. I agree with that. Almost everyone with modest funds buys an annuity at age 65 in any case, and the existing provisions would remain for those who wanted to invest using that vehicle.

The second charge is that the Bill is just tinkering. It is not. It is a radical option. Tinkering would be simply to move the age 75 cut-off point to 80 or 85, but then people would be encouraged to consume even more capital and head with greater certainty towards benefit dependency. The third criticism is that the scheme is a recipe for tax avoidance. I have spent some time explaining the measures that I propose to ensure that that is not the case.

The fourth accusation is that if pensions are made more attractive or, to use the Government's word, the "disincentive" of the present scheme is mitigated, there would be a flood of new money waiting to pour into pension schemes, claiming tax relief and escalating the cost to the public funds. That is the Inland Revenue's nightmare. That claim is exaggerated for three reasons. First, it is not clear that the amount of disposable income is as great as the Revenue fears, especially if the definition of disposable income includes housing cost. There is an argument about what disposable income is. The Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions do not employ the same definition.

**Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Beckenham): I am following my right hon. Friend's argument very closely. Does he agree that part of the reason for the apparent failure of the Government's stakeholder pension policy is that the very group of people who may save £30,000 or £40,000 towards an annuity are precisely those who do not have the disposable income to invest in a stakeholder pension? My right hon. Friend's proposals would be a much better way of dealing with people in the middle income bracket.

**Mr. Curry:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for discovering new reasons for me to approve of my own proposals.

The second reason why I believe that those fears are exaggerated is that it would be plain daft for people to over-invest in a pension given the rigorous fiscal regime that I propose to build around it. To use one of the current in-words, it would be counter-intuitive.

Thirdly, even if there is an increase in costs, the tax rules give the Government the eventual clawback on their investment. It is a crucial issue on which economists disagree—but when did economists not disagree? The Institute for Fiscal Studies argues that 75 per cent. of savings is not generated in lieu of consumption but by movement of funds from one investment to another. This is based on the operation of the so-called 401(k) scheme in the United States. So I do not believe that there is a footloose wad of new money waiting to cascade into pensions and claim tax relief.

**Mr. John Butterfill** (Bournemouth, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the statistics show that the existing availability is wholly underused, even by those who have surplus expendable income that would enable them to do that, and that if the rich wished to have vehicles for this purpose, the enterprise investment scheme or venture capital trusts provide a far more tax-efficient vehicle and do not have the long lock-in of pensions?

**Mr. Curry:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely valuable point and I am grateful to him for that additional information. In any case, it is evident that people are cautious about locking up capital in pension schemes when they may have emergency needs such as unemployment or divorce. To quote a personal example,

two of my children are getting married this year. That could be described as an asymmetric financial shock. [HON. MEMBERS: "Are they girls?"] One is a girl and one is a boy, so there is clearly some negotiation ahead. I put some money by in the Skipton building society, but I am afraid that the Chancellor has made sure that the return on that is much less than anticipated at the time of the investment. No doubt my children will benefit, but the old man is now having to scratch around in a fairly urgent way to finance these extraordinarily happy events. Certainly I would not have wished to lock up too much of my savings against such eventualities.

If the Government are really kept awake by fears of a new demand for rebate, they have the means to address it. They can simply set limits on the amount of income tax rebate on contributions which are lower than the limit on the contributions themselves, and they will have turned the trick in tax terms.

The Bill seeks to solve a real, growing problem, particularly for people of modest means. Moreover, the changes to the way in which businesses deal with pension entitlement accelerate the urgency of that problem. The Government have a legitimate concern: they have a legitimate demand and a real problem. Pensioners, too, have legitimate expectations and an acknowledged grievance. The Bill invites the Government to engage in a necessary debate and challenges them to adopt this solution or to offer a more effective one.

This is a private Member's Bill, so the Government have the whip hand. They can kill the Bill dramatically or they can engineer death by 1,000 amendments. I urge them to take on the challenge of addressing the issue and working to produce a reform in order to free a growing generation of elderly people from the fear that a civilised old age will descend into a struggle for survival.

10.3 am

**Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I know that it is customary for me to congratulate the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on winning the opportunity to present a private Member's Bill, but I can assure him that my congratulations are genuine. I congratulate him both on his luck and on choosing a subject that, as he admitted, many people deem to be fiendishly difficult. The danger of making such a choice is that many people do not engage in the debate but switch off—a dangerous temptation that we have a duty to resist.

Many hon. Members will not have to make a decision on annuities. Several trustees of the parliamentary pension fund are in the Chamber today. We are some of the few lucky people who participate in schemes with defined benefits, so we do not have to take such decisions. However, some of us have policies from previous occupations and many of us have constituents who have written to us with problems.

The caveat to my congratulations is that I have some reservations about private Members' Bills as a vehicle for legislation on complex issues. I share the view of some hon. Members that the House should not fall into the same trap as other organisations and mistake activity for achievement. We should not assume that the more we legislate, the better we are. I am something of a minimalist on legislation. If legislation is important, the Government should introduce it, and if it is not important, they should not legislate. Private Members' Bills can fulfil an important function if they are short, to the point and address an oversight in an earlier measure. In the last Parliament, I took forward such a Bill that had been introduced by the then Member for Wealden. The Government accepted that Bill, which clarified the powers of the health service commissioner.

I have some difficulty with this Bill because it raises an issue of political debate that is also extremely technical. I recall Parliament considering pension splitting on divorce. There was no political disagreement, but we all recognised that getting it right would be complicated, so in 1997 the Labour Government set up a Select Committee to give the matter pre-legislative scrutiny and take advice. Annuities are desperately in need of review and may require a broader vehicle to bring that about. Having said that, the Bill gives us the opportunity to consider what areas to focus on.

**Mr. Butterfill:** The hon. Lady described the Bill as politically controversial, but I am not sure that she is correct. I am chairman of the all-party group on occupational pensions, which for many years has taken the view that this reform should take place. The difficulty is with the Inland Revenue, not party political groups in the House.

**Ms Stuart:** The hon. Gentleman is right in some respects, but the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon referred to the erroneous assumption that is often made that any reforms to annuities will ultimately help only the better-off. There may be some political difference on priorities rather than on the need for reform.

**Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): This debate is assumed to be primarily of interest to those who are already retired. I have received many letters from constituents who are still in work, but nearing retirement. Only yesterday, Mr. Jeffrey Sharpe, from Sawbridgeworth in my constituency, wrote to say that he would love to retire but cannot afford to. Does the hon. Lady agree that we must recognise that the debate affects a much wider group in our communities?

**Ms Stuart:** The hon. Gentleman is right. The debate affects everyone because the financial decisions that have to be made on the point of retirement depend on the tracks that have been laid as soon as we start working, or even earlier. We need a longer period for taking advice. Decisions on retirement should not have to be taken at 65 but could be spread over a broader time scale so that advice can be taken, leading to the right decision being made. At present, decisions on annuities are irreversible, whatever changes in circumstances may arise.

In his pre-Budget statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced a review of annuities. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say when we can expect that. Whether the Government give the Bill a fair wind or condemn it to death by 1,000 amendments, I hope they will take note of the issues that are raised today and include them in the review.

Returning to annuities, it should be simple to provide for one's old age. The theory is straightforward. During a working life of some 40 years, we put aside money for our old age. The state collects taxes to provide a state retirement pension. When the Labour party took office in

*[Ms Stuart]*

1997, one of its priorities was to help those who were perceived to be the worst-off pensioners. It introduced legislation to allow those of working age to make better provision for their old age, and I commend the Government on what they have done for existing pensioners and their determination to help the poorest pensioners as a top priority.

Last night, I re-read the report of the pension provision group, "We all need pensions: the prospects for pension provision", published in 1998 under the chairmanship of Tom Ross. It still provides a valuable and comprehensive analysis of the future of pension provision, but I was struck by the fact that the word "annuities" did not even appear in the index. It was not deemed to be an issue of great importance then, but it is. So although I commend Labour's achievements on pensions, I warn my hon. Friend the Minister that, in those famous words, much has been done but much more needs to be done.

Decisions about annuities are often difficult. I offer the House a working definition of "annuity" as a policy purchased, usually from an insurance company, to provide a regular income from a lump sum. Anyone who has paid into a money purchase scheme—one in which the benefits are not defined as a percentage of the final salary—converts the pot of money accumulated into an annuity which then provides the pension. The great virtue of the scheme is that people are in no danger of running out of money simply because they live for too long.

None of us knows in advance for how many years we will have to provide, although actuarial forecasts provide us with an indicator. It is clear that people now tend to live longer, and by pooling the risk with others, we can provide much more reliably for ourselves. It has been mentioned that women live longer, and current evidence supports that. I do not know why that is the case; we could have an interesting debate on that. I wonder whether the size of the gap is sustainable. Our actuarial forecasts assume that, even after 65, that gap will not widen, but the German Government, in a recent life expectancy forecast, have assumed that it will widen increasingly.

**Mrs. Browning:** The latest figures produced by the Government show that children born last year will have a life expectancy of 74.91 years for men and 79.86 for women. There is still a five-year difference.

**Ms Stuart:** That is one way to look at the ultimate figures, but if we consider what is happening by 10-year age groups, the figures are different. Longevity is determined by such factors as infant nutrition, so the post-war generation, born between 1945 and 1955, will probably have a profile different from that of later generations. We need to segment the figures more carefully.

The principle of insurance is pooling risks. Separating out various groups is the start of a dangerous tendency. I declare a generic gender interest, and I am delighted that clause 1(4)(c) provides that annuities purchased to provide the proposed minimum retirement income should be provided on a unisex basis. We should not undermine the principle of pooled risk by separating provision for the genders. *[Interruption.]* The Conservative Front-Bench spokesman appears to doubt that. We are equalising pension age and I declare a further interest because I am in the first group of women—born in 1955—whose retirement age will be the same as men's.

**Mr. Dismore:** Is there not a difference between the pooling of risk between the genders by the state, which carries it across the whole economy, and the pooling of risk between individuals who happen to be men or women? It is clear that it is part of the state's responsibility to consider the issue, but does my hon. Friend agree that, as matters stand, we could run the risk of robbing Peter to pay Jane?

**Ms Stuart:** We may, but, on balance, it is a risk that I am prepared to run. I support the concept of annuities, but they have their drawbacks, one of which is that the Government force everyone with a defined contribution pension to buy one. We do not have a choice. It is also the only financial decision that is irreversible. Once an annuity has been bought, one cannot make any changes.

The decision is not a simple one. There are many different types of annuity: capital protected, single-life, joint-life, level, impaired-life, escalating, investment-linked. I will not go on and I certainly will not try to explain the various types. Despite the huge variety available, the choices that people make are limited. In his explanatory document, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon says:

"We have also rejected trying to create 'fancy annuities'".

We do not need to offer a wider range of products, because people already find it difficult to choose. Rates available vary frequently, with daily changes by many providers. A company that gives the best deal on a Monday may well no longer be the best buy on Friday. Continuing, long-term, high-quality financial advice is therefore crucial. Usually that is least likely to be available to those with small capital sums available—the least well-off. That is one reason why I urge the Minister not to approach the Bill with the view that it will assist only the better-off. Far from it: some changes to annuities will help those with smaller capital sums, because the evidence suggests that they make the worst decisions. For example, only about a third of people use the open-market option, and it is those with larger pension pots who do so, but that represents more than half the total value of annuities purchased. The open-market option is invariably the better option and it should be chosen more often by those with smaller pension pots.

**Mrs. Browning:** Does the hon. Lady agree that many companies do not disclose as openly as they might that policies are subject to an open-market option? It appears in small print and is not always pointed out to policyholders.

**Ms Stuart:** I agree, and the option should be made clearer. Most estimates suggest that more than 50 per cent. of those purchasing annuities do not get the best rate. The market for annuities is growing rapidly. In 2001, it was estimated to be worth some £8 billion. I expect the market to grow, not least because more and more company pension schemes are moving to defined contributions, rather than the more traditional defined benefits system. Government policies that encourage personal and stakeholder pensions will further that trend. Some estimates suggest a growth rate of 20 per cent. a year.

I support annuities as a vehicle for providing income, but we must make them work better. That will not benefit only the better-off as is often argued, but will improve annuities to help the less well-off. One improvement that may not require legislation is the provision of much better advice. I have already said that once a decision has been made, it is irreversible. Many people reach retirement age and are faced with complex decisions that they are simply not equipped to make. We should make it mandatory to take advice before final decisions are made. Ideally, such long-term decisions should be reached after lengthy consideration of options, but I accept that only those with larger sums of money available will have long-established relationships with financial advisers.

It is essential that forms are more easily understood and standard forms must ask the essential questions that will enable individuals to obtain the best rate available for their chosen annuity at the time of purchase. The present forms vary greatly in the language that they use. Many do not spell out the facts, and the language used is not uniform. The Association of British Insurers made a first step in the right direction when it proposed that all pension providers should clarify the availability of the open-market option. We should go further. For example, the proposal still does not ensure that members of occupational defined contribution or group personal pension schemes are choosing the right annuity or getting the best rate.

We need to ensure that before the final decision is made, everyone has answered the important basic questions to determine what kind of annuity is best for them and how they can obtain the best rate available for their chosen annuity at the time of purchase. That raises the question of how the advice is to be paid for. Currently, annuities carry an initial commission of, on average, 1 to 1.4 per cent. but in some cases it can be as much as 2 per cent. For an annuity of, say, £25,000, a sum of at least £250, or as much as £500, is deducted by the annuity provider even if—as is often the case—no advice is provided at all. For those who do not use an independent financial adviser, such a sum would be available to pay for advice. People in the industry say that for fairly straightforward settlements, a two-hour session would be sufficient. I accept that, at present, there are not enough advisers to meet the potential demand, but I see no reason why that should not change. As more people require the advice, the market will respond.

How do we ensure that the best rate is available? IFAs already use services that provide essential information. We need an extension of the database, with some safeguards, to ensure that rates quoted are reliable. That should not cause great technical difficulties. Close consultation with insurance companies and annuity providers is essential, but I cannot see any major problems. We need a commitment by the industry to have an annuities exchange and to provide the database so that people can access it and get up-to-date information. Again, I see no reason why that could not be policed by the Financial Services Authority.

To make annuities work better, we need to move towards a standard form of wording to help everyone to understand their options and a requirement to take advice before a decision is made. That must be combined with the pooling of information on annuities and the returns available at any given time in a way that is easily accessible and reliable. Those suggestions would improve the workings of the annuity system.

In the long term, the Government ought to be far more radical in overhauling the system. First, there are far too many different and often conflicting rules governing the annuities of different parts of one's pension. Rules need to be harmonised to provide a single set of rules for the various elements of an annuity.

The insurance industry itself has to improve its administrative systems. It often takes months for providers to transfer sums. The ABI initiative in this context is welcome, but it should be a mandatory requirement to prevent unnecessary delays and cumbersome administration. As I said, sometimes the best open-market rates available on a Monday may not be the best on Friday. However, companies sit on any request for months on end. That means that it is not only difficult to find the best deal but difficult to implement it practically.

We must establish a system that enables people to keep track of their old pension entitlements. That must strike a chord with everybody in the Chamber. If we all stopped to think, we would find that we have accumulated an array of pension entitlements during our working lives. I see no reason why we could not consider a system for updating the record of entitlements together with the issue of the P45.

In the long run, a process that makes it clear to people that they need to start planning early, and that the company that provides the saving vehicle during their working lives is not the same company that then pays their pension, is essential. That must be addressed by the Government, employers and the industry collectively. Far too many people assume that because their savings have been made with one company during their working lives, that company will also be the best provider of their annuity; far from it. However, no one agency can do that alone.

Income drawdown charges are far too high and investment-linked annuities should be made transferable. I welcome the thinking behind clause 1(7), particularly the provision that money may be withdrawn from the retirement investment fund at any time. I am attracted by the argument that once basic provisions have been made—for example, the requirements for a minimum retirement income; we can have endless arguments about how that is determined, and there are mechanisms by which we may do that—there should be a greater freedom on how the rest of the capital is used and invested.

The current age limits for retirement are increasingly out of step with people's wishes and lifestyles. Some people want to stay in work longer, or combine working and partially drawing on their pensions. For example, I see no reason why we should not allow people to take the lump sum separately from the rest of the pension. People could partially retire and live on the capital from the tax-free lump sum at first, and then annuitise the rest of the pension later when they finish earning altogether. That is currently not possible. Much greater flexibility at the point of retirement is needed to reflect people's wishes.

**Mrs. Browning:** That option is already available in many pension schemes.

**Ms Stuart:** The option is available in some schemes, but it ought to be made far more widely available. Take-up is low, despite the use of the phrase "a flexible decade in retirement". People do not consider it as a matter of course.

*[Ms Stuart]*

I hope that the Minister, in considering her response to the Bill—with which I broadly agree—will consider some of these suggestions. I ask her for help on one issue on which I have not had an answer and which was also raised by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon.

We all like to quote our constituents, and my constituent Mr. Bellamy wrote to me just after Christmas. He said that, all his working life, he had planned ahead and tried to make the best financial provisions for his and his wife's retirement. He behaved and acted in exactly the way that the Government wish to encourage: he has planned, provided and thought ahead responsibly. He outlined the difficulties that he foresaw in being forced to purchase an annuity once he reaches the age of 75. He cannot see any rational reason for fixing it at the age of 75, and asked me why that age was chosen. I, too, cannot see what is so magic about 75.

I note that the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon said that he rejected the idea of deferring the obligation to take an annuity from 75 to a later age; there may be good and rational reasons for that. I fail to see a rational reason for the age of 75, and I would be grateful for any indication from the Minister as to the thinking on that matter.

We need to review the rules relating to annuities to allow more people to get the best possible deal. Administration needs to be simplified, and more and better advice is needed. This will not, as is so often and erroneously said, help a small handful of people who are better off, but a great many people—and disproportionately those with smaller funds.

The Bill proposes some positive changes to the current regime. If the Minister does not feel able to support the Bill today—something which, on balance, I would regret—I hope that she will take the speeches today into account in the review that was promised in the pre-Budget report. Despite the fact that this subject is sometimes difficult to understand fully—I accept that it is technically difficult—it affects all our constituents.

The rules no longer serve the original purpose of annuities or our constituents. Changes are necessary, and I hope that the debate today—even if the Bill goes no further—will contribute significantly to work on the subject.

10.28 am

**Mr. Howard Flight** (Arundel and South Downs): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on securing the debate. This is a subject on which Conservative policy for the last four years has been to abolish the obligation to buy an annuity and to propose legislation broadly similar to the Bill. Personally, I have campaigned for four years on this matter, and I have worked with Dr. Oonagh Macdonald of the Retirement Income Reform Campaign. As everyone in the House knows, there is broad cross-party support here for change.

I should probably also declare an interest, as I have a money-purchase pension. If Members of this House found that their pension scheme was a money-purchase one, there would be a rather more acute interest in the subject than there has been.

I very much hope that there will be a positive response from the Minister today in the light of the Inland Revenue consultations. It seems that the ship of state may at last be turning on this issue and that the Government have heard many of the good points made by the Retirement Income Reform Campaign.

I do not believe that a more flexible annuity is the correct answer. The Government and the Financial Services Authority have, in all other territories, campaigned vigorously against the unnecessary costs of insurance wrapping of savings. To tell people that they had to pay extra insurance company charges for a product that they manifestly wanted would be a travesty in this crucial area.

There is already an approved annuity scheme that permits people to select a choice of unit trusts and to pass balances on to their heirs at death. The problem is that the costs are 1.5 per cent. per annum and the front-end charge is 3.75 per cent. Again, I cannot think that the Government or the Inland Revenue would want to encourage such charging when, in all other areas, they are campaigning vigorously against it.

I echo the point that some of the things that the Minister for Pensions has said show him to be out of touch. About 1.5 million people will benefit from the changes proposed and many more will do so in the future, given the 8 million or so with personal pension savings who will be eligible. In addition, a recent Winterthur survey showed that only 13 per cent. of people believed it fair to force people to buy an annuity. The Government should realise that a major reason for the disappointing sales of the stakeholder pension has been that people object to the Soviet-style requirement to buy an annuity. They know that annuities are not good value and they do not want their pension savings to get locked in.

**Richard Ottaway:** The Minister for Pensions said that the measure would benefit only the wealthy. He went beyond the position that my hon. Friend has deftly described and introduced the politics of envy into the debate.

**Mr. Flight:** I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. That is the point; I was endeavouring to be polite, but the right hon. Gentleman is mistaken in thinking that in this case the interest is limited to the better-off.

Canada has pension arrangements that are not dissimilar to ours. Some 14 years ago, it introduced changes permitting those with regulated retirement savings plans, which are rather like stakeholder pensions, to have the choice of putting the money into a pension account as an option for buying an annuity on retirement with, of course, everything drawn out of that being taxed as income. The Government will be interested to know that since that change, the number of people participating in those schemes has doubled to 40 per cent. of the work force. The powerful message from that experience is that if we want the stakeholder type of arrangement to succeed, there needs to be a package that people find acceptable.

It is clear that many people simply do not like having to surrender their pension savings for a bad-value annuity. The cost of annuities has virtually doubled over the past decade. Part of the cause has been the fall in inflation, but it is crucial to realise that real long-term yields on which

annuities are based have virtually halved as well. That has essentially been the result of fiscal surpluses, partly from licensed sales—in other words, a contraction in the supply of gilts available—at a time when demand has been rising dramatically. That demand is partly from maturing money-purchase pension schemes—£8.5 billion last year, £12 billion in two years' time—growing at roughly 20 per cent. compound. In addition, the remaining mature final-salary schemes now have a growing demand for gilts—we need only look at what Boots has done. So there is a complete mismatch in supply and demand which has, not surprisingly, driven down real yields and is making annuities relatively bad value.

**Mr. Butterfill:** Does my hon. Friend agree that legislation has played its part? The introduction of the minimum funding requirement, the requirement for improved reserving regimes for insurance companies and, most recently, FRS 17, which no doubt motivated Boots, have all meant much more institutional demand for these same financial instruments.

**Mr. Flight:** Indeed, yes. The Governor of the Bank of England has acknowledged that it is unhealthy for the imbalance between the supply of and the demand for gilts to worsen.

How an annuity yield is calculated is a mixture of the long-term redemption yield, the life expectancy and what the insurance company's book looks like. The biggest single factor is the long-term yield. People who retire and have to buy annuities have, to some extent, subsidised low-cost Government borrowing, for which the Chancellor has no doubt been pleased to claim credit in the national interest. People are not stupid; those forced into buying annuities know that they are paying.

The problem is worsening. Final salary participation has fallen to levels as low as those of the 1950s. There has been a major shift to money-purchase schemes across companies. In the past five years, 24 per cent. of firms moved to money-purchase schemes. Last year alone, 46 major companies, including Sainsburys, BT, ICI and Lloyds TSB, closed their final salary schemes. I repeat the point made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) that Members of Parliament, civil servants and everyone in the public sector are in a privileged cocoon, with indexed final salary arrangements. If, dare I suggest, Inland Revenue officials had money-purchase pension schemes, I feel that the issue would have been addressed long ago.

**Mr. Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way and for supporting this excellent Bill. I confirm that from the social security point of view there has never been any opposition to these proposals. Indeed, I strongly supported moves of this kind when in government. The opposition has always come from the visceral opposition of the Inland Revenue to any measure that defers payment of tax even if, at the end of the day, extra tax more than compensates for that deferral. If there is Government opposition to the Bill and we cannot get it through today, my hon. Friend's proposal that Inland Revenue officials have money-purchase pensions would allow us to make a lot of progress.

**Mr. Flight:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his support. However, I do not think that I would want to be labelled by the Inland Revenue as the person who introduced that measure.

On investment, most people buy guaranteed annuities which are not index linked because they get a better immediate yield and because index-linked annuities are even more expensive. Most people buy them at 65. Average life expectancy at 65 is now, if we take the combination of two spouses or partners, up to 25 years. Buying an annuity amounts to putting all one's savings for a 25-year view into gilts. I repeat my earlier point that if someone went to a financial adviser and said, "I want to do something sensible and prudent with my capital for the next 25 years to ensure that I have a reasonable income and return to live on" and the adviser said, "I would put the whole lot in gilts if I were you," the FSA would attack that adviser for giving unwise and negligent advice. No one knows what might happen to inflation over the next 25 years. It is safe in nominal terms but it is a highly risky approach in real terms.

Unless people protect themselves with inflation-linked annuities, which in general they do not, there is a major risk for those who retire now when inflation and interest rates are very low that, at some stage in the next 20 years, factors may conspire to raise the level of inflation significantly and destroy the value of the annuities.

**Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): In the light of his remarks about gilts, is the hon. Gentleman prepared to venture any comment on the decision of the Boots pension fund?

**Mr. Flight:** I could bore the House for a long time on that subject. Boots had little choice, but I would enjoy a full and frank exchange on that subject in another arena.

The Bill addresses two crucial concerns. First, the changes should not offer some tax-advantageous schemes for people to save in pension schemes and then pass them on to their heirs. There is a withdrawal tax as well as inheritance tax and the proposals involve tightening arrangements that may exist if one is lucky enough to die before 75 and have a drawdown from which one has drawn nothing. Secondly, there is a necessary requirement for people to purchase an index-linked minimum annuity. Pricing for those should be equal for men and women; once people are over 60, the difference in life expectancy between the two sexes is now less than two years, and it is likely to become even less. That would be a sensible arrangement, even if marginally unfair.

**Mrs. Browning:** I am sorry to be pedantic, but can my hon. Friend see that actuarial questions of equalising the annuity for men and women could have implications in other areas? For example, might not there be an equalisation of the cost of life insurance for smokers and non-smokers? What about women, who can sometimes obtain favourable car insurance because we are better drivers and have fewer accidents? Would not the industry see equalisation as a precedent to be used to our disadvantage?

**Mr. Flight:** I thank my hon. Friend, but I believe that the market is more flexible than that. In view of my record on cigarette smoking, I am one of the few people who could buy an attractive annuity because of the reduction in my life expectancy.

*[Mr. Flight]*

Somewhere in government, there seems to be an objection in principle to the idea that people should be able to pass on to their children anything from their pension saving. I see no logical or fair grounds for that. Whatever is passed on should be fairly taxed and should not provide some sort of scheme for tax saving. However, in principle, passing something on is surely a good thing. If people choose to take less pension with a view to passing something on to their children, they are surely entitled to do so.

The Treasury has expressed concern that if the Bill's reforms were introduced, there would be a huge increase in pension saving with a substantial tax cost. I thought that the Government wanted to increase pension saving. The more there is, the lower will be the massive future cost of the minimum income guarantee and pension credit.

There is no evidence to support the Treasury's assertion. Parliamentary questions from Opposition Members have obtained the response that the Government have no central data on pension contributions. Generally, people save what they can afford for their pension. They may at present save slightly less than they can afford, particularly in the case of stakeholders, but it is unrealistic and unfounded to think that people would leap into saving massive amounts if no tax advantages were offered for assets passed on to one's heirs.

There is a particular problem for Plymouth Brethren, a minority whose faith does not permit them to buy annuities. The Bill does not solve all their problems, but it goes some way to doing so. It is reasonable that a deeply held, politically inoffensive religious belief should not be ignored.

**Ms Stuart:** I have a problem with the hon. Gentleman's point about inheritance. The basic assumption underlying our tax structure of savings is that the Government want people to put away money for their old age and to use it for their old age. There must be some safeguard on that principle. People cannot have their cake and eat it. When people buy an annuity that will provide for them for however long they live, they cannot say that if they die early, someone can inherit it. We must make up our mind what we want.

**Mr. Flight:** With respect, I do not believe that the hon. Lady is looking at the point clearly. First, it would be fair if the tax benefits of the savings were returned to the state and taxpayers. Secondly, many people are saving for their old age through individual savings accounts—formerly through personal equity plans—and there are no problems with passing those on. Thirdly, people who are able to take tax-free lump sums from their pension savings may pass those on. The point is that there should be fairness as far as tax is concerned, not that there should be a principled ban on passing on money to one's heirs.

I shall close where I began. I worry that the Government will seek to answer the problems by proposing more flexible annuities. That would, to some extent, succumb to the interests of the insurance industry as well as being contrary to the general FSA and Treasury principles to discourage people from incurring the unnecessary costs of insurance wrapping of savings.

It is time to allow people to manage their pension savings on retirement if they wish to do so. Most people would continue to buy annuities, but Soviet-style compulsion is not acceptable to our society. If the Government do not bite the bullet in the near future, there will be growing problems. Private sector pension savings will increasingly decline and near-term annuity yields could decline further with costs rising higher.

A rising tide of maturing money-purchase pensions will come to the market over the next few years as post-war baby boomers of my generation retire. Why cannot Britain follow Canada and Ireland, which addressed these points, respectively, 14 and four years ago? Nothing of what the Revenue fears has resulted from that. Those fears are false bogeys. The Government should stop prevaricating and get on with addressing what the majority of people of all shades of political opinion have campaigned for. I have had more letters on from my constituents on this matter than on any other, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon has pointed out that the Department for Work and Pensions has also supported change.

Will the Government bite the bullet? The Opposition fully support my right hon. Friend's excellent Bill.

10.48 am

**Mr. Mark Hendrick** (Preston): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on coming so high in the ballot and on having the opportunity to introduce his Bill.

The Bill is aimed at amending the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, which obliges personal pension scheme operators to acquire pension benefits for their members by the purchase of an annuity by the age of 75. That is a strange age, and I am not sure why it was chosen. I shall return to that point.

The Bill would require annuity purchase to the extent necessary to secure what is referred to as a minimum retirement income. That is desirable from everyone's point of view. That income would be set annually by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Quite how the Chancellor would set that figure, I am not aware, but I am sure that there are some talented people in the Treasury who would give guidance. I hope that the Bill would result in incomes for pensioners greater than the current minimum income guarantee while not increasing the burden on the state. By its nature, I do not think that it would increase the burden on the state.

The Bill would also abolish the rule that requires that the whole of an accumulated pension fund, after deduction of the tax-free lump sum, be used to buy an annuity for the pension scheme by the time the pensioner reaches 75. The age of 75 seems fairly arbitrary to me, and probably a good deal more flexibility should be allowed. If hon. Members asked me what the age should be, I would be honest and say that I do not know. Perhaps the proposed consultation will throw a little more light on that. The House can probably find some consensus about whether the age should be fixed or there should be some flexibility.

The Bill will also allow residual funds on death to be passed to the member's estate, subject to what the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon refers to as an exit charge, except where the beneficiary was a spouse or partner of the scheme member, when it would be passed on tax free. That is an excellent idea, which will bring confidence and certainty to people investing in such schemes. In the past, pensioners had doubts and lost confidence because they did not know whether they

would receive the full benefit of their investment. Those doubts could be offset by the knowledge that a spouse or partner would benefit if they did not.

The Bill will also provide for the residue of the pension fund to be invested through a tax-exempt retirement income account, of which I am in favour.

As I said, the Bill will remove pensioners' obligation to use all their pension savings to buy an annuity by the age of 75. It will substitute for the existing annuity purchase rule a requirement to buy an annuity sufficient to provide an income above envisaged income support levels by age 65—again, a laudable aim. The annuity is to be index-linked. I and other Labour Members support that, and I shall be interested to hear what the Minister has to say on that point.

The aim would be to buy an annuity to meet the minimum income requirement. The current rules take away any option that pensioners currently have and force them to buy an indexed annuity. One or two hon. Members have mentioned the case of people with smaller funds. Independent financial advisers will not be able to give the same guidance as in the past because a minimum retirement income would be obligatory. That is an interesting scenario, and again I shall be interested to hear the Minister's comments.

I accept that the scrapping of income withdrawal will be beneficial. The current flexibility to draw an income of 35 to 100 per cent. of annuity income will no longer exist. In addition, any funds not required for the annuity purchase would be reinvested in a retirement income fund from which people could withdraw at will as much or as little as they wished. The retirement income fund will, I hope, be allowed to grow tax free. Again, I shall be interested in the Minister's comments.

Obviously, the setting up of such a fund would need cautious deliberation to establish which was the best institution to manage the fund and what were the best financial products in which to invest it. Clearly, that would involve risk analysis and consideration of all the individual's financial and personal circumstances. There will be a need for continuing advice until the pensioner's death.

As one would expect, any withdrawals from the fund during the life of the pensioner will be treated as income and subject to income tax, but the mechanism for applying a tax on withdrawals needs to be clarified. After the consultation, there should be some debate about how the tax mechanism would work.

It is intended to amend the Bill so that any funds left in the retirement income fund on the death of a pensioner should be taxed at 35 per cent. unless, of course, any sum remaining is to be transferred to a relative, the member's spouse, partner or dependent child, when no tax will be levied.

I understand from the figures that the tax yield on death between the age limits for drawdown is expected to be up to £100 million this year. If the amount of funds in drawdown remains static and funds pass immediately to families on the death of a scheme member, a similar annual sum will probably go to the Exchequer, which I am sure will please the Treasury.

An important issue is the pensioner's access to residual funds and the fact that funds could be inherited beyond the age of 75. Another is the issue of tax exemptions. I believe that those measures will possibly give an incentive to people with large pots to move savings from other sources into pension products that would be subject to considerably more tax relief.

The Bill will also provide for annuity purchase only to the extent of the MRI. If that was set at the level of the current minimum income guarantee, the cost of an annuity that would pay an equivalent income would be about £54,000 for a man aged 65. Assuming that people would take their maximum tax-free lump sum, the necessary fund size would be about £72,000. If it were index-linked, about £95,000 would be needed.

**Richard Ottaway:** Is the hon. Gentleman taking into account the value of the personal pension fund in those figures?

**Mr. Hendrick:** Yes, I understand that it is included.

Most of those who retire have pension funds of far less than the amounts that I have cited. The average is about £30,000. The changes proposed in the Bill would benefit—and I have heard what Opposition Members have said—wealthier sections of the population who can build up larger pots, but in practice the majority of ordinary people would still be required to use the whole of their fund to buy an annuity and so would not gain anything from the change. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon mentioned that that was currently the case, and I accept that, but I would have hoped that some attempt would be made to help poorer pensioners. Clearly, that is not the aim of this Bill.

**Mr. Greenway:** I am listening closely to the hon. Gentleman's speech. He speaks knowledgeably about a complex issue, but does he recognise that contribution limits are laid down by statute? Admittedly, many of the limits are not used to the full by individuals, but they prevent the so-called wealthy from taking advantage.

**Mr. Hendrick:** I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, but my concern was more for poorer pensioners than about the limitations placed on the wealthy.

I look forward to the consultation document whose publication is expected in January 2002. I understand that the consultation period will run until April 2002. It would probably be a good idea not to force changes to the Bill until the outcome of that consultation is known, but I await the Minister's advice on that point.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in the period leading up to the consultation some people will be disproportionately affected, including one of my constituents who will have the misfortune to reach the age of 75 on Sunday and for whom there is no escape without dispensation from the Minister? Incidentally, the Minister has not replied to my letters—two in December and one this month—on this issue as it affects my constituent. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be more equitable if the Minister now froze the current requirement for those people immediately affected, until the outcome of the consultations and the pending court case?

**Mr. Hendrick:** Obviously, I sympathise with the hon. Lady's constituent, but many people have reached the age

*[Mr. Hendrick]*

of 75 in the two years before the introduction of the Bill. If legislation is to be drafted properly, the consultation period is important, so the Bill should be neither hurried nor delayed on account of one pensioner, however worthy.

The clear aim of a pension scheme is to provide a satisfactory income to last throughout the whole of the pensioner's retirement. It is hoped that the substantial tax relief given to schemes will encourage and support people in that aim. Currently, the only way that a pension scheme that cannot pay a pension to its members from its own resources can guarantee to provide a lifelong income is through the purchase of an annuity. As many Members have pointed out, that is especially important given recent increases in longevity. The proposals could form the basis for the provision of a satisfactory income for the whole of retirement.

To some, annuities are currently seen to represent poor value owing to low interest rates and changes in the markets for financial products in the run-up to the purchase of annuities. That stems from the higher cost of annuities compared with the costs a few years ago. However, that higher cost arises from several factors that do not necessarily bear on value. Increased longevity has been mentioned. Low inflation and interest rates have pushed down the returns on Government bonds and gilts so that providers have had to purchase more gilts in order to maintain the same steady stream of income.

The Bill would mean that the real value of an annuity will not be eroded as it was in the past. I am sure that is what the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon intended. Furthermore, as we have heard, the pooling of risks that underlies an annuity—whereby those people dying early in effect subsidise those who survive the longest—will diminish with time, for the reasons given by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan). The early death of a pensioner should no longer be seen as providing a bonanza for the insurer. I look forward to the progress of the Bill.

11.3 am

**Mr. Steve Webb** (Northavon): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) not only on securing this important debate but on the unprecedentedly entertaining way in which he discussed annuities. We all enjoyed it. He was right to pay tribute to the work of the Retirement Income Reform Campaign, which has gone about its work in a well-informed and effective manner. Its work is to be applauded.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) brought these issues to the fore many times during the last Parliament, as I have also tried to do on some occasions. The purchase of annuities has become more important owing to the growth of stakeholder and personal pensions and is even more significant because of the increasing trend for occupational pension coverage to move towards a money-purchase basis. We might argue about whether we are discussing only the rich or the nearly rich, but even if that were true at present, it will become less true over time. The issue is important.

The hon. Gentleman referred to Stalinist compulsion. If my memory serves me correctly, the whole personal pensions regime was introduced in 1988 by that well-known Stalinist Chancellor, Nigel Lawson. The Conservative party has had an opportunity to deal with that Stalinist situation, but has so far failed to do so. Perhaps today will see a change in that.

**Mr. Flight:** The point is that in the 1980s, annuities were good value and attractive products. During the 1990s, it became apparent that that was no longer true, but the obligation to buy an annuity goes back even further than the 1980s.

**Mr. Webb:** Indeed.

As I said earlier, the Liberal Democrats are broadly supportive of the Bill. We certainly believe that the general principle of annuity reform is sufficiently important for the Bill to receive a Second Reading. Some of the detailed concerns that I shall raise should be understood in that context.

In the past, the Government have made two objections to the principle of relaxing compulsory annuity purchase at the age of 75. The first is that the well-off older person—the woopie—will blow it all on a world cruise, and then be thrown back on the mercy of the state. The poor Department for Work and Pensions would have to pick up the tab.

The second objection is that the taxpayer has provided the incentive to save throughout a person's working life and unless the money—with the exception of the lump sum—is converted into an annuity to provide a pension on retirement, the taxpayer will have paid out without return. As the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon pointed out, taxpayers will have given a subsidy but received nothing back.

Both arguments are fatally flawed. The objection that the Department for Work and Pensions will have to pick up the tab merely argues, like the Bill, for a minimum level of annuity. It would provide a minimum income from the pot, not that the whole pot should be spent on an annuity. There are two distinct points. As long as the person does not throw themselves on to the mercy of social security subsequently, what they do with the rest of their pot is no concern of the Department for Work and Pensions.

**Mr. Dismore:** I follow the logic of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. One of the issues that I want to raise later—if I catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker—is the interrelationship between the Bill and pension credit. I fully accept the point on the minimum income guarantee, but there are some difficult and complex arguments as regards the fact that pension credit might come into operation before the Bill takes effect. Will the hon. Gentleman give us his views on that point?

**Mr. Webb:** The hon. Gentleman is right. I agree with him. If he will allow me to follow the logic of my remarks, I shall deal with that concern later.

It is an entirely proper principle that people should be required to ensure that they do not throw themselves on the mercy of the Department for Work and Pensions. To put that into operation is difficult, however, and I shall return to that matter. The hon. Gentleman is right that the pension credit makes things much more complicated.

As regards the argument about tax relief, the nature of tax relief on pensions is often misunderstood. It is sometimes presented as a huge middle-class perk, but, in

essence, it is deferred taxation: instead of paying tax when we earn the money, we pay it later when we draw a pension. That is a cost to the Exchequer in terms of deferral and of the lump sum. There is also a potential cost in that, on average, people probably pay tax at a lower rate when they retire than when they contribute. In principle, the process avoids double taxation; it is not a big £10 billion or £12 billion middle-class tax perk designed to encourage us all to save for our old age. Clearly, it is about timing—the Government get the money eventually. That is an important point.

**Mr. Greenway:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the real cost to the Exchequer is when people do not make provision and fall on the state from the age of 60 or 65, as we have seen in recent years?

**Mr. Webb:** That is true, although it would apply only to a subsection of the saving population. Many of those who receive the highest tax relief would probably find saving mechanisms that would ensure that they did not fall on the state. Only some of the amount spent on tax relief saves the Exchequer money. If those things are true—

**Mr. Butterfill:** The hon. Gentleman says that it is all right as long as the Government get the money eventually. The problem is that under the present system, they do not always get the money eventually. If annuity purchase is deferred to age 75 and the person approaching 75 has three or six months to live because they have terminal cancer, the insurance company gets the money eventually, not the Government.

**Mr. Webb:** That is right if the person dies before the age of 75, before the compulsory purchase of an annuity.

**Mr. Dismore:** I question whether the previous intervention was accurate. I have read a little about the subject in the Library briefing and elsewhere. The Library's view is that while the view of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) might be the perception, it is not the reality, because the insurance industry pools the risk across the board, which takes into account the fact that some people live longer than they are expected to and others do not. The net result is a pooling across the risk. The winners-and-losers, swings-and-roundabouts arrangement means that the money does not go to the insurance company but is redistributed among other annuity holders.

**Mr. Webb:** Perhaps I should ask the hon. Members for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) and for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) to continue the discussion between themselves. I suspect that we are talking about a relatively small group, but the key is that pooling is taking place, so that if the insurance company gets a greater return because a person dies early, that money is available to be paid out in annuities to other people, on which they would be paying tax, and that is reflected in the annuity rate. That is my understanding of the latest intervention, but perhaps I should move on.

Provided that we ensure that the Exchequer gets its tax, and that the Department for Work and Pensions is not burdened, there is a positive argument for reform. If it is possible to make a reform whereby no one loses but someone gains, why not make it? If it is possible to require people to buy a pension that takes them beyond benefit levels and leave them a choice about what they do with the rest—subject to the caveat about the Exchequer getting its share—they would be better off. We would be giving them a choice that makes them better off, at no cost to the Exchequer because we would have ensured that the tax was coming. If we can increase the welfare of older people without such losses, which the Bill would allow us to do, I can see no reason why we would not want to do so.

For those reasons I am sympathetic to what the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon is trying to achieve. However, I have several concerns, which might be worth voicing briefly but which could be explored at greater length in Committee if the Bill should reach that stage.

The specific tax proposals are not yet in the Bill but it is envisaged that they will be brought in at a later stage. It is envisaged that, on the death of the person with the pension pot, bequeathment to a spouse would be entirely tax free. I wonder whether that provision would deviate from what the right hon. Gentleman called fiscal neutrality, by which he meant no net loss to the Exchequer. If we allow people to save with tax relief, to have tax relief as the fund rolls up and to spend only part of that fund on the annuity, and if we allow the whole of the balance of that tax-free fund to be passed on tax free—

**Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): Only once.

**Mr. Webb:** If we allow the whole of the balance of that tax-free fund to be passed on tax free, I am not sure that the Exchequer has had its share at any point. The individual has had tax relief on the way in and tax relief in the fund. The part that has gone out as annuity is obviously taxed, but the balance of the fund, if bequeathed to a spouse, also goes tax free, if I understand it correctly.

**Mr. Boswell:** Is not the hon. Gentleman overlooking the fact that the spouse in turn must pass on, and at that point the remaining fund falls into tax?

**Mr. Webb:** But if the spouse goes on the world cruise, no tax is ever paid, unless I misunderstand the point. Normal bequests between spouses out of taxed income should of course be tax free. However, something that has been tax-privileged on the way in and all the way through, and is then passed on tax free and can be spent without any payment of tax, with the result that the Exchequer never gets anywhere near it, goes too far.

**Mrs. Browning:** But is it not the case that if the fund was substantial in the first place, it would not be £100,000 to £150,000 sitting in a building society account earning 4 per cent.? It might have been invested in property, and the Exchequer could receive tax on rental income.

**Mr. Webb:** I accept that point, but I am not certain of the number of people affected and the amount of money involved. It is true that the balance of the fund could be invested in a tax-efficient manner. One would imagine that the folk whom we are talking about might have access to advice, and there are plenty of tax-efficient ways of using the fund that would ensure that little tax was paid. It seems to me that the incentive would be to blow the lot. We are talking about an elderly widow who has just

*[Mr. Webb]*

received a lump sum, who may well be tempted to blow the lot. Good luck to her, one might say, but I question whether that should be done at the taxpayers' expense. If I have misunderstood, I am happy to take further interventions.

On the benefits issue, the hon. Member for Hendon raised a crucial question—how should one define the amount that must be bought to bring the individual up to the minimum retirement income? My understanding is that that is a residual amount, so it is not necessary to provide the whole £140 a week; it takes account of the person's basic pension and other pensions. A person who had a decent occupational pension and another pension pot might already have £140 a week and be free to do what they liked with the fund. That seems fine to me. That seems the sort of flexibility that we would want.

The difficulty is how to specify that level. Discussions about that issue and about not having recourse to the taxpayer appear to show a mental amnesia about housing and council tax benefits. The sort of people whom we are talking about are probably not renters, so housing benefit may not be relevant, although it will be to some; but millions of pensioners are entitled to or receive help with their council tax. The span of income over which that help is available goes beyond even the reach of the pension credit. In fact, by introducing the pension credit, the Government have bumped up the thresholds for housing and council tax benefit so that even further up the income scale people are still getting means-tested help. Although we are talking modest sums—perhaps £200 or £300 a year of council tax benefit—there remains an issue in principle about relying on the taxpayer. The higher that threshold is raised, the fewer people benefit from it, so there is a trade-off, but I remind the House that millions of pensioners are entitled to help with council tax.

**Mr. Dismore:** The hon. Gentleman is talking about relatively modest sums, but in London, the sums involved with those benefits are substantial. I refer again to the Library briefing. To produce the sums that one would need to ensure that that minimum was covered would require a substantial lump sum of investment in the first place—way beyond what most people seem to have available at the moment.

**Mr. Webb:** I do not wholly accept that. First, the predominant tenure of the people we are talking about is outright ownership or ownership with a mortgage, so housing benefit is not an issue. For those who rent, I would imagine that they would on average tend to be better-off renters. London is an issue, because of high rents and so on. I am trying to say that we should be aware that a significant number of pensioners draw means-tested benefits other than the minimum income guarantee and the pension credit; I put it no more strongly.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs drew attention to the Plymouth Brethren's concerns about compulsory annuity purchase and private pension provision generally. I am not convinced that the Bill helps them at all. It takes a compulsory annuity purchase approach so I do not see that it addresses that concern. As it is a conscience issue, I hope that the Minister might tell us whether the Government have had any other thoughts about how their concerns might be addressed.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) made some incisive interventions on unisex annuities. I find myself in a strange position. When I saw in the Bill the provision that

"Section 45 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 shall not apply",

I thought that it was the Tories trying to get out of the Sex Discrimination Act, but they were trying to debar the bit that stops it applying, to bring annuities into the scope of the Sex Discrimination Act. I approve of that for a reason entirely different from that of the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon. I consider that the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, who intervened on him, is right: there is no argument for equalising in terms of economics or efficiency. It is a case of state redistribution. That looks great from where I am standing. I can imagine what the Conservatives would have said had the Liberal Democrats introduced the Bill.

Essentially, the argument about whether the gap between the sexes might be closing is a red herring because if it is closing, there would be no need for such provision in the Bill because the market would equalise. Such provision is needed only when there is a differential. There is likely to be a difference in the foreseeable future, so what should we do about it? The pure free-market argument is that women live longer so they should get less.

The redistributionist in me says that women get an awfully bad deal in pensions—a lifetime of injustice in many ways, which manifests itself in their income in old age. If the dear old state can step in and do a bit of meddling at the end, it is a good idea, but that is not the motivation of the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon.

**Mrs. Browning:** My free-market thinking does not suggest that women get less simply because they live longer. The hon. Gentleman knows about all the computations involved in actuarial calculations. He rightly says that women get less, but they usually reckon that they will be paid for longer. The guarantee is that, if they live longer, the payments will still be made, so there is a certain equalisation. I am concerned that we may allow sex equality, of which I am usually totally in favour, to get in the way of a more objective way to analyse risk.

**Mr. Webb:** I appreciate the point that the hon. Lady makes, but the pot from which the annuities are bought will be substantially smaller, on average, for women to begin with, for all sorts of historical reasons, such as the amount that they have paid and the sort of pension schemes of which they are members. I am happy to do a bit of meddling at the end to redistribute some of the injustice or unfairness that has not been picked up when women are of working age. All I am saying is that I am sympathetic to the provisions on sex discrimination for an entirely different reason from that of the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon.

**Mr. Flight:** Aside from a measure which, for whatever reason, is marginally favourable to women for so long as the age gap differs, the other concept is to have a simple standardised product in the minimum income annuity and, therefore, something that is as cheap as possible, with overhead costs as low as possible, and so forth.

**Mr. Webb:** I suspect that the complexity introduced by different rates for different genders is minimal compared with some of the complexity that the industry itself delights in introducing, but I understand the point.

Choice is critical, and I am concerned that, for some people, the Bill would restrict it. In an intervention, I mentioned people with small pension pots, who may not want to buy an indexed annuity, but would be forced to do so under such rules. A better example may be the impaired life category. If people hit 65 and all the signs are that they will not live until 70, they do not want to have indexed annuities. They do not want to protect themselves against 20 years of inflation, because they will only live for five years, but the Bill would force them to have a lower income for the rest of their lives than would otherwise be the case.

**Mr. Curry:** The hon. Gentleman has made some interesting remarks, but, in fact, the Bill would be optional. If people wished to continue under the old regime, they would be entirely able to do so.

**Mr. Webb:** If I understand the right hon. Gentleman correctly, he is saying that people could reach 65 and go on with the money in the pot as at present until 75, at which point they would have to act, and that there would be an option at 65.

**Mr. Curry:** People would have to annuitise at 65. That would be the change from the existing regime, so they would not have that choice, but they could annuitise at 65 under what would otherwise be the existing rules.

**Mr. Webb:** I think that that undermines the right hon. Gentleman's point. I am sympathetic to the Bill, but if people had to annuitise at 65 and they were lifelong chain-smokers with cancer, they would not want to have indexed annuities. Lifelong chain-smokers who are 65 and thinking about buying annuities would want to buy impaired life or non-indexed annuities, but they would be forced to buy indexed annuities, so their incomes would be reduced for the rest of their lives. I think that I am right in saying that.

**Mr. Gardiner:** This is an interesting part of this debate because the very compulsion to annuitise at 65 would increase the competition on gilts, which, in turn, would drive down the annuity rates. Therefore, insistence that people annuitise at 65, instead of 75, far greater pressure would be put on annuities to sustain even the very modest rates available at the moment. I hope that the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) will respond to that central point, perhaps later in the debate, because it is one of his Bill's defects.

**Mr. Webb:** There is a lot in what the hon. Gentleman says, and one of my concerns is that, to the extent that the Bill deals with a new form of compulsion, funnily enough, it may restrict choice and have knock-on effects, such as that on the gilt market, all of which need to be explored, although I remain of the opinion that reform is sufficiently necessary that we should take the Bill further.

**Mr. Butterfill:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Webb:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me but I do not want to hold up those who want to make their own contributions, and I have spoken for a considerable time. I want to raise a couple of other issues before giving other hon. Members a chance to contribute.

We have not discussed at any length the requirement to buy indexed annuities. I sympathise with the point that the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon made that many more people should buy those products than at the moment, although in these days of low and stable inflation that may not be as much of an issue as it once was, but that is slightly difficult politically. If the Bill were ever to come into force, he would require everyone to have smaller incomes at 65—because they would be indexed—than they could have chosen if they had been given a free choice to have level annuities. Indeed, they would have lower incomes at 66, 67 and 68, until the cross-over point, which may occur in their early to mid 70s. Pensioners may not respond well to that suggestion being forced on them. The question on my mind is how far such things should be compulsory and how far there should be choice.

I want to mention a couple of other quick thoughts. I worry about how the Bill fits in with the financing of long-term care. We increasingly need to think about people's old age holistically—for want of a better phrase—and a percentage of those folk, perhaps a quarter, will eventually need to pay for long-term care. That is essentially an insurance product. I am concerned that we should be thinking about income in old age, lump sums and what happens to them in the round, rather than in a fragmented manner. We have suffered too much from fragmenting the way in which we consider such issues, and we should consider how they interact with one another.

**Mr. Dismore:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Webb:** I had better not, for the reason that I stated.

I want to make a final observation on whether this is a Bill for the rich. The hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) cited the typical £30,000 spent on annuities, but, first, that does not take account of the fact that people may buy several such products, so it is the combined value of their funds that matters, not the fact that the typical sum is only £30,000. Secondly, it does not take account of the fact that those figures will increase as time goes by. Those concerns will increasingly not just be the preserve of the very well-off; they will spread down the income scale, so it is good that the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon has introduced the Bill.

The issue of annuities is technical. Although the Inland Revenue has given a nod and a wink to certain products, the Government's response is to say, "Let the market produce the right products." My worry is that the Government are obsessed with complexity. They talk the language of simplification, but their deeds reveal the contrary. This Government introduced the individual pension account—yet another complexity that seems to have achieved nothing so far as I am aware.

If such things are left to the market, we shall end up with a proliferation of products—the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) produced a long list, and she could have continued for longer—and people will become even more bewildered and at risk of making the wrong pension choice. That is why intervention of this sort is necessary; we cannot just leave things to the market, so I ask my colleagues to encourage the House to agree to the Bill's Second Reading.

11.28 am

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): In introducing the Bill, my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) began by outlining his early days and his good intentions when he and I were first elected to the House in 1987. One of my early resolutions, which remains intact, is never to be afraid of one's past, so I have always been proud of my working-class background and the fact that I was a grammar school boy and a London policeman. However, I am not quite sure, today of all days, what I should say about the fact that, for two years, in 1970–71 I worked for Equitable Life at its Epsom office. I have made that confession on previous occasions, particularly in debates on Equitable Life in Westminster Hall. I am sad about what has happened, but I make that point to show that I have an interest to declare as well as more than 30 years' experience of advising people on personal pensions.

I shall refer to my experience to address the issue of what motivates people to invest in pensions at all. That point is relevant to the Bill. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), I declare an interest as a policyholder.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) not just on his success in the ballot, but on his choice of subject to promote. Colleagues can choose what subject they wish, but they often choose narrow issues that do not always seem too relevant to our constituents. This is one of the most relevant issues to society today. That fact is reflected in the attendance in the Chamber and especially in the number of Conservative Members present.

The all-party group on insurance and financial services, which I have been fortunate to chair for 10 years, has examined the issue on numerous occasions and, most recently, in December. I gladly offer to any colleague present or who reads the *Hansard* report a copy of the brief that we were given. It complements the Library brief, which is also excellent.

One or two members of the all-party group are present, so I am sad that the Economic Secretary has left the Chamber because I wish to refer to its considered view. For some time, we have recognised that the Treasury is right to insist on proper safeguards to ensure that pensioner policyholders do not retain investments at the expense of state benefits. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) spent some time explaining that this is a difficult problem that the Bill, if it reaches Committee, will need to address. The Treasury is also right to say that the state must have an opportunity to recoup the tax reliefs that have been granted not just on the contributions but on the tax-free fund throughout the life of the policy. However, it would be wrong to conclude that that can be done only by the retention of an annuity requirement at whatever age it is decided that a compulsory purchase must be executed.

It would also be wrong for the Treasury or anyone involved in the debate to conclude that the Bill would benefit only the rich or—this argument has been made before—that very few policyholders would benefit. Reference has often been made to the argument that the average size of pension policies is not sufficient to justify the measure, but I want to stress a point that has not been made in the debate. That argument ignores the fact that many people have several policies.

I have several policies with several life offices but, thankfully, Equitable Life is not among them. Someone asked me the other day why I, with my experience as an insurance broker, was not an Equitable Life policyholder. I said, "You'd expect an insurance broker from Yorkshire to say that I was too mean to give up the commission."

**Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's point about the average annuity. Could he tell us what the average is? I appreciate that he has said that people may have more than one policy, but how many of those who would be affected does he estimate have more than one policy? I am concerned that the average purchase seems quite low and possibly would not achieve what the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) wishes to achieve. People would have to make a substantial annuity purchase to obtain the minimum pension guarantee that he mentioned.

**Mr. Greenway:** The hon. Lady seizes on a technical aspect of the Bill that we shall have to consider in Committee. It is no use addressing the issue by arguing that a person with a pension policy is in the same position as Members of this House who are fortunate enough to belong to the occupational pension scheme for parliamentarians.

At the last count, I probably had about 10 or 11 policies. Collectively, I would guess that, when I am 60 or 65, the combined value of my policies, many of which pre-date my coming to the House, would probably be about £250,000. However, I suspect that the most valuable is the one that has been in force for the longest time. It is with the National Provident Institution and is probably worth no more than £70,000 or £80,000. Therefore, the requirement for people to make sufficient purchase of annuities to avoid falling on the state would have to apply to all the policies that they have. That is the thrust of my argument.

**Mr. Gardiner:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Greenway:** No, I will not, because I assume that the hon. Gentleman will be seeking to catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I know that other colleagues wish to speak.

One cannot argue that people would not benefit from the Bill because their policies are not large enough. Collectively, they would, but we must examine the interface between the value of their policies and their not relying on the state.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon set out the arguments extremely well, and I congratulate him on his grasp of his brief. I agree wholeheartedly that a reform of the present arrangements is both justified and overdue. When my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs said that he was not in favour of flexibility, I think he meant that he did not simply want yet more flexibility about when one took an annuity. Overall, I believe that people need more flexibility beyond the age of 75, not least because of the issue of long-term care that may affect the widow rather than the main annuitant who had the pension plan.

We all tour old people's homes at this time of year, and we know that people now live long beyond previous expectations. That suggests to me that there is great

advantage in ensuring that people have the flexibility to put more money aside for the future and beyond the age of 75 rather than having to convert it all into an annuity at that age.

I wish to concentrate on a couple of important points. The House should address the issue not by means of adversarial argument—we have not entirely had one—but from the point of view of the public interest. We should determine where that lies, and that involves examining what is best in the long run for the public purse.

In two fundamental respects, the Bill is advantageous for the public purse. In the first instance, there is a growing crisis in pension provision that will get worse unless the Government recognise the shortcomings of more and more pension products being funded for cash rather than for defined benefit. They include not just the old retirement annuities or personal pensions, but the money-purchase occupational pensions that are becoming much more the vogue and, of course, the new stakeholder pensions.

The problem is not that people are saving too much but that they are not saving enough. In my experience, tax relief on contributions is no longer on its own a sufficient incentive for personal pension investment. It is a crucial element, but policyholders and investors are increasingly interested in the final result—a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) made in a telling intervention on my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon.

Pensions are infinitely less flexible than other types of investments—not just TESSAs and ISAs, but the venture capital trusts that are available to many. This relates to the point about Equitable Life that was made earlier. Problems have arisen because of the requirement to convert the funds into annuities at such low rates when others have the guaranteed rate.

Resolving the annuity issue, as the Bill attempts to do, would greatly assist the Government in their efforts to persuade more people to provide adequately for their old age. Let us remember that the money that goes into pension funds is locked into those policies until retirement age. It is therefore important that it is available at that time. We are not talking about people getting tax relief from contracts that allow them to remove the money and go on a world cruise before they retire.

My second point is that there is great advantage in the Government ensuring that annuitants arrange their affairs in a way that reduces or, better still, if possible eliminates the risk that someone with a reasonable pension fund at 65 ends up needing state benefits in later life, which might be 30 or 35 years or more ahead. Low interest rates are forcing annuitants to opt for the biggest annuity at the start, an issue that has arisen frequently in the debate. The value of level annuities erodes over time with inflation, while the newly introduced minimum income guarantee rises in line with inflation. Pensioner credit and housing and council tax benefit entitlements are also relevant.

**Mr. Dismore:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Greenway:** No.

Eventually, the MIG entitlement will pass the level of the annuitant's income because he opted for the level annuity. That cannot make sense in public policy terms, and I believe that that is the key trade-off in reaching a resolution between the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon and the Treasury. The requirement for an index-linked annuity would be a huge benefit, both to the Government and to future taxpayers, as well as to the annuitant and his or her widow or widower in the years to come.

**Mr. Oliver Heald** (North-East Hertfordshire): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Greenway:** No, because I know that other hon. Members want to speak and I am anxious about the time.

In conclusion, the Government have sought the help of the insurance financial services industry to find solutions to a range of issues that affect it, from regulation to product type. They have encouraged, by consultation, the development of products such as stakeholder pensions and ISAs. They have not always got it right, but their approach should be acknowledged.

As is clear from the debate, the Bill is very much an industry response to the intractable problem of annuities. It has been thought through for several years. It may not be a perfect solution, but the problem will not go away and has to be addressed. The Bill is an excellent opportunity for the Government to demonstrate their determination to do something about it. Their response today is eagerly awaited by many annuitants, who I hope will not be disappointed.

11.43 am

**Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). He said that he thought he had made a mistake when he applied to promote the Bill. If so, it was a fortuitous mistake that is to the benefit of us all. The way in which he presented it and its technical implications is much appreciated by the House. I have no hesitation in giving him my full support.

The fact that the Bill is needed is illustrated not only by the number of hon. Members present, but by the growing concern among constituents and people in the financial services sector that although the world has moved on, financial services products have not. May I pay tribute to the Retirement Income Reform Campaign and the energetic chairmanship of Dr. Oonagh McDonald who, as the driving force behind the debate, has made such an important contribution?

It is important that we do not knock annuities too much. They are unique to this country and have provided long-term stability to a generation of elderly and retired people. However, there is a definite need to adapt to changing circumstances. Those of us who were here a few weeks ago to hear the debate on ageism are in no doubt about the fact that working patterns are changing. We have ageing populations. The ratio of people in work to those out of work is shifting and, as a result, in a few years' time we will have skill shortages. People will work beyond the age of 65, which affects the whole dynamic of when people take their pension and how they use it. The Treasury and the Inland Revenue have been a bit slow off the mark. The marketplace and lifestyle patterns are changing, but the products are not.

**Mr. Heald:** Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a conflict of interest in respect of the Treasury? At the

*[Mr. Heald]*

moment, it is able to get very cheap borrowing because of the high demand for gilts, which are in short supply. Does he share my concern that that conflict of interest is one factor that may mean we get a slow response from Government?

**Richard Ottaway:** Yes, and my hon. Friend anticipates my remarks.

There are two key factors to consider. The first is the growth of life expectancy. Owing to better nutrition, better medical facilities, a reduction in the number of smokers and better long-term care—despite the state of the national health service—people are living longer. As a result, they have to make decisions at 65 or 75 when—my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) put this most eloquently—they have no idea what will happen 15, 20, 25 or even 30 years hence. That uncertainty is a problem.

The second factor, which relates to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), is the fact that returns are now poorer because of interest rates. We have no idea what future interest rates will be, but my hunch is that they will stay at about the level they are now. They might go a little higher, but I do not believe that we will have the double-figure interest rates that we saw in the 1960s and 1970s.

**Mr. Dismore:** Under the Tories.

**Richard Ottaway:** Time does not permit me to get into that sort of political badinage.

The important point is that we have falling interest rates and a reduction in the supply of gilts. The Treasury is well aware of the consequences of that, but it is not responding.

**Mr. Gardiner:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Richard Ottaway:** No, I am sorry but many hon. Members want to speak and time is getting short. I do not intend to take any more interventions.

People feel that they are worse off. In 1990, an annuity with a 3 per cent. escalator and 50 per cent. provision for a spouse would produce £10,000—10 per cent. on a £100,000 annuity. Today, the same annuity would produce £5,500. That is the killer. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said that he has a pot of £250,000, which today would produce an income of only £12,500. I suspect that when he started out he did not expect such a return.

We have an obligation to buy an annuity before the age of 75. As many people said, it is an arbitrary figure. The onus is on the Government to say why the figure should not change. It is affecting the way in which people conduct their personal finances. The Government have to justify their decision. As many people have said, the remarks of the Minister for Pensions have not been helpful. I suspect that there is a touch of the old Labour politics of envy in his remarks when he says that it is only the better-off who will benefit from such proposals. The people who benefit are the thrifty: those who place no burden on the state and on society. Any reform will have losers and gainers, but these proposals have been carefully designed to be cost-neutral and to have little impact. They will help people. Why should we oppose an idea that improves people's personal prosperity?

These proposals are sensible, and they meet the Government's concerns. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon introduced the Bill, he was right to address their concerns and to try to make the proposal fiscally neutral. I believe that the minimum retirement income is absolutely essential. There is no question of this reform imposing extra burdens on the state. It is important that people have the right to put the rest of the money in a residual income fund.

I want to make a constructive suggestion to my right hon. Friend. Perhaps he has allowed too much flexibility. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) raised a point about inheritance and whether it can be tax-free when it comes out of the fund, but that was not fully addressed. I would be concerned if it were possible to blow it. Perhaps my right hon. Friend might like to look at the Trustee Investments Act 1961 regarding recommended investments for trustees of other people's income.

I have no difficulty in supporting the proposal in the Bill that there should be greater flexibility and the power to pass money on through generations if necessary, provided that it places no burden on society and no extra burden on the Treasury.

11.51 am

**Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): I want to reinforce the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) that the Bill has cross-party support. As a Liberal Democrat, I strongly support what the Bill is trying to achieve. It protects the interest of annuitants in a way that has not happened before, and it takes the political risk of trying to address the Government's two fundamental concerns about the blowing away of lump sums and the problem of tax yield, which the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) addresses through his exit charge. As my hon. Friend explained, these are complex issues, and the Bill may need some refinement, but it is an excellent measure and probably the most sophisticated attempt we have ever had to address these central problems. As such, it deserves support and success.

The problem of annuitants is growing rather than declining. The problem of annuities first surfaced politically in 1998–99. It is probably a temporary problem because bond yields have fallen quite heavily in the market, from 10 per cent. to 4.5 per cent. Clearly, that is a big hit for the people whose annuities depend on them. It is a temporary problem because inflation expectations, which had fallen, will eventually translate into lower inflation, so there is a bit of a money illusion. Those people who have lower annuities will eventually benefit, and the real value of their annuities will be preserved over time, so it does not matter too much.

It has also been said that circumstances were slightly artificial two or three years ago. Annuities were particularly depressed, while the stock market was doing extremely well and people were making a lot of money in shares and were frustrated because they could not translate their savings into equities. Now that the stock exchange has taken a hit as well, that argument has disappeared.

One could argue that some of the problems with annuities were temporary and caused temporary grief. I would argue that, for reasons that have already been explained, it is a more systemic and serious problem, which is why the Bill is particularly important. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) said that the move to money-purchase policies is growing rather than diminishing. There are good reasons why it is growing. It is partly because employers are not willing to take the cost element in defined contribution systems, and because people are becoming more mobile and want the flexibility of those policies.

All the evidence suggests that, despite the innovations in the market, people with defined contribution policies are not able to access flexible schemes. Only 16 per cent. of people with defined contribution schemes have got into the income drawdown. People with such schemes are faced with the most severe problem: when they retire and start drawing their pension they are obliged to take the annuity.

There is an additional dynamic to this problem. As more and more people get into defined contribution schemes and are required to take annuities, the pension funds that back them up are having to buy more gilts in the market, which drives up the bond price and drives down the yield. That vicious circle makes the problem worse, and it will continue to do so. That is why we need to address it as a systemic problem, not as the temporary problem which it was viewed as a couple of years ago.

There are two problems with annuities. As I have explained, the returns are poor and are poor value for money, and there are problems associated with that. More fundamental than that, however, is the issue of principle concerning people's right to a basic entitlement to use their savings as they judge prudent. Families are of different sizes and have different expectations, and the population is increasingly mature and educated, so why on earth should we have a paternalistic philosophy dating from 1921? It was not Lenin who was responsible: it was a combination of Gladstonian Liberals and Conservatives. None the less, it is a rather paternalistic idea. Subject to the Inland Revenue being protected, which is crucial, why should a paternalistic view of the world prevail, and why should not people have greater choice?

The irony of this exercise is that, if the Government succeed in blocking the Bill, they may be humiliated in the courts. A human rights case is now being brought—I think by Cherie Booth QC—challenging the Government on the basic principle that the right to dispose of one's retirement income is fundamental. That, in essence, is what the Bill is about, and it is one of the fundamental reasons why I support it.

11.56 am

**Mrs. Angela Browning** (Tiverton and Honiton): I shall be brief, because I agree with much of what has been said. I shall not labour the point that I have made. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have been generous in giving way to me on the issue of equality of annuities for men and women. I have put on the record my concerns about departing from the analysis of risk merely on the ground of equality. In many other areas of life I would not make that argument, but I have concerns about the read-across to other areas where it could be to the detriment of women to use such a formula.

I congratulate and wholeheartedly support my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on the Bill. Conservative Members campaigned in the general election on the issue of abolishing the compulsory annuity. It is right that the matter has not just been left, and that my right hon. Friend has brought it forward now. All of us have received constituency correspondence from people who are very concerned.

Many hon. Members have drawn attention to the poor annuity rates that prevail. At the grand age of 55—[HON. MEMBERS: "Never!"] Hon. Members are too kind. During my lifetime, I have seen times when annuity rates have been very attractive. Although I accept all the reasons given by hon. Members for annuity rates being low, my view is that legislation should not be changed simply because of the state of the market at a given point. That is not my motive for supporting the Bill, because, over a lifetime, one sees that the market is cyclical, and it will always be so.

Pensions are lifelong investments, particularly for those who are wise enough to start investing when they start work. They do the right thing and put a bit away every year until they reach 60 or 65, but most of us never imagine that we shall reach such an old age. We do not save in our 20s and 30s when we are funding mortgages and children, then we shovel in every penny we can in our 40s and 50s. That is not the way to do it, but that is the reality and it concentrates people's minds.

A lot of attention has been drawn to money-purchase schemes in personal pensions, which are addressed by my right hon. Friend's Bill, but those schemes apply also to additional voluntary contribution schemes, which offer no opportunity to draw down a lump sum at the policy's end. Of course, younger people who have opted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme have their money in money-purchase schemes and they, too, have no opportunity to draw down a lump sum.

Although there are many types of pension vehicle for people with many years of working life ahead of them, they are confronted with the fact that they will be forced to purchase an annuity. Those who defer taking that annuity up to the age of 75, when it becomes compulsory, often do so in the hope of getting a better rate, but, as Members on both sides of the House have said, that, too, is a cause for concern.

I say to my right hon. Friend that I hope the Government see the sense in supporting the Bill and give it their backing. He wants to introduce one or two points in Committee about which the Government may have concerns, but he has introduced the Bill most constructively both to benefit the pensioner policyholder and to take on board the Treasury's concerns. On people who have deferred taking an annuity—those over the state retirement age—the Minister should bear in mind the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan). I hope that many people will be able to make use of any new regulations that may be introduced in the near future, but they are hanging on, waiting to see whether the Bill receives support.

There has been some discussion of when such policies were introduced. Retirement annuity contracts were introduced in 1956 for the self-employed and those whose employers did not provide an occupational pension

*[Mrs. Angela Browning]*

scheme. The personal pension legislation was enacted in 1988, so a great many working people with a variety of pension policies may benefit from flexibility.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman who spoke from the Liberal Democrat Benches. *[Interruption.]* No, not the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), I am sorry to say. It is interesting to see two book ends sitting on the Liberal Democrat Benches today: the hon. Gentleman, who sits on the Front Bench, espouses the classical socialist philosophy while the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable)—the free marketeer who sits behind him and with whom I agree—says that people should be allowed the flexibility and responsibility to make more choices about how the money that they have earned and saved is ultimately used.

I do not want to labour the point, because Conservative Members agree wholeheartedly with the thrust of my right hon. Friend's Bill, although I should perhaps declare a modest interest, which has become even more modest since I entered the Chamber—I have heard the rates. I have money-purchase policies, which I want to transfer to something more useful in due course. There is a lot of support for the Bill, not only in the House, but out in the country, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will be successful.

12.2 pm

**Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): As always, it is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), and I, like her, should declare an interest: I have private pension provision, which I suspect is wholly inadequate not only for the lifestyle to which I have grown accustomed but for my own aspirations to life expectancy.

I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) for introducing this important Bill—I know what it is like to come near the top of the private Members' Bill ballot; one is never lonely—and my right hon. Friend has widespread support throughout the House and the country.

I have two reasons for making this brief contribution: many of my constituents in Eastbourne have written to me over recent years about this very problem and I am co-chairman of the all-party group on older people. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton will be relieved to hear that we now consider anyone over 50 as falling in that category—I thought that she would want me to make that clear—and, like other Members, I pay tribute to the excellent work of the Retirement Income Reform Campaign.

What we are debating, stripped of all the complexities and the impenetrable language, is a betrayal of people who have sought to provide for their retirement—those who do not want to depend on the state. The Bill seeks to address that problem. These are people who want to be independent and who want their financial provision to come from their own efforts.

The past few years have not been a happy time for people of retirement age. Almost the first of the Government's acts after the 1997 general election was to abolish tax relief on private medical insurance premiums for people over retirement age. I secured a debate very early in the last Parliament on that subject because of the problems that it caused many of my constituents. There was also the £5 billion smash-and-grab raid by the Chancellor on pension funds early in the last Parliament. We have heard about the demise of final salary schemes. One colleague referred to the fact that today is the last day for members of Equitable Life schemes to vote on the company's proposals. In addition, we continually hear that companies in the business are cutting their bonuses and, therefore, the amount that people will ultimately have in their pension fund.

These have, then, been rather dismal times for pensioners. As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) made clear, there seems to be an element of the politics of envy in all this—it is claimed that pension arrangements are designed only to help rich people. We have heard about the downward pressure that has for some time been exerted on annuity rates as a result of higher life expectancy and lower returns on investment. The nub of the problem is that people are locked into an annuity rate that applies when the annuity is bought, which may be as long as 50 years after their decision to start putting money by. It is a purely arbitrary cut-off.

Among many examples that have been brought to my attention is that of a constituent, Mr. B. L. Harris, who wrote to me the other day. He made several points, and I shall mention two or three of them. He pointed out that people using ISAs as pension plan substitutes have complete flexibility with their investment proceeds. He says, and I am sure that he is right, that the UK is the only major industrial democracy to insist on this rigid need for annuitisation. He adds that the present annuity system prevents many people such as him from being able to provide for their own long-term care, which is an ever more pressing issue for all of us in the House. Mr. Harris makes it clear that people such as him, who are on lower or middle incomes, are not in the business of investing money in pensions primarily to get tax relief. They do so, and mostly on the basis of only standard tax relief, predominantly to provide

"for personal security in old age."

He adds that there has been discrimination against the lower and middle-income groups.

We can all accept the Treasury view on this point at least: if people have received tax relief to help them make contributions in the first place, there should be an obligation on them to ensure that they do not become a burden on the state purse if they take money from their pension funds unwisely. My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon has tackled that danger very successfully in the Bill. As he said, it would require people to buy an annuity at age 65 rather than 75. They would still be able to take the 25 per cent. tax-free lump sum, and the remaining savings could be invested in a retirement income fund.

We have had some debate about the concept of the minimum retirement income, and we will debate that further in Committee if, as I hope, the Bill receives a Second Reading. It is important that the MRI is set at the right level. An attractive level would be that representing income produced by the basic state pension and the state earnings-related pension scheme for someone who had formerly been on national average earnings. That strikes the right balance, as the Library briefing seems to agree, between flexibility and certainty.

The Bill is not designed to give rich people tax breaks. It is designed to produce fairness and flexibility for people who have been on a whole range of incomes during their working life and who now find that much of their effort to put money by has been reduced to nought by the vagaries of the annuity market. I have one final point on the minimum retirement income. As I understand the Bill, it gives the Chancellor the flexibility to set the MRI on an annual basis, so if the initial amount turns out to be inappropriate, the Government can always change it.

Inaction is not an option for the Government. The Singer case is going to court fairly soon with no less a figure than Cherie Booth QC representing the pensioner. The Bill is cost neutral to the Treasury, so what is the problem with it?

I return to the human aspect—the cases of people such as my constituent Mr. Harris. Why should someone in their 20s or 30s, perhaps 50 years in advance of purchasing an annuity, have to trust themselves to the vagaries of the current annuity system? That is the unfairness. It is a practical, human problem, which the Bill addresses effectively.

12.10 pm

**Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). I have always found it strange that hon. Members congratulate each other on securing a high place in a ballot, because that does not seem to be a matter for congratulations. However, my right hon. Friend has raised an issue of concern to many of our constituents all over the country and I pay credit to him for the work that he has done and the good-natured way in which he introduced the debate with a good deal of clarity. I am happy to contribute to the debate. I also congratulate the Retirement Income Reform Campaign on continuing to lobby for changes to annuities. I should also declare an interest in that I have modest pension provision that will obviously be subject to the provisions if they become law.

There has been considerable debate about the wider reform of annuities not only in the House but at conferences widely reported in the media. Indeed, the debate has sharpened over time and as the results of the Government's shrewd economic management of the economy have taken hold. Obviously, the economic benefits of low inflation and low interest rates have meant that investing in annuities does not deliver the results that it did under boom and bust.

I quote the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who was then Economic Secretary to the Treasury, in her response to an amendment tabled by the then Member for Guildford to the 1999 Finance Bill:

> "The move from an era of boom and bust . . . to an era of macroeconomic stability and low inflation creates problems of adjustment. This country has not been used to a period of sustained low inflation and low interest rates—with all the benefits that that brings for business investment—for a very long time. Neither were elderly people used to it, therefore they had not planned for their retirement on that assumption. Although low inflation brings real benefits to elderly people—directly, because their income and capital is not eaten away by inflation, and indirectly, because of the greater economic benefits that it brings—low inflation and low interest rates bring with them the problem of low annuity rates."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 22 June 1999; c. 744.]

That sets out in crystalline form the problem that the House seeks to address today.

Of course people want to be confident that annuities are efficient investment vehicles. Naturally, they are concerned at the fall in annuities in the past 10 years, but that decline must be set in context. The most obvious reason for the decline is the fact that increasingly stable and low inflation has driven down interest rates. The second reason is the dramatic increase in life expectancy. Forty years ago, when inflation was last running at its present rate, life expectancy for a man was only a further 12 years after retirement at 65. Today I am happy to say that that figure is 17 years. That, too, has a dramatic effect on reducing the annuity rates that companies are prepared to offer. Companies now have to pay out 40 per cent. more than they did 40 years ago. If the annuities purchased are index-linked, which they increasingly are, the increases are even greater.

The third element that influences the annuity rates on offer is the demand for long-term gilts and bonds. It is those that underwrite the security that annuities provide. The demand for gilts is boosted by the ageing profile of the present population. The yield on long bonds has therefore often been lower than the yield on short and maturing bonds. I mentioned in an intervention that I hoped that the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon would address that issue, and perhaps he will in his concluding remarks. He will, of course, appreciate keenly that the measures contained in his Bill that would insist that annuities were purchased at the age of 65 would increase that pressure on bonds and gilts. In and of itself, that provision would tend to drive down annuity rates.

**Mr. Curry:** Because people can invest in a retirement investment fund, money that would otherwise have been compelled to go into gilts can go into alternative funds and take the pressure off gilts.

**Mr. Gardiner:** I appreciate the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes only too well. Current legislation provides that people can defer purchase of an annuity until 75, but he suggests that the annuity must be purchased at 65. I agree with his point but I am sure that he will agree that many annuity purchasers do not have the extra income to do what he suggests. Many people also find it difficult to understand the issue and simply put their money immediately into an annuity.

**Mr. Flight:** The overwhelming majority of people already buy an annuity at 65. The issue that the hon. Gentleman raises could be covered in much greater depth in Committee, but it is not correct to argue that the Bill would result in a massive increase in the amount flowing into annuities at 65.

**Mr. Gardiner:** I look forward to further debate on these matters. I do not think that the picture is quite as the hon. Gentleman paints it, but we need to take seriously the effect that the Bill might have on gilts. Nobody wants a perverse effect under which annuity rates would be driven down even further by these proposals. I am sure that we would all agree on that point.

The three factors that I have outlined are good things, in and of themselves. It is good that people live longer. It is good that inflation is low, and I hope that we would all agree that it is good that the Government can borrow cheaply. The problem is that those three factors combine to reduce annuity rates. That does not mean that annuities

*[Mr. Gardiner]*

are, in today's market, bad value. In fact, indexed annuities are relatively cheap, and annuities are still arguably the most efficient way of using pension capital to ensure financial security in retirement. Also, the substantial growth in the equities market over the past 20 years has increased substantially the value of the individual's pension fund as people retire. That rise has offset the decline in annuity rates that we have seen over the past decade for most pensioners as they retire. The contrast with the historic situation of pensioners is not as stark as some of the often-quoted statistics would suggest, and as some of the remarks made in the Chamber today might lead one to believe.

Having made that argument, I want to acknowledge a central agreement with the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon. The real issue for all of us, both the Government and the Opposition, is not whether annuities are a worse investment than they used to be, but whether we are enabling people to make provision for their pension in the best way possible. Obviously, if there are changes that we can make to legislation or regulations that allow people better to provide for their old age in security, it is incumbent on us to do so. It is very much in that spirit that I join the debate today.

The debate centres around a number of issues relating to annuities: the requirement to purchase one with money-purchase pension funds before the age of 75; the perception that they are poor value for money; the belief that they do not allow money to be inherited on someone's death; and the fact that they are inflexible and cannot cater for the different monetary needs that arise at different points during the ever-increasing retirement period.

The Bill attempts to address some of the issues by adopting the Retirement Income Reform Campaign proposal to allow, on retirement, an index-linked annuity purchase to meet a minimum retirement income to ensure that state support is avoided. The Bill seeks to give greater freedom in using the remainder of the residual fund to re-invest in the retirement income fund, which will be unrestricted in terms of when and how much income could be withdrawn from it.

If we are to examine these proposals' ability to deliver the reform of annuities, it is necessary to understand what the Government's response to date has been, as there has been little consideration of what criteria the Government should use in evaluating alternative options for reform. To date, Ministers have yet to give a single definitive announcement of the criteria that they would like to use. As observers of the Government's every move—as we are on the Labour Benches—it is possible to deduce two of the main criteria, based on announcements already made by Ministers and Departments.

At a fringe meeting at the TUC conference in September last year, the Minister for Pensions publicly rejected some of the alternative proposals related to the Bill on the basis that only the rich would benefit. It is important to quote what he went on to say:

"Some of the arguments being pressed on the Government are valuable only to the very wealthy. I would resist such a change. I have nothing on my table that suggests to me we should be damaging the concept of providing a lifetime income for people."

Similarly, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions said in the House:

"I am not against change and the Government will consider alternatives if they are better, but we cannot embark on a course of action that might benefit a few people, some of whom are substantially well provided for, at the expense of the majority."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 906.]

Her Majesty's Treasury, in responding to calls for reform from the Retirement Income Reform Campaign, concentrated, as might be expected, on the costs of reform. Any reforms are likely to need to avoid significantly increased costs to Government, including increases in tax relief. That was clearly underpinned in the pre-Budget statement on 27 November, when the Chancellor again spoke of the Government's support for annuities and the secure income, through retirement, that they provide. He also pointed to the continued development of the product range, which I trust Members will agree has occurred, and which has resulted in pensioners having more choice.

The Chancellor went on to announce his plans to consult on how better to promote competition in this market and thereby improve benefits to customers. The poor use made of the open-market option facility was specifically raised.

Without the privileged insider knowledge of a Front Bencher, it is only possible to draw conclusions from those announcements. It therefore seems that the main Government criteria for successful reform of the annuity system are twofold—the protection of Government revenue and an improvement in the situation of all annuity buyers. I wholeheartedly support those criteria and I urge right hon. and hon. Members to do so as well. In practice, there will be two aspects to protecting the Government's fiscal position—ensuring the payment of tax on the proceeds of pension funds and keeping pensioners' incomes above means-tested benefits levels.

One area that I do not wish to cover is the further impact on Government revenue if the changes in annuity rules result in changes in patterns of saving behaviour. For the sake of today's debate, I will assume that there will be no change in that behaviour, and conduct my analysis accordingly. However, that is another factor to be addressed, perhaps in Committee. The second-order effects are difficult to measure, particularly as they are likely to be affected by other changes in pension policy, such as the introduction of the pension credit.

I shall concentrate on the impact on Government revenue and reform of the whole annuity system, assuming that no change in savings behaviour would result from the Bill. Commendably, the proposals in the Bill and those of the Retirement Income Reform Campaign have been promoted as specifically trying to avoid loss of tax revenue on pension funds. The proposals allow for all the pension fund that is not annuitised to be taxed on withdrawal; they will therefore balance any imbalance that may occur to the Treasury. The campaign's working paper says:

"The Campaign does not believe that its reforms will cause any long-term net tax loss to the Treasury. In fact, we believe that increased income tax payments by pensioners and inheritance tax receipts would actually come to exceed income tax rebates paid on contributions."

The Bill also takes into account the means-tested benefits system by requiring the purchase of an index-linked annuity to provide a minimum retirement

income. The level is rightly set to ensure that, on reasonable assumptions, individuals will not have an income below the means-tested level during their retirement. Otherwise, the individual would become dependent on state benefit and the proposal would fail the test.

The Retirement Income Reform Campaign, in a communication referred to in House of Commons Library research paper 0118, has suggested that MRI would be pegged at £140 a week. That level represents the income produced by the basic state pension and SERPS for someone formerly on national average earnings—£140 a week at the time of that communication, and from next year around £160. That option was recommended on the grounds that it struck a suitable balance between flexibility and certainty and because it marked a link between the income produced from contracting out of SERPS and the income which would have been produced by staying contracted in.

That figure was first suggested in March 2000, when the minimum income guarantee was £75. The MRI would have to be much higher than the MIG because the Government, commendably, intend that MIG should be uprated in line with earnings. Most other income sources in retirement will increase in line with prices.

From April 2003, the MIG will be £100 a week. From October 2003, the Government will introduce the pension credit, a reward for private saving that will extend means-testing to those with incomes in retirement of £135. In future, it has been suggested, the upper limit is likely to rise faster than earnings as the gap between the MIG and the basic state pension increases. That suggests that if the MRI is to ensure that individuals do not fall back on means-tested benefits, it will have to be much higher than £140.

Take the example of someone who purchases an annuity at 65 and has a life expectancy of 15 years, the figure in the Government Actuary's interim life tables. With real earnings growth of 1.5 per cent. a year and an income increasingly in line with prices—currently 2.5 per cent. a year—the MRI would have to be around £195. That would ensure that people, on average, did not fall back on the state, but those who lived longer than 15 years would do so, and the MRI might therefore have to be even higher.

The MRI would also have to increase over time. The income at which pension credit is payable would be higher for those retiring in later years. Even assuming no increase in life expectancy, they would need a larger MRI to ensure that they did not fall back into means-testing. Consider someone who retires five years after the pension credit is introduced. That person would need an income of more than £350 a week 15 years later. That would mean an index-linked income of almost £250.

An MRI at such a level, which is needed to protect spending on means-tested benefits, would obviously have a significant impact on the number of individuals who would be able to take advantage of the Bill's proposals. Assuming receipt of a full basic state pension in 2003—£77 a week—and an index-linked MRI of £200 a week, a fund of £95,000 would be required. That is significantly higher than the funds for the vast majority of annuity purchases.

Although income from SERPS and occupational pensions will reduce the amount needed from annuity income—though not for the self-employed—evidence from the Aberdeen Asset Management retirement income survey suggests that few of those who retire over the next 20 years with annuities will have retirement income at that level. In fact—a killer fact as far as the Bill is concerned—fewer than 5 per cent. of those who retire will have that income, assuming that there is no increase in the MRI.

The Bill therefore fails to protect Government revenue, unless it is increased greatly above the level proposed by the Retirement Income Reform Campaign. It also fails to deliver an improvement for all annuity buyers since it would benefit only 5 per cent. of them.

Further implications in respect of the impact of the Bill can be seen when working through the income generated in retirement and the amount of capital remaining for one individual with a pension fund of £25,000 on retirement. Let us contrast the two options.

Under the existing system of annuities, let us assume that the individual buys a level annuity and receives a nominal return on capital of 6 per cent. Let us compare that with what would happen under the Bill, which is based on a retail prices index-linked minimum retirement income of £140 a week. No allowance is made for any state benefits.

The answers that unfold are simply staggering. The income in retirement for individuals with smaller pension funds is initially lower under the proposals made by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon. That is because the Bill requires the pension purchase to be index linked. That suggests that, at least initially, Government expenditure on means-tested benefits could rise. The index link does not mean that there may be savings in later years, but the individual is undoubtedly no better off and may even be worse off. A level annuity may give them income above the level of means-tested benefits, to which they then become entitled as inflation erodes their income. With an index-linked annuity, they may receive a lower income initially and still end up on the same income provided by means-tested benefits later in life. That could be exacerbated by differential mortality rates. Those with low incomes are also more likely to die at younger ages.

In the example that I have given, the right hon. Gentleman's proposals do not provide a capital sum that could be used other than the existing tax-free lump sum. So, in summary, the attempts in the Bill to protect revenue make his proposal applicable to only a small number of people. Perhaps fewer than 5 per cent. of those retiring will have an income above the revised MRI levels. Even with an MRI, there may still be extra Government expenditure on means-tested benefits.

The difficulty in meeting the apparently contradictory objectives suggests that, rather than requiring substantial reform of the annuity regime, the answer may lie in a better understanding of annuities, better access to advice on retirement income and the introduction of small reforms to the pension system as a whole.

Like many hon. Members, I am happy to claim credit for many things, but this morning I acknowledge my profound debt to an article written by Julie Stark and Chris Curry, which is to be published next week. It provides an industry view of the weaknesses of the Bill

*[Mr. Gardiner]*

as well as the proposals made by the Faculty and Institute of Actuaries and the Tenon proposal. Therefore, I do not claim credit for all the analysis that I have just used.

**Mr. Curry:** It is from the Treasury.

**Mr. Gardiner:** No, it is from a discussion with the Association of British Insurers yesterday. It would be an injustice if I did not pay credit to Julie Stark and Chris Curry for their work in highlighting what could have been a dangerous flaw in the legislation.

Perhaps I might also outline some of the proposals that have been made as other ways of resolving the problem. In the pre-Budget report, the Chancellor expressed concern that individuals might not be exercising their open-market option. Pensioners are entitled to shop around when their fund matures. The FSA's proposed rule on disclosure of the open-market option is one way in which the problem is being addressed. It is a real problem for the annuity market. There is a great deal of choice, but unfortunately it is not a choice of which consumers are aware. Many believe that they have to purchase an annuity with their fund provider and do not shop around, and therefore do not take the benefits that the market has to offer.

The ABI has already taken steps to address that problem with its "Statement of Good Practice on Pensions Maturities", which came out in August last year. That statement requires ABI member companies to explain to consumers their entitlement to purchase an annuity from a company other than the one that has provided the pension. The proposed FSA rule will extend that requirement to all pension and annuity providers.

The ABI statement goes further, however, by recommending that companies spell out the range of options available on retirement—including the different types of annuity product; setting minimum standards for the timing and content of letters to policyholders whose pensions are reaching maturity; and encouraging the use of consistent terminology across the industry. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that those recommendations are welcome, because we want to promote the greatest clarity among consumers in what is inevitably a complex and convoluted but important aspect of their future financial planning.

It is important that we alert consumers to the fact that there is an open market with a range of products available to them to provide security in retirement. To take advantage of that range, consumers need access to advice. At present, they cannot always obtain that advice in a way, and at a price, that suits them. A recent report for the ABI, "The future regulation of UK savings and investment—targeting the savings gap", prepared by Oliver Wyman and Company last September, found—in the context of the savings market—that a complex mix of conduct of business and product regulation has actually rendered it uneconomic to offer advice to a large and growing number of consumers, especially those at the lower end of the income scale.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon will be as concerned as me and many hon. Members that the report showed that, yet again, those in the poorest position to secure their retirement and their future financial provision are less likely to be able to procure the advice that they so desperately need.

The report also found that advice was a critical element in persuading people to save, so by inhibiting access to advice, regulation inhibited saving. Regulation may similarly be inhibiting access to affordable advice for pensioners who need it in order to make a decision on how to turn their savings into adequate income for retirement.

The Government should certainly consider tackling the advice system as one way of increasing competition in the market, as that would equip consumers to choose from a much wider range of products with a greater sense of their own needs and how to provide for them.

Providing better access to advice will not be easy. The range of types of consumer will need to be taken into account. Different types of advice will be appropriate for different people. I have already referred to the large number of people with extremely small pension funds on retirement, but such people may, of course, have other—perhaps much larger—pension funds, or other savings. For people with a range of savings, it is not necessarily appropriate to consider their pension fund in isolation when deciding how best to turn it into retirement income. That relates to points made by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the fact that the number of funds and the relative value of each one does not necessarily reflect the status of a pensioner who is approaching retirement. There is no direct correlation between the value of funds and the total sum possessed by an individual.

An holistic approach should be taken to retirement planning, taking into account all the savings of a consumer. Only a financial adviser—indeed, an independent financial adviser—is in a position to take such an approach. There may be some room for generic advice. There is no doubt about that. It could be through a helpline for those with small pension funds and no other savings. Such people need to find an annuity that will give them the best possible rate according to their circumstances.

In a recent article in *Financial Adviser*, Peter Quinton of the Annuity Bureau made several suggestions that he hoped could make pensions as a whole more attractive and efficient. He argued that the debate should not be about annuities in isolation, but about the pensions system as a whole, making it more attractive to young people and more efficient for retirees. Some hon. Members may be horrified by one of the conclusions that he reached—the suggestion that the age for retirement should be raised. Other suggestions were to improve links with long-term care packages and make retirement more flexible.

The main proposal, however, was that the retirement age should be raised to 70. That would address the problem of increasing longevity, which policy makers are struggling with and which Members on both sides of the House have this morning acknowledged as one of the primary reasons why annuity rates have come down to their present level.

An increase in the retirement age would of course reduce the amount payable by the Government under the state pension, which I am sure would gain favour in some Government Departments, and it would prevent a reduction in the amount payable as a pension, as one hopes that it would encourage people to stay in work longer.

Any reform of the current system should benefit everyone, not just the wealthy, and should prevent people from falling back on means-tested benefits. It should also be as simple as possible; that is another hurdle that some of the current proposals fail to clear.

Recently, some ideas have been advanced that might meet those tests alone or as a package. At the fifth annual annuities conference, entitled "Delivering Flexibility and Choice in the Open Market for Retirement Income", held in Westminster and the City on 16 October 2001, Peter Carter of Canada Life suggested that 25 per cent. of the pension pot could be taken as a tax-free lump sum now; 25 per cent. could be taken as a taxable lump sum or transferred into an account to accumulate tax free and could be withdrawn as required; and the remainder could be used to purchase an annuity. Obviously, the withdrawals would be taxable. There would be no minimum withdrawal and the entire amount might be withdrawn if desired because the tax had been paid on it. Anything left in the account could be left to beneficiaries on death.

That solution is simple. It would address inheritability—another of the issues about which Opposition Members expressed great concern today. It would certainly provide extra flexibility to everyone, at little extra cost in lost tax revenue to the Exchequer. It could also be further developed to address issues such as long-term care—for example, by allowing 25 per cent. of the taxable amount to be paid tax free if it was to be used for long-term care. In that way there would be a similarity with purchased life annuities.

The danger that that proposal poses is that people might withdraw the 25 per cent. taxable amount, spend it and then fall back on state benefits more quickly than they might otherwise have done. The annuity income generated in retirement might also be reduced by up to a third, meaning that more people might qualify for means-tested benefits at the point of retirement or later in life.

A further proposal is to pay annuities gross once a retiree requires long-term care. That concession already applies to income payment from purchased life annuities, provided that the income is paid directly to a recognised long-term care provider. An alternative would be to link long-term care insurance to Peter Carter's proposal to allow a taxable lump sum to be taken, by allowing the otherwise taxable sum of 25 per cent. of the pot to be paid gross if used to purchase long-term care insurance.

The Government may not be enthusiastic about these ideas from a cost perspective, but they have said that they are keen to increase sales of long-term care insurance, and these ideas would certainly help to achieve that aim. A variation would be to re-introduce what was known as the Cannon Lincoln product. *[Interruption.]* I see that the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) recalls it with glee.

In 1991, Cannon Lincoln—an insurance company—proposed that it should be possible to take, for example, a 10 per cent. reduction in income in return for getting three times that income at the age of 85, or at earlier disability. For example, a person might have the option of giving up £1,000 of a £10,000 income to have an enhanced income of £30,000 at age 85, or at earlier disability. Of course, that could substantially help to increase the costs of residential care. That proposal was refused by the Revenue because it was outside the current rules. An amendment to those rules may be a desirable way to accommodate such flexibility now, given that we want to improve stability and security of income in retirement.

It would also be possible to allow occupational pensions to be withdrawn while a person was still employed with the same employer. That would allow people to opt for partial retirement. Again, hon. Members have mentioned that provision earlier in the debate. At the moment, to start drawing occupational pension while working part-time, the member has to leave the employment of the occupational scheme provider and work part-time for someone else. I cannot understand the rationale behind the enforcement of that rule. I have no doubt that the Treasury has one, but I am afraid to say that it has escaped my powers of comprehension. We should consider that proposal as yet another way to enable people to have greater flexibility in their retirement funds.

In the United States, 401(k) pensions allow people to withdraw pension savings that suffer tax charges to meet emergency payments, or for specific uses such as housing and education. Arguably, such flexibility could encourage people to save more in pensions because it would overcome their fear of tying up their money until retirement age and not being able to get at it in an emergency.

As we heard earlier, in the past few years PEPs, ISAs and TESSAs have provided the sort of tax-free savings inducement that makes similar provision. However, that is another example of the way in which different Administrations and jurisdictions approach this problem and can enable people to prepare better for their retirement.

Further incentivisation would provide another way to encourage people to save more in their pensions, especially if the incentive could be targeted at employers. Early evidence from stakeholder pensions shows that take-up increases to about 85 per cent. if employers make contributions. The Government would do well to take note of that statistic.

The behavioural effect is borne out by the ABI's recent report "The prospect for stakeholder pensions", which it prepared in July last year. If employers were further incentivised to contribute to pensions, particularly stakeholder pensions, perhaps through a tax credit or similar direct incentive, employee take-up would be likely to increase substantially. Again, 401(k) plans provide an incentive for employers to contribute on behalf of what they call rank and file workers, by denying full tax reliefs to the pensions of highly compensated workers, unless a specific proportion of workers are in the company's scheme and benefit from a specified employer contribution.

The idea of allowing annuitants to switch provider after they have purchased their annuity—particularly investment-linked annuities, which people view as akin to income drawdown products that allow for switching between providers—has been suggested recently by a number of commentators. It is designed to allow individuals to move from poorer performing providers, so increasing competition and performance. However, that would also be very expensive and would be likely to lead to reduced annuity rates as actuaries then factor additional costs and risks into the price of the original annuity.

*[Mr. Gardiner]*

There would also be the risk of selection by annuitants. For example, if an annuitant contracted cancer, he could transfer out of his current annuity, in which the benefits are based on his expected mortality when he took it out, to an impaired life annuity from which he would receive increased benefits owing to his reduced life expectancy. To avoid that, a charge or adjustment would have to be levied on the transferring annuitant to be fair to the remaining annuitants in the mortality pool. Again, the increased costs of administration, which would be factored in by the companies, would tend to reduce the returns yet further.

Effectively, annuitants would strike a deal with the transferring annuitant whereby, if one of them died early, the transferring annuitant and others would benefit, via a cross-subsidy, from the fund remaining on his death. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) went into the issue, and it is important to appreciate the point that the hon. Gentleman who chairs the parliamentary pension scheme made. I am sorry, but I have forgotten the name of his constituency. [HON. MEMBERS: "Bournemouth, West."] Indeed. It is a shame that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) is not here at present. I am sure that he will rejoin the debate, because he is an assiduous attender of such debates. I also welcome the way in which he guides pensions affairs in the House.

The hon. Gentleman made the point to the hon. Member for Northavon that the money reverted to the company and not to the Government. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) pointed out, a proper analysis of the issue shows that this money goes back to the other annuitants because it is part of the actuarial considerations that the company took when it entered into the contract. Under such a deal, if the transferring annuitant died early, the remaining annuitants would benefit, via the cross-subsidy, from the fund remaining on his death. Transferring out early would mean that that annuitant had disadvantaged the other members of the fund. Therefore, there are disadvantages to the proposals.

I could go on for much longer. I am sure that many other Members wish to speak, and I have had a good crack at the debate. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon has alighted on an important issue and his Bill has sought to address it in an extremely responsible manner based on the work that has been done by the industry and by many in the voluntary sector. He has led the debate with great tact and diplomacy.

I am sorry that I cannot support the measures in the Bill, but I hope that this debate and any debate in Committee, should the Bill reach that stage, will be used to inform Government thinking. It is vital that certain changes for pension provision are made, so I look forward even more to hearing the remarks of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary.

12.59 pm

**Mr. Mark Field** (Cities of London and Westminster): May I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on raising this important issue? There is some disappointment that Labour Members are trying to talk out the Bill.

**Mr. Gardiner** *rose—*

**Mr. Field:** No, the hon. Gentleman has had more than enough time.

Although the Labour party makes a great fuss about its role as the friend of the pensioner, Labour Members' constituents will realise that its position is weak.

Nothing is more likely to induce a glaze across the eyes of most hon. Members than a detailed analysis of pension-related policy. I wanted to say much more, but I shall keep my comments brief because time is tight.

There has been a healthy consensus within the United Kingdom political spectrum over the past couple of decades about encouraging individual saving for retirement. An integral part of that policy has been the generous taxation treatment of such personal contributions. I accept that the principle of an enforced annuity has been a quid pro quo for the generous taxation treatment. However, the element of compulsion lies in a bygone era.

Over the past few weeks and months I have been trying to conduct a small focus group—perhaps I am heading the same way as Labour Members. I asked people in one ward of my constituency about their views on pension-related issues. Having received 25 or so responses, I can only describe my research as qualitative rather than quantitative. There was universal opposition to the idea of an enforced annuity provision. Indeed, the pearls of wisdom from my Knightsbridge-based constituents include: no one should be forced into schemes that are provided by insurance companies; annuities are an outrage; we should allow any pension fund to be moved by a pensioner with transparency and full rules of reporting.

It was also the view that annuities are a strong disincentive and put people off saving for their retirement because the yields have recently fallen to such a low rate, as many hon. Members have commented. Above all, there was an overwhelming desire on the part of many of the constituents who got in touch with me that we encourage people in their 20s and 30s to start saving now. However, the problem with Equitable Life and other companies has affected confidence in the savings and pensions industry.

The final word from my constituents is a little more depressing. One local resident wrote to me and simply said:

> "The Tories are as much to blame as Labour for the mess of the pensions industry—the entire issue is much too complicated for the average voter."

I hope that we all play our part, not just in this debate, but in the months and years ahead. Only if the pensions industry is made much safer can we possibly contemplate compelling people to place their trust and their hard-earned cash and savings into it. If legislation forces us to hand over hard-earned cash to the incompetent, there is little incentive for anyone to save. Amid the debate on this issue and the worthy objectives of the Bill, which many of my hon. Friends addressed, we need to realise that no amount of new legislation will overcome the fact that, as Labour Members have said, many of our fellow countrymen are too poor to save adequately for their retirement.

**Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon) *rose—*

**Mr. Adrian Sanders** (Torbay): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Too much time is being taken by Labour Members as they attempt to block future Bills. I wish to move the closure.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** I am not prepared to accept such a motion at this time.

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Although I do not in any way challenge your ruling—nothing could be further from my mind—may I point out the problem that has arisen? It is obvious that at least one other Labour Member wants to speak, to say nothing of the Minister, who has not yet tried to catch your eye. The Children with Disabilities (Play Areas) Bill follows this Bill, and I understand that it has widespread support. If we are not careful, we will be in some difficulty. As a result of the Government's obvious tactics at this stage, it is perfectly possible that we will get to 2.30 pm without that second excellent Bill having any opportunity for debate.

You will be as aware as I am, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the pronouncement from the Chair—admittedly some years ago—in which the Speaker said:

"It is not unprecedented for a Bill to go through all its stages on a Friday. However, I repeat that that practice is always deprecated by the Chair. Even small measures should never go through the House of Commons without debate."—[*Official Report*, 14 April 1989; Vol. 150, c. 1163.]

If we are to pay proper account to parliamentary process, debate and accountability, the second Bill is in jeopardy, because it will not get even a brief debate as a result of the Government's tactics.

I make that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while in no way challenging your ruling, because we are in a certain difficulty.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The right hon. Gentleman is a seasoned Member of the House, and he will know the pattern of Friday business over the years. Many alternatives are still open to us in the 85 minutes remaining for this debate. He should wait and see what may yet happen.

**Mr. Gardiner:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) suggested that Labour Members had been blocking the Bill. May I ask you to point out that Labour Members who have spoken in the debate have delayed the House for less time than Conservative Members?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member is making a point of debate, and he had 49 minutes in which to do so.

**Shona McIsaac:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a co-sponsor of a Bill that is third on the Order Paper, I want to assure you that I am certainly not trying to delay this Bill.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I was not aware that the hon. Lady had made any contribution so far that would give rise to that accusation.

1.6 pm

**Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): I preface my remarks by declaring an interest: I have four money-purchase policies, so I would be affected by the Bill.

I am shocked by the allegation that I would take part in any attempt to talk out the Bill. The remarks of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) are extremely misplaced. We have had an informed debate on an extremely important issue. The contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) was extremely erudite and well informed. In fact, it was so well informed that I had great difficulty following some of the technical arguments in answer to the detailed points that arise from the Bill. I hope that, as my remarks progress, we will get back to a more level playing field, as suggested by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who commented on the fact that the debate had been non-partisan, and that issues had been discussed sensibly across the Floor. I hope that my observations will be taken in that context.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on securing his place in the ballot and introducing a Bill dealing with this extremely important subject. However, I question whether a private Member's Bill is the correct vehicle to bring in these complex, although badly needed, reforms to annuities, with all their tax consequences. In that context, I agree with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), who is not present at the moment.

The starting point when considering pension policy—whether annuities or other issues—is to look at the overall context. The Government's White Paper on the pension credit succinctly sets out the Government's position, which provides the context in which this debate is taking place. In the White Paper, the Government say:

"The Basic State Retirement Pension is, and will remain, the foundation for income in retirement. However, it has always been the case—right from the early days of state pensions—that people were expected to build up a second pension or other savings, on top of their Basic State Pension. Indeed, it is the fact that more people are retiring with good company or other personal pensions that explains why pensioner incomes have risen faster than the incomes of people in work. The task now is to encourage more people to save, and to make sure that it pays to save.

The Government's reforms are based on the principle that those who can afford to save have a responsibility to do so. In return"—

this is the point that the right hon. Gentleman's Bill is trying in part to address—

"the Government should support those who cannot afford to save, and regulate the pensions and wider savings system effectively."

There is no doubt that there is a crisis of confidence in the concept of private pension provision following the mis-selling scandals of the 1980s and the Equitable Life fiasco, on which we focused at the start of the debate—before you took the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Responding to an intervention, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon said that the Bill would solve that sort of problem. Furthermore, on 22 July, *The Sunday Times* reported:

"Even insurance firms are privately lobbying Labour for a change in the law. They argue that if annuities were not compulsory, the Equitable Life scandal would disappear overnight."

I intervened to challenge the right hon. Gentleman to explain to me, as an Equitable Life policyholder, how his Bill would address the issue. He said, probably facetiously, that if I listened to his two and a half hour speech, I would learn the answer. He spoke for half an

*[Mr. Andrew Dismore]*

hour, so perhaps the answer was in the other two hours, which he chose not to give us, no doubt to avoid being accused of talking out his own Bill.

**Mr. Curry:** I provided an example of precision, which I urge the hon. Gentleman to follow.

**Mr. Dismore:** I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's intervention, but I am afraid that I am still none the wiser.

**Mr. Gardiner:** My hon. Friend is no doubt aware of the barrister who, when pulled up, gave a long explanation of which the judge said, "I am none the wiser." The barrister replied, "None the wiser, my lord, but much better informed." I trust that my hon. Friend might also be.

**Mr. Dismore:** I am not sure that I am any wiser or better informed as a result of my hon. Friend's intervention, but "Revenons à nos moutons," as Voltaire might have said.

The Equitable Life issue is quite important in this context. To inform the House, may I say that I have both guaranteed and non-guaranteed annuity rate policies, so I suppose I am both a loser and a bigger loser. I took those policies out in my late 20s as it was a requirement of my partnership to do so, although, like most people who take out pension policies, I had no idea what I was signing up to. However, I have become remarkably better informed about the affairs of Equitable Life over the past few months, and exactly what the Equitable Life policy problem is bears pointing out to the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon.

When I, and many others, took out policies in the early 1980s, interest rates were high, as were annuity rates, as we see from all the research information available for the debate. Equitable Life made a promise: I would have a guaranteed annuity when I retired if I kept up my contributions. The problem has arisen for Equitable Life because it cannot achieve that, and I challenge the right hon. Gentleman to say how his Bill would solve it.

Obviously, the Bill will be of no assistance to existing policyholders who have to vote by today on whether to accept the scheme, so how can the right hon. Gentleman pray in aid, both today and in publicity, the claim that the Equitable Life problem would be solved—for the future, I assume—were his Bill passed? The real answer to the Equitable Life problem is that the insurance industry has got a lot wiser and no longer sells those particular policies. We should question some of the arguments that have been advanced today because there is a lack of knowledge about the workings of the pension industry and of annuities. I suspect that if the Bill is passed it will add to the confusion. I question whether that is the best way to proceed.

I am a member of the Work and Pensions Committee and, in the previous Parliament, I was a member of the Social Security Committee. I share the blame for the fact that those Committees have always focused on state provision such as the minimum income guarantee to combat pensioner poverty, and have paid little attention to the private insurance market. I am keen for the Select Committee to conduct an inquiry into the issue of confidence in the private sector annuity market, and I have been attempting, with some success I think, to persuade my colleagues to agree. That would be a good opportunity for us to examine proposals such as this in detail and to take evidence from all sides about the best way forward. We could investigate whether the right hon. Gentleman's proposals are workable, and whether they solve the problem that they seek to address.

Apart from our little spat just now, today's debate has been very well informed and useful, but it has not allowed the House to take evidence from the experts, except indirectly in hon. Members' contributions, about whether the Bill's proposals are sensible. We also need to test its long-term financial implications. If the Bill gets to the Committee stage, that will be all well and good, but I would hope that an inquiry by the Work and Pensions Committee could be conducted in parallel with those proceedings. That would ensure that our debate is fully informed, which is important because many people would potentially be affected by the Bill.

One or two things need to be said about what the Bill will not do. It will not enable people to put any more money in their pension pot. There is no doubt that there is concern about annuities, and the House of Commons Library briefing puts that point rather well. It says:

"Today's pensioners are faced with much lower nominal annuity rates than earlier pensioners, but the expectation of low and stable inflation in the future (incorporated in the bond yields underlying annuity rates) means that they face less inflationary risk in future and that their income will maintain its purchasing power much better than has been the case in the past. Nevertheless, the perception remains that it is unfair for current annuitants to be retiring with an annuity income based on rates half those prevalent ten years ago."

That is followed by an interesting graph showing a high peak in 1990 and a low peak in 2001.

The briefing goes on to make the following important point:

"Research from the ABI stresses the extent to which the determination of income in retirement is a two-stage process, encompassing both annuity rates and pre-retirement investment growth. While someone retiring today faces historically low annuity rates their pension fund will have benefited from historically high growth in equities in the period before retirement. The net effect of these two countervailing forces is that—for a given level of contributions relative to average earnings—an individual retiring at the end of the 1990s has a higher income in retirement than someone who retired at the start of the decade."

That seems a paradoxical position, and I suspect that it is very difficult to explain to people who face the problem of purchasing an annuity today.

The Library briefing makes the point that the coincidental high pre-retirement growth and low post-retirement returns may not continue. My point is that perception and reality are not the same in this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston did the House a service by referring to the plethora of different insurance products on the market and the different types of annuities that are available.

As I said, the Bill would not put more funds into the pockets of people who are trying to buy annuities. There would be the same amount of money in circulation, so people who think that the Bill would provide a panacea for their annuity problems may be under a misapprehension. That could be wrong only if the claim in support of the Bill that it is tax neutral is also wrong. The additional money in the annuity—or the alternative

to an annuity—could come from only two sources. It could come from increased contributions by the person during their working life. We all know how difficult it is to convince younger people of the need to invest in their future. I made my own personal pension arrangements when I became a partner in a law firm, not voluntarily but because it was a requirement of the partnership. When I was in my late 20s, my partnership share was not sufficient for me to consider it easy to make those contributions. Tax breaks are the alternative possible source of additional money.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon has claimed throughout the debate that the Bill is tax neutral. In my opinion, we are being asked to buy a pig in a poke. The Bill makes no mention of tax provisions. Clause 1(7)(5) states:

"Any withdrawal from the Fund by the member under subsection (2) shall be regarded as 'income' within section 1 of this Act."

—the Act in question being the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988. That is as far as it goes. Although the right hon. Gentleman may claim that the Bill is revenue neutral from the Inland Revenue's point of view, we have no way of knowing that other than in general terms from his speech today and his press releases.

It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to say that he will table amendments in Committee, but those amendments will probably expand the Bill to three or four times its original size, so it is important to say on Second Reading that the Bill is only half the story so far. Either the right hon. Gentleman is overselling his Bill by suggesting that it is the panacea that will help to sort out the problem, or he may be mis-selling the Bill by suggesting that it is revenue neutral when that is not the case.

My other main observation concerns the Bill's proposal in respect of the minimum retirement income. Earlier in the debate I explored the issue with the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) who made one or two points that I had not spotted. I was attempting to raise further points that were consequential on what he said, but he had lost patience with me by then. The hon. Gentleman is a professor and professors do not like to be interrupted.

The amount of the minimum retirement income was covered by the right hon. Gentleman's press release and by some hon. Members today. As I understand it, the purpose of the minimum retirement income is to make sure that anyone who buys one of the products that the right hon. Gentleman is promoting would not ultimately have to fall back on the resources of the state. I question that based on the wording of the Bill, which appears to be somewhat contradictory. Clause 2 states that

"the Minimum Retirement Income shall be set annually by the Chancellor of the Exchequer by order, and he shall set the amount for the financial year in which this Act comes into force".

Clause 1(4)(c), which introduces a new subsection (8) to section 1A of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act, states:

"The income provided each year from the annuity under section (1A) must increase by reference to increases in the retail price index, so far as not exceeding 5%."

That is a convoluted way to describe it, but my question is how those two provisions relate, and whether the Chancellor's discretion under clause 2 would be fettered by the 5 per cent. RPI rule.

I am concerned that the Bill contains no provision to require the Chancellor to consult anybody about what rate he should set for the MRI. In these days of inclusiveness in politics, I am surprised that the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon has not included in the Bill a suggestion that the Chancellor should consult the insurance industry and pensioners' groups, some of which are very active in private sector pension provision, before deciding what rate should be set.

I am also surprised that the right hon. Gentleman suggests that the appropriate rate should be linked to the RPI. I am sure that he is serious about ensuring that the provision that people make is sufficient to ensure that they are not dependent on the state, but the Bill would not achieve that. He might not like to hear it, but the Government have been very generous to the least well-off pensioners through the minimum income guarantee, which increases every year in line not with inflation but earnings. We know that the intention is to increase it for 2003 to £100 a week and that it will continue to increase and, I suspect, overtake the RPI increase. The right hon. Gentleman and his party are not keen on the earnings link and abolished it for the basic state pension in the early 1980s. It may be that if at some remote date the Conservatives should return to government, they will not continue this Government's policy of generosity to the least well-off pensioners by maintaining the earnings link for the MIG. However, that is the present Government's policy, and the Bill in its present form would mean that pensioners would quickly find themselves falling behind and becoming dependent on the state.

The problem goes further. The hon. Member for Northavon raised the issue of housing and council tax benefits. He made the valid general point that housing benefit may not be of much interest to the sort of people who would have such policies, but I challenge it inasmuch as a number of reasonably well-off people, especially in London, choose to rent property. Luxury property in London is often only available for rent, not for sale. Those people could potentially be thrown back on state provision, and the Bill would make no provision for housing benefit, let alone council tax benefit.

The hon. Gentleman also made an impressive point about long-term care for the elderly. That is phenomenally expensive, as we all know from our debates on the royal commission reforms. We also have the additional complication that although taxation arrangements are UK-wide, different arrangements for long-term care pertain, for good or ill, in England and Wales compared with Scotland, as a consequence of devolution. In Scotland, it has been accepted that the state will meet the cost of long-term care, but that has not been accepted in England and Wales, where the means test still applies to the personal care element of long-term care of the elderly. That cost is rising, as we all know. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon provided no answer to that problem and we do not know whether he believes that the cost of long-term care for the elderly should be borne by the state or by setting his MRI at such a level that individual pensioners should be able to absorb the cost.

I also challenged the hon. Member for Northavon on the pension credit. The Bill's relation to the concept of pension credit, the purpose of which is to reward savings, is complex. It rewards pensioners with a small amount of savings—whether from an occupational pension or from an annuity of the sort contemplated by the Bill—by

*[Mr. Dismore]*

allowing a small amount from such sources to be made up by matching funds from the Government to various sliding scales, as set out in the chart at the back of the Bill.

I do not understand from the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon whether he perceives that subsidy from the pension credit—which is aimed particularly at middle-income pensioners—as something that should be covered by the minimum retirement income figure, or whether that figure should be set at a level whereby people who purchase an annuity under MRI should not have to make provision for that so they could maximise their entitlement to pension credit. At the moment, there is no incentive to have that sort of fiddle, when one can arrange one's affairs in such a way as to maximise one's entitlement to pension credit. Either one is entitled to it, through the purchase of an annuity, or one is not.

As it stands, the provision could enable people to have some sort of benefit planning arrangement where they can set their annuity under the MRI at a level to maximise their benefit, which is effectively potentially increasing the burden on the state in respect of the people to whom the Bill is supposed to apply. The pension credit raises complicated questions for the right hon. Gentleman which, so far, he has not answered.

The old system that we inherited from the Tories was simple; we had the basic state pension and a low level of what was then supplementary benefit, now the minimum income guarantee. However, because the present Government have been generous to the least well-off—and are about to be generous to the next band of pensioners—the problems have started to arise in terms of pension credit, long-term care of the elderly and ancillary benefits such as housing and council tax benefits. Frankly, the right hon. Gentleman has not answered those points. If the Bill is to be revenue neutral, those are important questions that he must answer.

We then come to how couples are treated in these arrangements. The difficulty that the right hon. Gentleman has to face is that taxation is done independently within a couple but benefits are assessed on a family basis. That includes pension benefits. Again, he has not dealt with this question. The Library briefing states:

"The treatment of pensioner couples is a further complicating issue. The MRI proposals—like the income sources which would constitute any MRI—are based on the individual. However, the means-tested benefit system which the MRI seeks to maintain pensioners above is based on the family. The interaction between individual income and family assessment of benefit entitlement raises the issue of the MRI over-providing for couples where both have pension entitlements from a defined-contribution pension scheme."

That was referred to tangentially by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North.

The briefing continues:

"Both partners would be required to purchase an annuity sufficient to provide them with individual income of £140 per week, producing a joint income of £280 per week. Given that to avoid dependence on the MIG they only require a joint income of £140.55 per week, their flexibility in annuitising their pension fund may be seen as somewhat less than is intended."

As has been said, £140 continues to be discussed as the likely figure, but how many people will benefit from that?

At current annuity rates, an annuity producing an income incremental of £67.50 difference between the basic state pension and the MRI would require a fund of about £55,000 for a man aged 65 and about £60,000 for a woman. Given that the average annuitised fund in 2000 was just £23,000, it appears that many annuitants would not be able to meet the MRI, let alone benefit from any flexibility in the use of their remaining fund. That argument applies with knobs on if we are talking about a couple as opposed to the two halves of a couple, a husband and wife. This is a practical question: how would we overcome the difficulty of people being taxed independently while the benefits system applies jointly. Should we go back to taxing husbands and wives jointly? That is a tendentious problem that raises issues that go way beyond the Bill and could open a whole can of worms.

What about the sex discrimination legislation and the double exemption? Is it the role of private sector provision to level up between Peter and Pauline, to use the example of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North, or is that the responsibility of the state? There is nothing wrong with the state's involvement in pooling risk between the sexes. I take the point that when each sex reaches the age of 65 the differences between life expectancy are somewhat lower. However, I question whether it is right for the private sector to adopt this position, bearing in mind how annuities are currently calculated for pooling risk.

We have discussed what happens if the annuitant dies early. It was alleged that the money goes back to the insurance company. It does not. As I said in my intervention on the hon. Member for Northavon, it is part of the pooling arrangement. If we are already arguing whether the pooling arrangements in the annuity system work fairly, those arguments will become stronger if we broaden the pooling arrangements by pooling across the sexes, for example.

Another criticism is that the Bill benefits only rich people. The Labour party has been accused of bringing the politics of envy into the debate. Frankly, I am not bothered whether the Bill will benefit only rich people; my main concern is whether it is fair between the different income groups and between the annuitant/taxpayer and the Exchequer. If the measure is genuinely revenue neutral, I am laid-back about it—that is not a problem. My concern is whether the process could penalise the less well-off, which takes us back to the relationship between pension credits and the minimum guaranteed income. I am also concerned about whether there is equity between the different income bands.

I pray in aid the comments of the Association of British Insurers that were reported in the 17 December edition of *This is Money* magazine under the headline "Insurers welcome pensions Bill". I must say that I am not hostile to the Bill, which contains proposals for important and necessary reforms. I simply question whether the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon has covered all the bases. On equity, the article in *This is Money* said:

"The Association of British Insurers said that this was a contribution to the debate on the compulsory purchase of annuities. However, association spokeswoman Emma Grainge said: 'Our general fear is that most people will have insufficient savings to take advantage of it.'

She said that to get an income of more than £140 a week"—

which is what we discussed earlier—

"people would have to spend around £50,000 on an annuity, and many people's retirement funds were less than this. 'We do welcome any contribution to the debate on compulsory annuities but any changes to legislation should enhance flexibility and choice for all consumers.'"

Has the right hon. Gentleman come up with a plan that benefits all consumers or only a relatively small number? Are we considering an inheritance tax avoidance scheme or something that provides the flexibility that people need to provide for their retirement at a time of varying economic circumstances?

The Bill takes away some current choices. It removes the drawdown provisions, although that fact is not clear from the Bill itself as one must cross-reference it with the 1988 Act. I do not have time to go through that point in detail, but drawdown would be withdrawn.

Compulsion at age 65 has been canvassed today. I believe in flexibility, and we need to work towards the flexible decade of retirement. People increasingly live longer and want to work beyond 65. We have all had letters from people who object vehemently to being forced to retire at 65. They think that that is the worst sort of ageism, and I agree to some extent. In some jobs it may be appropriate to retire at 65, but in others it may not. By specifying 65, the Bill does not provide the flexibility that the modern age requires.

Equally, I must tell the Minister that specifying age 75 in the tax scheme is also inflexible. I am with the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon on the need for that reform, but his Bill would create as much of an evil as that which he proposes to remove.

The Bill does not deal with multiple policies. I have four different private policies, and the hon. Member for Ryedale said that he had 11. Would one have to opt all one's policies into the Bill's system, or could one pick and choose? I foresee cunning tax avoidance schemes in which I could include one policy in the system but maintain my position in relation to annuities for the others. There could be all sorts of juggling as people bought all sorts of different policies, and that would not be sensible. Should the Bill reach Committee, I urge the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon to consider how multiple policies should be dealt with.

Will he also examine security of investment? The Bill refers to schedule X of the Insurance Companies Regulations 1994, which specifies permitted investments that could be quite risky. We have already discussed whether it is wise to put all a person's money into gilts. Schedule X goes perhaps too far the other way, and I urge the right hon. Gentleman to consider whether there should be restrictions on that.

Will the right hon. Gentleman also consider the transitional arrangements in his Bill? The Bill would straddle the introduction of pension credit and the growth of stakeholder pensions, and there is potential for a series of loopholes.

I have spoken for some time, and, as I promised, I am not trying to talk out the Bill. I hope that I have offered constructive points and criticisms. The right hon. Gentleman's proposals have a lot going for them, but they also contain some flaws.

1.43 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly):** It is a pleasure to take part in the debate. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on securing his private Member's Bill slot. I also congratulate him on his application for the Bill, which, as he said, required courage, and on being successful in the ballot, which, as he said, required good luck.

I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman, too, on choosing the most complex of subjects, although I am not sure whether that required courage or foolhardiness. Whatever it required, I congratulate him on choosing a subject that represents a challenge to us all. We face not just an intellectual exercise, but the realisation that pensions, pension products and annuities have an impact on the lives of real people, their security in retirement and their savings behaviour. I congratulate him, finally, on the clarity with which he put his arguments. Like other hon. Members, I found his speech most entertaining.

The right hon. Gentleman has received advice from the Retirement Income Reform Campaign on the substance of his Bill. I have had the pleasure of meeting representatives of it and its chair, Dr. Oonagh McDonald, and I have discussed the proposals with them in some detail. I am grateful for their contribution to the debate. I am sure that once proceedings on this private Member's Bill have concluded in whatever way, we shall continue negotiations and debate with all interested parties. I am certainly committed to exploring workable and affordable ways of reforming the current annuity structure to improve choice and give people more control over their pension products. That is why the Inland Revenue and the Department for Work and Pensions will shortly publish a joint consultation document on how we might make the annuities market work better for pensioners. I hope that that document will deal with some of the issues that have been raised with passion and knowledge here today.

However, there are fundamental problems with the Bill—problems that are inherent in the Bill and could not be resolved by amendment in Committee. It might be useful to hon. Members if I sum up briefly some of the main problems before I go through them in more detail. I believe that the Bill would be costly, and that the cost could run into several hundred million pounds. The Bill would be counter-productive and restrict choice for the majority of pensioners. It could also drive down annuity rates further.

The Bill would reduce flexibility and would not fit well with proposals for making the retirement age more flexible. I reject the charge that we are not willing to act because in some sense we are not prepared to give greater flexibility to those with larger pension pots. Those issues are fundamental to the content of the Bill. If we accepted that, we would restrict choice and flexibility for the majority of pensioners who seek to draw annuities.

It is important for me to start with an explanation of what the current annuity system is designed to do and what annuities are for. It is important to recognise that annuities are the single financial product that can provide a guaranteed income to people in their retirement, no matter how long they live. I hear hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), suggest that we could consider other ways in which secure income for retirement could be provided, but at the moment they do not exist. Annuities are the only way in which a pensioner can be guaranteed a secure income in retirement, no matter how long he or she lives. Successive Governments of either persuasion have found the annuity system appropriate for just that reason. With people living ever longer today, annuities provide that important security.

I want to examine why the Bill would restrict choice for the majority of pensioners—choice that the Bill is supposed to be opening up. The aim of the Bill appears

*[Ruth Kelly]*

to be that pension scheme members should be required to use their pension scheme funds for annuity purchase only to the extent necessary to secure a minimum retirement income. The annuity has to be index linked and, apart from some transitional measures for those currently in drawdown, has to be bought by the age of 65.

The minimum retirement income is to be left to the Government to set annually. I understand that the idea, which has been explored in debate today, is for the MRI to be set at an amount that would ensure that the pensioner did not fall back on means-tested state benefits. Otherwise, the Exchequer could end up paying twice—once for the costs of the pension scheme tax reliefs on a person's pension fund and a second time for the cost of state support.

Let us suppose that the annuity level was to be set at the level of the minimum income guarantee—currently £92.15 a week, or £4,790 a year. I realise that my assumptions are cautious and that other speakers in the debate have assumed a much higher figure—£140 a week or even more. However, if we assume that the amount is £92.15 a week, the cost of providing that income for a 65-year-old man—at the best annuity rates currently available—would be about £54,000. Assuming that people took their maximum tax-free lump sum, the necessary fund size would be about £72,000. If the annuity were index linked—as the Bill would require—a fund of about £95,000 before deduction of the tax-free lump sum would be needed.

That makes no allowance for those who want the minimum retirement annuity to continue to their survivor after their death. The cost of such an annuity would be significantly more, requiring a fund—before deduction of the tax-free lump sum—of more than £109,000.

Members may like to know that most people retire with pension funds of far less than that amount. The average size of pension fund accumulation is about £30,000. We are talking about the difference between £30,000 and £109,000—that is what would be required to meet the MRI. About a quarter of the fund is taken as a tax-free lump sum, leaving even less available for annuity purchase. The average amount spent on each pension annuity—as I understand it from figures provided by the ABI in 2000—was actually £23,000.

**Mr. Webb:** I may have misunderstood the Bill's provisions, but surely they would mean not that the whole of the minimum income guarantee would be replaced, but only the marginal amount above any basic pension or other pension. The amount to be replaced would not be £92 a week, but about £17 a week at current rates—a fifth of the amount suggested by the hon. Lady.

**Ruth Kelly:** The hon. Gentleman is probably aware that the rate of the minimum retirement income is left to be set by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in a yearly order. Furthermore, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon has proposed, both in the debate and in his press releases, that the amount is likely to be about £140 a week. That would, of course, include the basic state pension. If that figure were not included the level would fall, but other benefits might apply, such as housing benefit—to which the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) referred—council tax benefit and so on. When we consider the other benefits that might line up, it seems extraordinary to suggest that the size of pension fund that people currently use to translate into an annuity would be anything like enough actually to buy a sensible amount of MRI, at the levels proposed by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon.

I realise that some people hold more than one personal pension fund, but the Bill would benefit only a small section of the population—those people able to build up pension funds large enough to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Bill. Under the measure, the majority of people would still be required to use the whole of their pension fund to buy an annuity. Not only would they gain nothing from the Bill: they would actually lose. I shall return to that point later in my speech.

Some people may say that an annuity of the size of the minimum income guarantee would be excessive—a point made by the hon. Member for Northavon. In addition to taking into account the benefits I mentioned earlier—council tax benefit and housing benefit—we should remember that the Government are committed to raising the MIG in line with earnings, at least during this Parliament. The value of the annuity—indexed by reference to the retail prices index and capped at 5 per cent., as the Bill proposes—together with the basic state pension would be likely to fall steadily behind a minimum income guarantee that increased in line with earnings. The annuity would not then provide the protection against falling back on state benefits for which it was designed.

For the proposal to be effective, the MRI annuity would need to be linked—like the MIG—to earnings. No such annuity product exists, and it is unlikely that the industry would ever be able to develop such a product, as there is no matching funding vehicle to back it.

People's needs and financial circumstances differ greatly. Some may not have built up an entitlement to the full basic state retirement pension, so a requirement to build an annuity to cover only the difference between the basic retirement pension and the minimum income guarantee would often be inadequate for that reason. I am sure that hon. Members would not agree that the minimum retirement income fund should be set differently according to people's individual financial circumstances and I do not believe that that is the intention of the Bill. It would be wholly impractical, as well as an unnecessary and costly intrusion which could only increase the cost of annuity purchase.

There is another issue concerning value and freedom of choice. Index-linked annuities provide the very valuable guarantee that the purchasing power of the person's pension will not be eroded by inflation, but, as with all guarantees, there is a price. In the case of index-linked guarantees, that is paid by the person's receiving a lower level of income at the start than they would from a flat-rate annuity, which pays a fixed level of income throughout. The hon. Member for Northavon made some valuable and interesting comments in that regard.

If one assumes that the average level of inflation is about 2.5 per cent., it could take about 15 years before the income from an index-linked annuity matches that of a comparable flat-rate annuity. Many people, particularly those with modest pension pots, need—or even prefer—to maximise the amount of income that they have earlier in their retirement, perhaps if they think that they will be

more active during the early years of their retirement, or have specific plans that they want to undertake, or if they fear a shorter life expectancy. The Bill would take away the choice that people currently have and force them to buy an index-linked annuity for each personal pension arrangement that they hold. That may not be what they want; it may not be in their best financial interests; and it certainly restricts their choice and freedom.

The opportunity, if a number of small personal pension arrangements are held, of taking a selection of different annuity types at different times can enable a person to spread risk. The Bill would remove that opportunity. For the very small minority of people who have large enough pension pots, who would perhaps benefit from the Bill, that loss of flexibility might be a small price to pay, but for the majority of pensioners the Bill would represent a significant backward step.

The important point is that people now have a choice. They can use their open-market option for annuity purchase. They have the freedom to decide which type of annuity best suits their needs. The proposals in the Bill would take away that choice.

The requirement for everyone to buy an index-linked annuity would also increase insurance company demand for index-linked gilts. The stock of index-linked gilts is limited. The present Government have been taking measures to ensure that index-linked gilts are still available up to a point, but even so the stock of index-linked gilts is limited and there are far fewer corporate issuers of index-linked gilts than fixed-rate bonds. It is not clear how that demand could be met.

I suspect that if there was a requirement for annuities to be index linked at the age of 65, current annuity rates would deteriorate. The vast majority of pensioners would then not only lose choice and flexibility but get worse rates on their annuities than people currently fear.

The Bill would force people to buy annuities not at the current age of 75 but 10 years earlier, at age 65. Most people would have no option but to withdraw all their pension benefits from age 65, whether or not they were retired, again limiting the choice that they currently enjoy. That introduces inconsistency and unfairness, in that the requirement to annuitise by age 65 would apply only to personal pensions but not to retirement annuity contracts or defined-contribution occupational pension schemes, which are left as they are.

However, there is a much larger issue in respect of flexibility and the age of 65. If people are compelled to take out an annuity at the age of 65, they cannot continue to contribute to their personal pension scheme past that age. They have to retire at the age of 65.

**Mr. Butterfill:** I am very interested in what the Economic Secretary has to say, but would not it be very simple to overcome most of her objections by tabling an amendment in Committee that would simply make the arrangement optional, rather than compulsory—as, indeed, was the case in the similar Bill that I introduced in the previous Parliament?

**Ruth Kelly:** I understand that taking annuities at 65 would not be optional under the Bill. That is certainly how the Government read the Bill. A fundamental aspect of the Bill is that people would take an income at 65 to guarantee that they would not fall back on state retirement benefits after that point.

Advancing the contributions stop by 10 years for personal pensions is a substantial issue that is not compatible with the need to encourage increased economic activity over the age of 50 in the light of improvements in life expectancy. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon would say that his Bill would expand people's choice if they were only compelled to use a proportion of their pension funds to buy annuities. However, as I have said, those who stand to gain under the Bill are the small minority of people who are able to build up large pension funds.

I shall consider the Bill is greater detail. I have not yet even mentioned costs, but I shall return to the minimum retirement annuity. The Bill's aim appears to be to allow people to take benefits from their pension scheme—the residual retirement income fund—in whatever form they choose, as and when they like. Under the Bill, funds could be withdrawn while sweeping away all the current income withdrawal rules that are designed to prevent the fund being under-drawn or over-depleted.

Although the Bill would appear to give wide freedom on the manner of drawing down from the retirement income fund, it would also force the scheme member to decide, by the age of 65, just how much of the fund above the minimum retirement income they want to annuitise. Under existing income withdrawal rules, which would be repealed under the Bill, the member could annuitise any portion of the fund and could do so in varying stages until the age of 75, when the remainder must be used to buy an annuity.

Under the Bill, when an annuity had been bought by the age of 65, members could only turn the balance of the fund, or any other part of it. into an annuity if they first paid income tax on the withdrawal, thus reducing the available fund by up to 40 per cent. So, effectively, the Bill would impose a penalty on people who did not make the right annuity decision at the age of 65. In that sense, too, the Bill would reduce choice and restrict flexibility.

Let us consider the proposed retirement income fund when the annuity has been purchased by the age of 65. Normal advice for people considering entering income withdrawal is that they need large pension funds for the withdrawal to be financially viable. Different firms set their own rules, but some providers will offer such withdrawals only to people with funds of £250,000 or more to ensure that their customers can cope with fluctuations in income and capital that reflect, for example, the fortunes of the equity market and the administration costs involved. Unless they have ample other income, conversion of the whole fund into an annuity is normally the best advice for people with smaller pension funds, as investment and mortality risks are pooled and costs are much lower.

As I have already said, the average fund on retirement is about £30,000. More than 50 per cent. of those who reach retirement after taking their tax-free lump sum have a remaining pension fund of less than £50,000. For women, that percentage increases to about 70 per cent., and three quarters of people have a fund less than £100,000. Only 5 per cent. of recently retired scheme members are estimated to have a pension pot worth more than £250,000, after taking their lump sum. Again, the vast majority of the relatively few people who would have

*[Ruth Kelly]*

some remaining funds after the minimum income annuity had been purchased would be best advised not to take advantage of the freedom the Bill purports to offer.

**Richard Ottaway:** The Economic Secretary is not just opposing the Bill; she is doing a hatchet job on it, and that means that the Government will oppose its proposals in perpetuity. She claims that only a narrow group of people would benefit from the Bill, but what is the matter with that unless it is the politics of envy?

**Ruth Kelly:** I thought that I had gone to some length to explain why additional flexibility for the 5 per cent. of people who have funds worth more than £250,000 would, in fact, reduce choice and flexibility for the vast majority of pensioners who have smaller capital pots from which to buy an annuity. That is the basis of my objection to the Bill.

**Mr. Gardiner:** It is the politics of fairness.

**Ruth Kelly:** As my hon. Friend says, it is the politics of fairness that looks after the many pensioners who try to save to protect themselves in retirement.

There is another important issue connected to the Bill to which I must try to do justice. I refer to the substantial costs to the Exchequer that could arise if the Bill became law. It is an incredibly important consideration to take into account, as hon. Members on both sides of the House know or should know. In his press release, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon said that he had

"specifically designed this Bill—working with the Retirement Income Reform Campaign—to take into account Government concerns that any annuity reform should be affordable."

Instead, I believe that the impact of the Bill would cost hundreds of millions of pounds at least. I had to be persuaded of that. It was not as though I came to the proposals and thought, "Gosh. These are going to be very expensive." It is a complex issue, but I seriously believe that the proposals could not be amended in such a way, unless the Bill were drastically rewritten, without costing the Exchequer hundreds of millions of pounds.

**Mr. Boswell:** The Economic Secretary has told the House that the proposals would benefit only a small minority of rich people and that they would be a disbenefit to others. How come they would cost the Exchequer a fortune as well?

**Ruth Kelly:** If the hon. Gentleman is patient, he will find that I am just about to run through all the arguments as to why the Bill would cost hundreds of millions a year. I am sure that hon. Members will realise that we must have an opportunity to debate the sizeable expense involved.

People currently use only a fraction of the possible pension scheme tax reliefs available to them. There is a potential for take-up—I put this figure in the public domain without suggesting that this is how much the Bill would cost—of a further £34 billion worth of relief each year within the current tax limits. Members have asked whether that figure takes into account the current limits and the answer is that it does.

People of modest means often face other demands on their income, and hon. Members have suggested that such people might not have too much disposable income to hand. That is surely the case. However, even higher rate taxpayers do not save as much as they could in tax-privileged pensions. If one asks how much of the £34 billion applies to higher rate taxpayers, one finds that more than £8 billion applies to those higher rate taxpayers who do not take full advantage of their tax reliefs at the moment. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members suggest that that is hardly surprising, but that tacitly admits that higher rate taxpayers would take up the tax reliefs if they were given more flexibility over what they could use the money for.

The people with the largest pension pots are those most likely to have substantial amounts of money in other forms of savings and investments. They would need to switch only a small proportion of their savings into pension schemes for the public cost of the pension scheme tax reliefs to rise by hundreds of millions of pounds each year. Little, if any, of this extra tax relief would benefit the majority of people with modest pension funds who hold limited amounts in other forms of saving.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon proposes that his Bill should go even further than that. His press release of 17 December states that it is his intention to amend the Bill in Committee so that any money left in the fund on the death of a scheme member could be transferred to a spouse, partner or dependant free of tax. Some of these issues were explored by the hon. Member for Northavon.

Hon. Members are no doubt aware that, under the current income withdrawal rules, any funds remaining on death before the age of 75 that are not used to secure a pension income for a survivor are charged at a 35 per cent. tax.

Let us examine the possibilities. A 65-year-old man with a pension fund of £600,000 which has been built up with the assistance of generous tax reliefs—precisely the sort of person we might expect to benefit from the Bill—can take £150,000 tax free, provided the rest of the fund is used to provide an income for the life of the scheme member. Such income would, of course, be taxable in the normal way.

Under the Bill's proposals, however, the member would be able to remove a £150,000 tax-free lump sum out of the fund. He would need to use about £72,000 to buy a minimum retirement income annuity, which would leave a remaining fund of £378,000 that would continue to roll up tax free. The income and the gains of the fund, although no longer needed for pension purposes, would be exempt from tax. The scheme member would be free to withdraw from the fund at will. If he did so, it seems that the intention is for the withdrawals to be taxed as income.

The proposal is technically flawed because it is too imprecise. Although that could be resolved, the principle remains a concern. If the scheme member decided to make no withdrawals from the remaining fund for the rest of his life, it would build up with the benefit of tax-free investment income and capital gains until his death. A man at the age of 65 has an average life expectancy of 17 years. For a woman, it is 20 years. Over such periods, if the lowest long-term growth projections of about 5 per cent. a year, as recommended by the Financial Services Authority for such a scheme, were achieved, the fund size

would have increased to about £1 million. Under the right hon. Gentleman's proposals, the whole £1 million could be passed to the scheme's surviving members, tax free. It is not clear—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members say no, so I shall continue to explain the situation.

It is not clear whether the Bill would require the sum to be taken into account for inheritance tax purposes. If so, it would revert to the deceased member's spouse. However, there would still be no inheritance tax to pay.

**Mr. Curry** *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

*Question put,* That the Question be now put:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 139, Noes 25.

**Division No. 127]** **[2.12 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Mark Hoban and**
**Mr. Mark Field.**

**NOES**

Barnes, Harry
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cawsey, Ian
Denham, Rt Hon John
Gerrard, Neil
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Kelly, Ruth
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNulty, Tony
Perham, Linda
Sedgemore, Brian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Whitehead, Dr Alan

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Andrew Dismore and**
**Mr. Barry Gardiner.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Question put accordingly,* That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 139, Noes 27.

**Division No. 128]** **[2.25 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael

Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Sir George Young and**
**Mr. George Osborne.**

**NOES**

Barnes, Harry
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cawsey, Ian
Denham, Rt Hon John
Gerrard, Neil
Godsiff, Roger
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Kelly, Ruth
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNulty, Tony
Morley, Elliot
Perham, Linda
Sedgemore, Brian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Whitehead, Dr Alan

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Andrew Dismore and**
**Mr. Barry Gardiner.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).*

## Remaining Private Members' Bills

### CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES (PLAY AREAS) BILL

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** Not moved.

### ANIMAL SANCTUARIES (LICENSING) BILL

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### FOOTBALL SPECTATORS BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*To be read a Second time on Friday 12 April.*

### EURO AND STERLING CHOICE BILL

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### NATIONAL HERITAGE BILL *[LORDS]*

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*To be read a Second time on Friday 18 January.*

## Social Services (West Berkshire)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

2.36 pm

**Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): I am delighted to have the opportunity to debate the subject of West Berkshire social services provision. It was as long ago as 19 October last year that the debate really became necessary. It was on that date that the Secretary of State for Health read out his now notorious statement at the national social services conference in Harrogate. In that statement, he named West Berkshire as one of the 14 worst-performing social services departments in the country. The statement led to an explosion of real anger among the councillors and managers of the local council, who had been so viciously and unfairly maligned.

The statement also made me and many of my constituents equally angry on the council's behalf. How dare the Secretary of State condemn those who are struggling so manfully against huge difficulties when, as I shall demonstrate, all the objective audit evidence was that the Government were the main cause of those difficulties? West Berkshire council was not informed that the Secretary of State would be making that statement. There was no opportunity for the council to put its case. One of our councillors who was sitting in the hall said that she felt as if she was being treated like a schoolgirl sitting in assembly as the exam results were announced.

The effect of the speech was horribly destructive. It stank of posturing politicians trying to deflect blame from their own inadequacies by slamming hard-working local councillors and council staff who are trying to do their job in the most appallingly difficult circumstances. It was a speech calculated to produce unhelpful headlines and to destroy local morale, while doing nothing to improve services.

I am not suggesting for one moment that the level of social service provision in West Berkshire is adequate. Indeed, everyone in the area knows how much more needs to be done. That fact is one of the greatest sources of frustration to those who struggle desperately to meet local needs within an impossibly tight budget. Nor am I making a case against rigorous inspection and monitoring to ensure that high standards are maintained. Indeed, the latest joint review between the social services inspectorate and the Audit Commission praised West Berkshire for the council's responsiveness to the review process and its determination to improve performance.

What was most ridiculous of all about the Secretary of State's remarks was the way in which he completely ignored the findings of the joint review team. Only the day before the right hon. Gentleman made his speech, the inspectorate and the Audit Commission published their annual joint report in which they pointed out that while West Berkshire was not providing a high level of social care, it was at least among the top 8 per cent. of councils that had excellent prospects for improvement. When I read that, I thought that it perhaps meant simply that the council had started from such a low base of provision that it would be comparatively easy to improve. I looked in the appendix to see what criteria had been used in making that judgment. Among the qualities described as essential in achieving such a high grading were:

"a proven track record of identifying strengths and weaknesses"

and

"evidence of taking effective action to address weaknesses";

"effective political leadership" and "effective managerial leadership". Yet, the very next day—after West Berkshire was found by these unbiased, objective, non-party political judges to be among the top 8 per cent. of councils when measured against these criteria—the Secretary of State announced that the council was failing so badly that it was in danger of other "better-run" councils being called in to take over.

Just which councils does the Secretary of State think are going to take over, given that West Berkshire is already among the top 8 per cent. for effective political and managerial leadership and for taking effective action to overcome weaknesses? What the Secretary of State said was absurd, laughable, ridiculous and totally contradicted by the joint findings of the inspectorate and the Audit Commission.

So why did the Secretary of State get it so wrong? The first point to make is that the Secretary of State's verdict was based on a misinterpretation of some highly misleading statistics produced in the social services performance assessment framework indicators. Many of the areas in which West Berkshire is deemed to perform poorly are related to either costs or small numbers. West Berkshire is a very affluent area with high employment; which, by the way, means that we never get any special money for regeneration, home start or other such schemes. It also means that local care homes charge high prices and, if they do not get them, they sell up and make huge profits in the booming housing market. That means that the council has to pay over the odds if it wants to attract quality staff for itself.

Also, West Berkshire is a comparatively small authority. The numbers of clients involved in some of the specialised services are necessarily quite small. That means that minor changes in absolute figures—maybe just one or two more children in a particular service—can have a major impact on percentages.

Let me cite one absurdity. West Berkshire has been told to conduct an urgent investigation because the number of children removed from the child protection register and then subsequently reinstated is deemed to be too low. The assumption is that re-registrations are not taking place because social services are not monitoring the families concerned closely enough. An alternative explanation might be that social services is doing its job very well; that the council has reviewed its child protection procedures and is convinced that they are safe and appropriate. The only children who are being removed from the at-risk register are those who have been correctly judged to be no longer at risk and who should not be put back on the at-risk register. It is utterly ridiculous that the Secretary of State would have given the council a higher grading if it had put just one or two children back on the at-risk register, even if they had been judged not to be at risk.

**Mr. John Redwood** (Wokingham): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), whom I

*[Mr. John Redwood]*

congratulate on obtaining the debate. As a Member of Parliament representing a part of West Berkshire, I am glad that he is taking up the matter with the Government. Does he agree that there are a lot of people in need who are very worried that, as a result of the Government's attitude to the budget situation, they will not get the care and attention they need? That is why we want a sensitive and decent answer from the Minister today.

**Mr. Rendel:** I am very grateful for that intervention, and I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Moreover, his presence in the Chamber, and the fact that I know that the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) would have liked to be here amply demonstrates that this is not a party political matter. On the contrary, all three parties are agreed that the blame for the situation lies with the Government and not with the local council. One of the things that the Secretary of State said in the speech to which I have referred was that sometimes problems in social services arise because of party political infighting on the local council. The joint delegation to the Minister in November, which the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) attended, and today's debate demonstrate that party political infighting is not the cause of the problem in West Berkshire.

There are many areas in which West Berkshire council would be the first to admit that it is failing to provide for its residents the level of social care that it would wish. The crucial reason is the budget settlement that the council receives from the Government. The Secretary of State's speech ignored this crucial point. It is a grossly unfair funding formula which considerably underestimates the cost of delivering services to a widespread area with a scattered population such as West Berkshire.

According to the Department of Health press release that accompanied the Secretary of State's speech on 19 October, the right hon. Gentleman said that performance in social services was not primarily about money but about management and organisation. I have explained that objective evidence shows that he was wrong to imply that West Berkshire's problems arise from a lack of effective management and organisation.

So what does the objective evidence say about funding? The joint review reported on West Berkshire as follows:

> "In the 1999–2000 financial year, the net approved budget for social services was . . . 56 per cent. above the allocated SSA . . . Detailed scrutiny of the evidence, however, again suggests that this difference reflects the relatively low settlement from government rather than profligate spending by Social Services".

The joint review's findings again directly contradict the Secretary of State's verdict.

West Berkshire benefits from good management but lacks adequate funding. I do not intend to spend much time on that subject as it would be going over the ground that we covered in our joint delegation in November. Let me repeat one or two crucial statistics, however. In the 2000–01 standard spending assessment, West Berkshire receives £77 per child for children's social services. That is almost £100 less than the average, and still £34 less than a comparable authority such as Bracknell. The figure is the fourth lowest among the 150 councils that provide social services. We get £328 per elderly person in residential care, compared with an average of £446, and we still get £100 less than Bracknell. Ours is the ninth lowest figure in the country. For total personal social services, we get £113 per resident, compared with an average of £180, and that is the third lowest figure in the country.

Other authorities may have a greater need to spend on social services, but the variation in Government support is dramatically out of line with actual spending needs. There is no doubt that social services in West Berkshire are grossly underfunded, in both absolute and relative terms.

Meanwhile, the council has made significant savings in the budget, totalling some £3.6 million over the past three years and a further £1.4 million planned for 2002–03. However, the current expected overspend this year is some £740,000. That figure demonstrates that further cuts are simply not achievable if the council is to fulfil even its statutory responsibilities.

Painful decisions have been necessary. The council has had to raise the threshold at which people become eligible for services and is able to purchase new packages of care for people only when resources have been freed up from existing clients. As a result, there is no ability to undertake preventive work with community care clients, particularly older people. That has had a dire knock-on effect on the local health service. What would happen if the Council spent at SSA, as the Government say it should? That would wipe £9.6 million from the social services budget, and the council would be unable to deliver even a basic level of service to people in need. It would not be possible to meet national standards for child protection. Further cuts in services for older people would be required, increasing bed blocking. Unsustainable cuts would have to be made to services for adults with mental health problems and learning disabilities.

In his notorious speech, the Secretary of State for Health suggested that one way in which councils could improve their social service provision would be to take a more corporate approach. In West Berkshire, the corporate board has time and again sought cross-departmental solutions. Only one local budget has not been cut to support social services—education. West Berkshire spends at its full SSA on education. To avoid further criticism from the Secretary of State, are we to cut the education budget as well? I am not sure that the Secretary of State for Education and Skills would agree with that suggestion. After all, the Education Bill going through the House at present proposes to ring-fence the education budget so that councils will have to passport their full SSA allocation.

The council, local residents and I were furious at the grossly unfair naming and shaming of West Berkshire social services. If my speech does nothing else, I hope that it will demonstrate that that anger has hardly diminished in the three months since the speech. The Secretary of State's statement on 19 October 2001 was deeply damaging to local morale, particularly since it coincided with the launch of a national campaign to show a more positive profile of the work of social services in order to encourage recruitment.

It is time the Government stopped searching for cheap headlines while avoiding their responsibility to improve services. West Berkshire is not a rogue authority that throws money about and fails to deliver. Independent assessments have shown it to be a responsible council that makes difficult decisions within tight budget constraints and with what the joint review called

"energetic and effective corporate leadership".

Of course things sometimes go wrong and not all genuine needs can be met, but as the local Member of Parliament I have no hesitation in praising the hard work of local social services staff. They deserve better from the Government. In particular, as we said when the Minister received our delegation, they deserve an assurance that the Government will seriously address the funding shortfall that has so hindered social services in West Berkshire.

The staff deserve one more thing—an apology for the Secretary of State's unnecessary and damaging criticism last October. I hope that the Minister will have the courage and humility to admit that the Secretary of State got it badly wrong and that he will give, on his right hon. Friend's behalf, the apology that West Berkshire deserves.

2.52 pm

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) for raising the important matter of social services in West Berkshire. He will not be surprised to know that I take a different view from his, particularly on issues such as performance management and how we monitor the effective delivery of social services. I shall deal shortly with that and with his well-expressed and accurate points about funding. He is the sort of Member who will have taken the time to read the White Paper that we published in December, and he will know our stated view about the inadequacies of the local government financial system and our determination to produce a fairer and more easily comprehensible system of funding local government services.

The ability of local authorities to discharge their social services functions is affected by two important considerations. The first is the financial resources available to them. The Government provide a substantial proportion of those resources through the local government financial settlement. Although the hon. Gentleman did not say so, we have steadily increased the resources going into social services, including those for his authority.

Secondly, local social services will be heavily influenced by the overall decisions that the local authorities take about the priority, organisation and efficiency of those services. The Government for their part, through a combination of new legislation and other measures, have taken positive action to ensure that local councils have new means at their disposal to improve the quality, consistency and flexibility of local social services.

All these additional powers and freedoms are available to West Berkshire council and should be considered by the council as part of its strategy for improving the services available to local people. So while I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns over resources, he and others must not fall into the trap of simply assuming that all these problems can be addressed only through the local government financial settlement. I simply do not believe that that is true.

In that context, the hon. Member, together with leaders of the council and senior officers, recently met my fellow Minister of State, my hon Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), to discuss the overall state of social service provision in West Berkshire. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who sadly is no longer with us, and my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) also attended that meeting. My hon. Friend the Minister of State made several suggestions about how the council might improve the position.

My hon. Friend suggested, for example, that the council consider the benefits of using the legal powers contained in the Health Act 1999 to improve partnership working with the local NHS as well as care trust status under the Health and Social Care Act 2001. My hon. Friend also drew the council's attention to the opportunities presented by public-private partnerships to attract extra investment in social care. She also drew their attention to the new pathfinder programme administered by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions as a way of further improving the delivery of social services. I have not heard from the council, and I do not think that the Department has heard back either, about those issues, but I hope that the council has been considering how best to exploit those opportunities as a way of improving both the quality and value for money of social service delivery in West Berkshire.

At least half the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Newbury today were about local government finance and the way in which social services funding is provided to West Berkshire. I want to deal fully with the concerns that he has raised.

To put the matter in context, nationally, resources for personal social services have increased by more than 20 per cent. in real terms between 1996–97 and 2002–03—an average real-terms increase of more than 3 per cent. per annum. For historical purposes, it is important to compare and contrast that with the record of the previous Administration between 1992 and 1996–97. The comparable average annual real-terms growth figure was only 0.1 per cent.—virtually no real-terms growth.

West Berkshire has benefited significantly from this investment in social services. This year, on a like-for-like basis, the council received an increase of more than 8.5 per cent. in its total personal social services resources, including an increase of more than 6 per cent. in its personal social services SSA. In cash terms, the overall PSS funding for the council has increased from £15.8 million when the council was established as a unitary authority in 1997 to £21.2 million in 2002–03. I am not a great mathematician, but my arithmetic tells me that that is an increase of more than a third in cash terms since 1996–97. That is not an unreasonable overall increase; it is a very good increase, and I do not recall the hon. Member for Newbury referring to it at all.

We are continuing to increase the funding. Next year—2002–03—on a like-for-like basis, West Berkshire's PSS funding will increase by about 6.6 per cent. I believe that people of good will across the House and outside will regard those increases as significant. It is not just the SSA that has increased as there have been significant increases

*[Mr. John Hutton]*

in the council's carers and children's grants, and a doubling in the new grant designed to help deal with problems associated with delayed discharges from hospital. This year, for example, the council received £258,000 through this new grant. Next year that will double to more than £500,000.

The hon. Gentleman referred to problems of the relationship between social services and the NHS. The new money has helped, for example, to reduce delayed discharges at the Royal Berkshire and Battle trust from 19 in October to three. That is real and positive progress.

With that money, the council has been able to support an extra 27 residential and nursing home placements as well as supporting care home owners by increasing fees, helping to stabilise the local care home sector. I am glad to say, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees with me, that the fee level is now the same in each of the three authorities in the west of Berkshire. That is an important thing to have achieved, and I congratulate the council on it. The number of nursing home places in West Berkshire, as reported by the council, has remained constant since spring last year. That is very welcome, too.

The council is also providing a new home-from-hospital service to enable people to get back on their feet, an enhanced home care service for those people with greater needs, extending the working hours of the rapid response team to enable diversion from hospital admission where appropriate, and additional staff to undertake assessments in hospital to manage the throughput of patients at times of peak demand. Those are valuable additional services.

It is wrong to imply that nothing is currently being done to help West Berkshire with extra funding. That is not true. We are taking action to improve the resources available to the council and, thanks to the way in which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has presided over the economy, we can look forward to continuing improvements in the area.

Of course, we appreciate the commitment and priority most councils are giving to personal social services and recognise that social services departments face increased demand for services. That is especially true in West Berkshire. That is why we are working closely with the Local Government Association to identify the underlying source of that pressure on social services. We will be considering the outcome in the context of the 2002 spending review.

As I said earlier, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions published a White Paper in December, setting out proposals for a better way to fund local government. In particular, the Government are determined to simplify the methodology for distributing the general revenue grant so that it is more easily understood. We are also determined to reduce the amount of local government funding that is ring-fenced, especially for councils which are performing well, so that local government has more flexibility to make available funds to deal with local priorities. That will also help to reduce the bureaucracy associated with administering each grant, by reducing the number of plans required from councils.

In relation to reform of the general grant allocation formulae, the Department of Health has already commissioned independent research into all four of the current social services standard spending assessment formulae, with the aim of introducing improved formulae for 2003-04—the financial year after the one that we are about to enter. The Department is working closely with the Local Government Association on that research, and we shall of course share the research findings, both with local government and with hon. Members, when they become available in the spring. I hope that will enable a proper debate to take place on the new formulae before they are announced in November.

The hon. Gentleman asked why West Berkshire, in his analysis, receives comparatively less Government support than other local authorities. It does not. The hon. Gentleman has failed to take into account—although he acknowledged it in passing—the fact that West Berkshire is a relatively wealthy and affluent area, a fact made clear in the measurements of deprivation produced by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. In respect of employment and income, the vast majority of wards in West Berkshire are among the most affluent in the country. As I said earlier, it is right that that fact should be acknowledged in any rational funding formula.

The Government allocate general revenue resources to local councils using needs based formulae, which have been developed over the years by independent research. The formulae apply equally to all councils—West Berkshire is not being picked on and treated in a discriminatory fashion—so that after making allowances for the size and needs of an area, all councils receive the same level of funding relative to need. We would not, therefore, expect West Berkshire to receive the same level of funding on a per capita basis as, for example, Liverpool or—more locally—Slough—

**Mr. Rendel:** I did not say that.

**Mr. Hutton:** I realise that, but the hon. Gentleman has failed properly to address the important factor of relationship to need in the social services spending formula. He talked at length about per capita allocations. That is a deeply, deeply regressive way to allocate resources. The only way to deal with the point that the hon. Gentleman made would be either to increase the overall resources available to social services—something to which the Conservatives are not committed and I should be surprised to hear detailed figures from the hon. Gentleman—or to redistribute resources to areas such as West Berkshire away from areas of greater need. That is simply not a viable way to address the acknowledged deficiencies in the local government funding formula.

Clearly, we need to consider carefully what the new research on SSAs will show, but I strongly expect that any new formula introduced in 2003–04 would still need to take account of the social care needs of an area as measured by the level of deprivation, rather than—as the hon. Gentleman implied—a stricter per capita basis.

The hon. Gentleman asked why West Berkshire was named by the Secretary of State as one of the poorest performers on the basis of the social services performance indicators when joint review and SSI reports seemed to indicate that the council was doing well.

It is important to clarify exactly what was said. The joint review and SSI reports did not say that the council is doing well, so there is no inconsistency with the Secretary of State's announcement based on the indicators. Both reports said that the council is serving only some people well. To be clear, those reports use a four-point scale to summarise their judgments on current performance: not serving people well; serving some people well; serving most people well; and overall serving people well. The hon. Gentleman's description of the conclusions of the reports is not accurate.

In this context—

**Mr. Rendel** *rose—*

**Mr. Hutton:** I have only two minutes left. The hon. Gentleman took 17 minutes to make his point, so I think that I should conclude my remarks. In this context, it is clear that to say that West Berkshire is serving some people well means that a great deal of progress still needs to be made. That is borne out in the detail of the reports.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State rightly identified West Berkshire as one of 14 poorly performing councils because, over the past three years taken together, its performance against the indicators was poor. In the most recent year, only 56 per cent.—just over half—of the available indicators showed acceptable performance or better. Performance on the others was not acceptable. The situation has clearly improved slightly, but it still, notwithstanding those improvements, places West Berkshire near the bottom against the indicators.

**Mr. Rendel:** They are ridiculous indicators.

**Mr. Hutton:** They are not ridiculous indicators, and they are based on information supplied by the relevant authorities to the council. The hon. Gentleman highlighted one indicator: re-registrations on the child protection register. That indicator tries to identify inefficient practice in removing children from the register and reinstating them later, because that is not a good use of resources or necessarily a good indicator of practice.

**Mr. Rendel:** What about too few?

**Mr. Hutton:** Similarly, too few also gives cause for concern.

**Mr. Rendel:** Why?

**Mr. Hutton:** Unfortunately, we do not have time to have a debate about—

*The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour,* MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

*Adjourned at six minutes past Three o'clock.*

# Westminster Hall

*Tuesday 18 December 2001*

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

## Post Office

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

9.30 am

**Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am pleased to introduce this important one-and-a-half-hour debate for colleagues with an interest in the future development of post office services, particularly in relation to electronic government and the Government's targets to deliver services using automated credit transfer systems and new banking systems.

I am delighted that the Minister is able to join us. I know that he is particularly busy and that he has had difficulties at home to do with the health of a family member. We are all pleased that it seems that the family difficulties are being resolved. We are particularly grateful that he has joined us this morning while under that sort of pressure.

This is an important debate on the relationship between the Post Office as an institution and central Government, and the services that we are trying to ensure are delivered in the best possible way to our constituents. I shall set out the context in terms of Consignia and the Post Office. One does not have to be an expert to recognise that both are currently under considerable financial strain. Anyone who has studied the recent report of the announcements made by the chief executive to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry will see that the Post Office is under a great deal of financial pressure across its operations. It is facing financial losses and increasing competition, not only internally in the United Kingdom but throughout Europe and the wider world. Base level staff within the Post Office and Consignia are understandably worried—both those who work directly and those, such as sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses, who work indirectly for the organisation. It would not be proper at this time of year to miss paying tribute—as I am sure all Members would wish—to the dedication and commitment of Post Office staff, particularly the postmen and women who over the next week or so will work themselves into the ground to ensure that our constituents get the delivery services that they have come to expect. Their sacrifice and contribution are acknowledged and recognised by us all.

I shall concentrate on the future facing postmasters and postmistresses and consider two aspects of e-commerce and ACT technology. I want to refer to the universal bank, about which the Minister made a significant announcement in a written answer yesterday. I shall then consider the "Your Guide" system of promoting government general practitioner services in the way suggested in the performance and innovation unit report, published in June 2000.

First, I shall cover some of the background to the current situation regarding sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses. I vividly remember the television report of the Conservative party conference during which the then Secretary of State for Social Security, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), waved his magnetic stripe card high above his head with gay abandon and an uncharacteristic flourish. In fact, that is not true, because the year after he took to song, which was even worse. It looked like an awful opportunity for a photograph, but that did not cross his mind. The Horizon card scheme ended up hung round his neck like a political albatross, because it was a signal failure. However, it was a signal failure only afterwards.

It will discomfort the Minister to remind him that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)—the Minister for Welfare Reform from 1997-98—confirmed at the annual conference of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters that the Labour Government would continue with the swipe card. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), whom he sent in his absence to the subsequent annual conference, also confirmed that the Government would try to roll out the Horizon card scheme as it was originally conceived. Many sub-postmasters rightly made investment decisions on the basis that that would provide secure income generation.

Many of my constituents told me that they had invested heavily in the bricks and mortar of their village and town post offices, safe in the knowledge, as they believed, that their businesses would have some income security. That was turned completely upside down when the Minister of State for Social Security in the last Parliament decided that the game was up and that the scheme would not fly. Everyone took a terrible financial loss, including ICL—the company that promoted the scheme—the Post Office and postmasters. The Government also lost a lot of money. The National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have looked into the matter, which was one of the biggest financial disasters ever known in the public sector.

That is the background to the debate. In June 2000, the performance and innovation unit produced a report—"Counter Revolution: Modernising the Post Office Network"—which gave postmasters in my constituency real hope that if everything that was set out in the report was done, which is what they wanted and needed, there was a future for post offices in urban and rural areas throughout the United Kingdom. The report raised their hopes, and the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters could not have written it better. The report's concepts are still the foundation for a secure future for post offices in rural and urban areas.

The report highlights the universal bank, the concept of the roll-out of the government general practitioner and the "Your Guide" pilot as crucial to the success of the entire undertaking. These are big projects and none of this is easy. It is difficult for Government to procure them and to roll out contracts. They always take longer than anyone would like. I also accept that considerable investment has been put into the hardware system, which is now working and which makes a positive difference. That is all welcome. However, the day of judgment is looming, and we must try to pin down what income stream will flow from the PIU reports and recommendations, the universal bank and the general practitioner services for sub-postmasters. I need not remind the Minister that there are only 53 or 54 weeks between now and when ACT technology starts to be delivered and post office owners no longer have access to

*[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]*

the income stream from fees for cashing social security giro cheques. In anyone's language, that is not a long time. The timetable for finishing work on the universal bank and rolling it out in a sensible, coherent way, and for developing sophisticated new concepts such as general practitioner services, is certainly ambitious. Time is not on our side.

Although the concepts and vision are right, post office owners in my constituency are fearful that they will not recover the £400 million that will be removed from the system with the loss in 2003 of social security giro cheque payments. They are not convinced that e-commerce, the universal bank and general practitioner services will provide adequate substitute income.

It is important that between now and 2003 postmasters and postmistresses are able to clarify the business opportunities. The written answer that the Minister gave yesterday to the hon. Member for Kettering (Phil Sawford) will cause them to be more rather than less fearful; the answer was helpful only to the extent that we now know a bit better where we are going. We waited for that answer for some time, but it was not what my sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses wanted to hear. I will quote some key sentences for the benefit of Members who have not yet read it.

"The emphasis of the ACT migration and marketing strategy will be to ensure that each customer has the best account for his or her circumstances."

That is seductive, but the words "marketing strategy" concern me. If the Government were to make it more attractive for people to take ACTs straight into their bank accounts, it would diminish the opportunities that the universal bank would provide for sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses.

**Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for initiating this important debate. Does he agree that a subtext is that the Treasury would dearly love to encourage more people to use PAT 14 accounts—named for policy action team 14—at the expense of the major banks, rather than the Post Office card accounts, which would have to be underwritten by the Treasury? I have not had the benefit of reading the detailed answer, but I suspect that it does not tell us how many accounts the Treasury is prepared to underwrite.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** I am grateful for that helpful intervention, which underlines my point. Another key sentence in the answer might help the hon. Gentleman understand the Government's plans for a cap:

"Our operational assumption is that around three million benefit and tax credit recipients will open a POCA, but there will not be a cap on numbers or eligibility criteria for a POCA."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 119W.]

That is good news, because we have argued all along that there should be no eligibility criteria or cap on numbers for Post Office card accounts. However, it is bad news because the operational assumption of 3 million accounts suggests to me that instead of the £400 million that is available annually at present, postmasters and postmistresses will be lucky to get £50 million out of the system when it is fully operational. Every week, 16 million social security benefit transactions in 18,000 branches throughout the United Kingdom contribute to that annual income of £400 million.

The question is how we will fill the £350 million gap. If the Government limit the amount of funding, it will not matter that there are no caps or eligibility criteria for the Post Office card account. The 16 million Post Office benefit transactions, if they continue at that level, will be financed with only £50 million. That will not take post office and sub-post office operators any further forward. I may be wrong, but I hope that the Minister will answer that crucial question.

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): I support my hon. Friend's argument. A further difficulty is that the Post Office card account and the basic bank account will not be on an equal footing if they are not simultaneously up and running in April 2003. That start date is desperately important for many reasons, not least of which is the effect of the Tax Credits Bill that is currently passing through Parliament. The Government have decided to split the contracts: one will go to the Link organisation, the other to EDS/Citibank. It will be difficult to get the contract right in the time scale available. Given the experience of previous contracts such as NIRS2, is the Minister confident that a POCA will be functional in April 2003?

**Mr. Kirkwood:** I am certain that some people know much more about that than I, or my hon. Friend do, although he has worked extensively on this subject. They are concerned that the roll-out periods and implementation plans are not robust, and feel that a full trial year of the fully spec system should take place before it goes online. My hon. Friend is right to remind hon. Members that the system is vital, especially for the low paid, whose domestic income depends on reliable delivery of benefits. Otherwise, they are thrown on to the social fund safety net.

The Government must persuade us not only that that can be done in the suggested time scale, but that they have a plan B. The obvious plan B would be to postpone the replacement of benefit books by ACT for as long as it takes to ensure that the new systems are robust.

Other questions flow from the operational assumption that 3 million people will open accounts. Do high street banks want a new cohort of people past retirement age queueing up in their branches to obtain their pensions? How will the Government's marketing strategy ensure that POCAs are limited to 3 million? If an agreed rate of return was set for each transaction, sub-postmasters might be able to derive income. If customers wanted to continue using the service, which they currently do at the rate of 16 million transactions a week, postmasters and postmistresses in my constituency could encourage them to do so in their post offices. If the transaction rate were agreed, people could choose where they obtain their benefits without the need for marketing strategies, pressure or incentives. Academic research suggests that people are more comfortable with benefit payments being made across the counter in their local post office.

We must try to pin down the Government's plans, which are crucial to the survival of the post office network. We are talking about 18,000 offices and a high

closure rate. I think that the last Postal Services Commission report said that 541 offices closed in the year to March 2000. The Minister may say that closures have tailed off and that things have not been quite as bad this year but people have been founding their plans on the PIU report. When sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses see the detail of the written answer dealing with the universal bank proposals and others, the closure rate of sub-post offices may accelerate.

I want to talk about the concept of the government general practitioner. The pilot scheme has been running for some months in Leicestershire and Rutland, and all the evidence made available to me suggests that it has been a success. The services that were rolled out have been of considerable interest to the people using the new delivery mechanisms.

Some of my colleagues and I had the advantage of seeing a presentation by the team that is rolling out the project. That powerful system is impressive. If it were put at the heart of the Government's programme of service delivery, it would transform the interface between the ordinary citizen and central Government. That vision was carefully worked out and involved consideration of the way in which post offices could be a one-shop entry into a panoply of Government services. I found particularly exciting the fact that they could to a large extent deal with information and advice themselves, using a combination of new technology and personal services across the counter. There is the additional benefit of passing on customers to specialist advisers and having surgeries on-site.

I think that the Secretary of State may have in mind the possibility of a visit to one of the best examples in the pilot area. I hope that she makes known her views and her experience of how well the pilot scheme has gone. If the Government invested time, effort and commitment in the idea, it would certainly be a key element in developing and delivering post office services in rural and urban areas in the longer term.

Again, the concept and vision are right, and the work that has been done is extremely useful and valuable, but we must ask questions about some of the resources, timetables and other issues. We need to know how the programme is going. What is the Government's view of the pilot scheme and what is their time scale for rolling it out? Which client groups found it most useful and to what extent are they using it in a way that they did not before? Do customer satisfaction surveys suggest that users are satisfied with the new services that they are being offered? I am particularly interested to know how the programme has affected low-income groups and rural areas such as south-east Scotland, which includes my constituency.

What will be the decision-making process? What steps is the Department of Trade and Industry taking to see that the devolved Administrations ensure that the content of "Your Guide" is accurate and up to date? If it is not relevant to the local circumstances, it will be useless and positively harmful. We need to tie in the constituent legislatures in Edinburgh and Cardiff and the content providers in the devolved parts of the United Kingdom where the content is significantly different because some of the rules and laws are different.

How do the Government see "Your Guide" helping to achieve their rightly ambitious targets for the delivery of e-government by 2005? What other areas of government policy are likely to be affected by the new service? The opportunities are almost limitless. It could help to improve public service reform, social inclusion and to tackle fuel poverty in rural areas. It could promote neighbourhood renewal, rural renewal and e-democracy. I came away from the presentation extremely enthusiastic. I am old and cynical yet I was really cheered up by the potential that this new tool can deliver if it is properly used.

Finally, I return to the future viability of sub-post offices in my constituency. Where will the income stream come from for "Your Guide"? When will we know what fees central Government will pay? When will we get down to the nitty-gritty of how these concepts—"Your Guide", the universal bank and other systems of e-government—which are right in theory, will work in practice? The day of reckoning is coming. We need to know how committed the Government are, how much money they will put into the system and how the Department will take forward these issues. We need to know that soon because the ACT migration scheme will kick in in 2003. As my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said, if we do not get these things sorted out by then we will all suffer. Certainly the attrition of the network will continue and rural and urban sub-post offices will continue to close at an alarming rate. I hope that the Minister can answer some of these important questions because many people are urgently awaiting his response.

9.58 am

**Mr. Michael Moore** (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)—my neighbour—in this important debate, and I congratulate him on securing it. The attendance for the debate has rather the feel of the usual suspects. There is strong representation on the Liberal Democrat Benches and a blank representation on the Government Benches, apart from the Minister whom we are grateful to see in his place. What was once a reasonably healthy attendance by Conservative Members at previous Post Office debates has now diminished. I do not think that fairly reflects the seriousness of the issue. although I concede that the full title of this morning's debate may be somewhat esoteric and may have scared off a few hon. Members.

The bottom line for us all, regardless of party and whichever part of the country we represent, is that the local post office is a vital part of our communities. My hon. Friend said that our thoughts are focused at this time on the Christmas postal deliveries. I attended the Peebles delivery office yesterday at the ungodly hour of 6.30 am. I was a late arrival; most of the postmen and postwomen had been there since midnight, anticipating what turned out to be the busiest day of the year so far. About 50,000 items of mail were being sorted by a team of between 30 and 40 for delivery throughout the county of Peebles, which forms a large part of my constituency.

Much information technology in the modern post office is used for preliminary sorting, but when the mail gets to delivery offices such as that in Peebles, it is a much more manual affair. That is perhaps why, when I was going round the office, getting in the way of people sorting the mail, several postmen and postwomen told me that they could not understand why, at this busy time

*[Mr. Michael Moore]*

of year, senior managers in the Post Office had announced the possibility of 30,000 redundancies. To say that the timing was insensitive is an understatement; to see the hard work being done and the necessary way of working in post offices suggests that senior managers need to get back to the floor themselves if they are to understand more about what goes on in their business.

Although it is not the primary aim of the debate, I hope that the Minister can assure us that there will be nowhere near as many redundancies as has been suggested, even though some doubt was subsequently cast on that figure. The people who deliver the customers' mail would be reassured to know that they are extremely valued and that it is not their fault that the Post Office is in commercial difficulty.

**Mr. Waterson:** I do not for a moment disagree with the hon. Gentleman about the excellent work and commitment of Post Office workers. In his conversation with them, did he ask why the Post Office or Consignia is responsible for about half of all days lost throughout the economy in industrial disputes?

**Mr. Moore:** I did not discuss that issue. The industrial record in my constituency is perfect, and I am unaware of any recent disputes in any of the areas that I represent. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will raise that matter with the Minister.

We are, rightly and properly, focusing on the delivery of e-government through post offices. Liberal Democrats have consistently expressed anxieties about the future of the sub-post office network in rural areas and in larger towns where sub-post offices also give an essential service. They, too, feel under financial threat because there is great uncertainty about their future.

The Government proposed the universal bank and the 'Your Guide' system as solutions to the crisis; my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire extolled some of the ideas and asked some important questions. Time is short to get the new systems in place, assuming that they will deliver what they promise. Substantial anxieties remain among the sub-post masters and mistresses in my constituency and, I suspect, across the country.

My hon. Friend and I recently held a meeting with our local post masters which highlighted their worries, especially about the shape of the community information network, which "Your Guide" will represent. They expressed great uncertainty about it and although their federation had received a presentation in Perth not long before, they were conscious of widespread ignorance among local agencies in the Borders and elsewhere about the services that could be provided through it and the roles that councils and other agencies would be expected to play. That meeting in Galashiels led us to ask for the meeting, which my hon. Friend mentioned earlier, with the "Your Guide" implementation team in London. We were given a comprehensive and neutral presentation of the project's development to date, and I thank the individuals concerned for their time and patience.

The presentation made it clear that there are three core customer propositions in the project that try to focus its usefulness on retirement, work and community services, and on key groups that use or might be tempted to use the Post Office reasonably regularly. An impressive range of services is being considered on such matters as money and legal issues; retirement; jobs and training; benefits entitlements; local government services; adverts and notices; and, importantly, local information. There are several channels, to use the jargon, through which the services may be delivered, but the touch-screen facility is perhaps the most imaginative and the one that catches attention. We saw a demonstration and were able to test it out in its current form for our constituencies, and we were impressed by what we saw, although we appreciate that it is not yet the finished article.

It was a good presentation in many ways, but it raised a series of questions in my mind. It was not clear which Department is in charge of ensuring that the services that are to be delivered through "Your Guide" are properly prepared, although I assume that it is the Department of Trade and Industry. If the Minister is able to answer that question, perhaps he could list the Departments that he expects to use "Your Guide" and give us a progress report on the state of preparedness for trialling it beyond the pilot stage that is happening in Leicester. It also struck me that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) mentioned, huge cost implications are often associated with such projects. It is unclear what departmental budgets exist to ensure that proper preparation is made for developing the services and ensuring that they are delivered on time.

Most important will be the roll-out of touch screen and other aspects of "Your Guide" to the wider sub-post office network. Will the Minister tell us what stage the procurement and contract setting has reached? Given that we are within 18 months of the project going live throughout the country, we would expect to hear about an advanced stage of negotiation and roll-out. I hope that we will not be told that nothing will be done until the pilot is finished. I suspect that that will be a handy answer behind which to hide, but no one will believe the Minister and his Department if that is the best that can be done at this stage. We want a cast-iron assurance that the 2003 deadline will be met. As my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said, there appears to be an alarming shortfall between the income generated under the existing benefits system and what is promised under the new system. If there is no income when we trip over from one to the other, there will be chaos in the system and many people will lock up their post offices and throw away the keys.

My hon. Friend spoke about the relationship between the DTI and devolved administrations. Anxious about the future of our sub-post offices, we in the Borders have devoted considerable time to that matter. The position north of the border is extremely murky: it is not clear who is in charge of the roll-out and the relationship with the DTI. I am a firm supporter of devolution—as, indeed, is the Minister—but that is no excuse for losing the thread of Government policy and the impetus to deliver it.

At what level is liaison with the Scottish Executive taking place and to what extent are the same services as those set out in the "Your Guide" plan for London involved? I do not want to make a personal point, but is

the Minister's sister in charge? Perhaps they will have a chance to sort out a few problems over turkey this Christmas.

I have heard some flashy suggestions that the "Your Guide" platform could be used as an internet access point across the country, which would help the Scottish Executive to reach their target of internet access for the whole of Scotland. That is superficially attractive and I can understand why one might think in those terms but, as the history of commercial internet café sites shows, those who want to use the internet do not necessarily use it for a short period. To make this a commercial proposition—and ensure that people are not gummed up in queues until they get fed up and move on elsewhere—internet access may have to be denied and other routes for delivery established. Will the Minister clarify the position, which is a matter of growing concern north of the border?

My hon. Friend's argument came home to roost when we spoke recently to key local players in our region. He and I chair a monthly meeting that brings together the convener and key economic development officials from the council, the chairman and chief executive of Scottish Enterprise Borders, the chairman and principal of Borders college, the vice-principal of Heriot-Watt university, and the chief executive and chairman of the Scottish Borders tourist board: I hope that that list includes everyone. That meeting has taken place monthly for two and a half years, primarily to focus local efforts on maximising the benefit to the region of European funding, but we also touch on wider purposes. When I recently mentioned the roll-out of "Your Guide" I was met by blank stares. I blame not those senior local individuals, but the information system. We are close to implementation yet key players such as the council, which should be interested in developing its services through the platform, know little about it.

My hon. Friend and I suggested that the implementation team should come north of the border at the beginning of January to demonstrate the system to local agencies. That may sound like an ad hoc approach from the Minister's point of view, but it is important from our local perspective. I hope that the Minister will provide the implementation team with sufficient resources, because it is costly to acquire the kit north of the border. The team must be able to meet Ministers and the Scottish Executive. I understand that the Minister cannot instruct or demand in that respect, but I hope that he will encourage the appropriate Minister to meet the team. If the "Your Guide" platform is on time in England, we do not want to be left behind in Scotland.

The bottom line is that within 18 months the sub-post office network should have a viable future. It is important that post offices serve our local communities and that Government policy objectives can be delivered through that post office network. Despite numerous debates in the House, Government announcements in parliamentary answers and so on, it is not clear what form that future will take. The documents that we are asked to read are full of buzz words: modernisation, reform, and one nation—you name it, it is in there. Sub-post masters would add another buzz word, which is uppermost in their minds—survival. They fear for theirs right now. I hope that the Minister appreciates that the onus is increasingly on him to demonstrate how they will survive.

10.15 am

**Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on initiating the debate, on his campaigning over the years for the post office network and on the work that he has done on the Select Committee on Social Security in bringing out many of the ways in which the automated credit transfer system will have an impact on the Post Office. The debate builds on a substantial legacy of work. He and my hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) referred to the problem from the standpoint of the Scottish Borders. However, this is not specifically a Scottish problem, a Borders problem or a rural problem. I represent a relatively affluent London suburb but I know from experience that post office branch closures arouse perhaps more emotion than any subject other than the closure of hospitals. The issue concerns us all.

I wish to ask two opposing questions. First, what can the internet and particularly e-government do for the Post Office? Secondly, what can the Post Office do for the internet and e-government? The first question returns us to the issue that both my hon. Friends have touched on in some detail: the underlying economics of Post Office Counters and of the network and how they will be affected by the changes of the next two to three years. Perhaps I can put the same questions in a slightly different way. I understand that as a result of the phasing in of ACT in 2003, the network will lose approximately £430 million in income, which is slightly more than the figure suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. The notional figure that I was carrying in my head, as a result of past debates and parliamentary questions, was that the universal bank and particularly the Post Office card account would bring in about £180 million. My hon. Friend quoted £50 million, and it would help us all to have more clarity about the income string that we could expect. The Government have always said, "That is an issue of commercial secrecy; we cannot discuss it." It may be an issue of secrecy or it may reflect an unwillingness to say that they do not know the answer.

It is also vital to have more clarity for the sake of staff. People are having to make decisions about whether to continue in the business or to close up. If there is a prospect of raising more money than the figures I have cited, it would help to build confidence within the network if we knew that. The more the Minister can say about the expected figures for card accounts and the income stream that will flow from that, the more that would help business planning. It would also help if we could add to that a notional estimate of what fee income the network can expect to derive from its electronic government work, a role that will emerge from the pilot programme. I was given estimates of a fairly derisory income, but that may be over-pessimistic. There may be substantial money in the scheme, in which case it would be useful if the Minister could give us a range of estimates. We are not asking him to put his reputation

*[Dr. Vincent Cable]*

on the line by citing a precise figure—a possible range of figures would tell us something about the way in which Post Office economics are being affected.

Before leaving the question of the impact on the Post Office, I raise the slightly wider question of how internet-based services will affect Consignia as a whole. As we have learned over the past week, the finances of Consignia are in a dire state. It is not simply a question of strikes, though they are important. The simple fact is that there has been growing competition for the services provided by the Post Office for many years, particularly by electronic mail and fax. The Post Office has been unable to respond because of under-investment, in large part because its annual gross profits every year have been looted by the Treasury. As much as 90 per cent. of its gross profits for much of the 1990s was taken by the Treasury in tax and dividends. It has not invested and is not ready for the challenge. It is now faced with a pincer attack from two sets of regulators: the Association for Postal Commerce—Post Com—which is helping couriers and others to get into bits of its business, and the European Commission, which will squeeze its margins by reducing the weight limit. It is difficult to see anything other than a downward spiral of increasing losses and contraction of business, and at some point the issue will arise of whether Consignia can continue with its universal service obligation.

The relevance of the internet is that at least it offers a positive opportunity rather than a set of negative threats. The Post Office's one great asset is the door-to-door delivery system. It may become a liability, but it could become an asset if it were linked to the increasing use of internet shopping. Terminals in domestic households and the Post Office Counters network could be the mechanism for stimulating new business and value addition for the postman delivery service, and that could be a great boon for Consignia. However, I do not see much evidence of that.

I want to ask the Government for some indication of how they see the income streams of Post Office Counters and Consignia generally being affected by the changes. I also want to turn the question round and ask what the Post Office Counters network can do for the dissemination of internet access and electronic government. I understand that both universal access to the internet and availability of electronic government are targeted for 2005, so the two processes are interrelated. The Government must address the issue of how far the adaptation of electronic government by Post Office Counters can contribute to reducing the digital divide problem, which has several elements. One is the great difference between social classes—about 20 per cent. of families with unskilled workers as head of household, but more than 60 per cent. of those with professionals as head of household, have internet access. There is also a big gap between the old and the young, and between rural areas and big cities. The question is whether the Government can bridge that gap using the post office network. Let us take those in turn.

With imagination in the use of electronic government through the Post Office, much could be done to bring the elderly within the system. They are the main users of Post Office Counters because that is where they collect their pensions. They are being left behind, but they do not have to be. In Twickenham, an imaginative system has grown up around the villages which are the basis of my constituency. One social entrepreneur has created in each suburban village an online system targeted specifically at elderly people, most of whom are now wired up to the internet, but that is unique and specific to my area. The system—Hampton online and Twickenham online—has not, as far as I know, been replicated elsewhere. If elderly people are to have internet access, the Post Office Counters network of branch offices is best placed to achieve that. I wonder how far the Government are targeting that specific audience in that way.

The second problem relates to rural areas. We know that BT is behind with its asymmetric digital subscriber line roll-out, but even if it were up to scratch with that, there would be a problem. We know from case studies in Europe, in countries such as Sweden, that even if there is a line going into a village, the offshoots into domestic households often lag far behind. The way in which village communities obtain access to internet services is primarily by using a focal point, such as the library or the local main post office.

I turn to electronic government itself, an area in which there are clichés. The Government often set themselves a target of having certain services online, but the services offered are often fragmentary and not very useful. It is important that a small trader should, for example, not only be able to use electronic government terminals to find out how to get an application form for a VAT return, but should be able to talk interactively to the VAT office. That would make business and the payment of tax much easier. The quality of electronic government is crucial, not simply access to it. We must understand how far the Government have thought through going beyond mere mechanical targets to achieve a really useful electronic government service. The Post Office experiment could be important in accelerating that process.

We are at a branching point. We can envisage an environment in which the Post Office Counters network declines or disintegrates rapidly and the Post Office as a whole is on a downward spiral. However, it is equally possibly to envisage upturn and increasing opportunities. The use of the internet-based system and electronic government could be a main mechanism in achieving that. The Government must be much more explicit about how they intend that to work and how much income the Post Office can derive from it.

10.26 am

**Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on securing the debate. It is a timely opportunity to discuss such issues, although it is not one that a significant number of colleagues have taken. Perhaps they are desperately trying to catch the last Christmas post.

As it is Christmas, I join in the tribute paid to postal workers in my constituency and elsewhere. They are a special breed of people. How many of us would want to get up so early and tread the streets in all weathers? I know how committed and dedicated they are to their task.

The real affection that the British people have for the Post Office—if I can use that old-fashioned term—is underlined during the Christmas post. It is therefore all

the greater pity that the postal services face so many problems at present. A rather good film was made a few years ago by Mr. Tim Burton called "The Nightmare before Christmas". The postal services are becoming the nightmare before Christmas in some ways.

There are two principal issues. First, how effective are the Government in delivering e-government and e-services generally? Secondly, will the steady erosion of postal services, in particular the closure of branches throughout the land, undermine the efforts to introduce e-government?

It will be interesting to see whether the Minister, in what will probably be a protracted reply, given the time available, will follow the example of his Secretary of State in Question Time the other day. She distanced herself from the many problems currently faced by postal services and no wonder, because we are talking about an organisation that is losing £10 million a week and has the worst industrial relations of any organisation in the country. Perhaps the Minister, who has many and varied contacts in the unions and in politics, can use his good offices to try to get the Communication Workers Union's tanks off Consignia's lawn so that it can at least make some sensible management decisions and have some expectation of carrying them through to fruition.

We know that the management have decided that they must make savings of £1.2 billion. Rather unbelievably, the figure of 30,000 redundancies was blurted out during evidence to the Select Committee. Ministers and senior management have rowed back from it ever since. Underlying all that is Consignia's dismal failure even to come close to meeting what are in my view quite modest delivery targets. Achieving its basic core business of delivering a first-class letter the next day is simply evading that failure.

We keep hearing ideas floated that would dismantle the postal service as we know it. They include the abolition of the first morning collections, which has happened in many parts of the country, and scrapping the second delivery. It has also been suggested that people should actually pay to receive their mail, rather than its being delivered in the traditional fashion. I hope that the Minister will explain how such developments will sit with the universal service obligation.

In introducing the debate, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire rightly dwelt on universal banking services and the "Your Guide" pilot. Despite the written answer that slipped out yesterday, presumably in anticipation of this debate, the universal banking project is fraught with uncertainty. What is certain, however, is that in April 2003, 36 per cent. of sub-post offices' income—about £400 million, although the figure will have risen even during this debate—will disappear. That is one major reason why 547 sub-post offices have closed. That is a record figure, and the trend is continuing this year.

During questions a couple of weeks ago, Ministers tried to draw comfort from the fact that that rate of closure may be slowing. I am sorry to disabuse them, but there are a number of reasons for that. Many sub-post offices have already closed and will probably never reopen. Moreover, the honest truth is that some people are hanging on simply because they cannot find anyone to buy their business. Many in urban areas are waiting until next year, when new forms of financial support will be introduced as part of the Government's regeneration proposals. As has been eloquently pointed out, a great mass of people are waiting to see what will happen with the universal banking project.

In a remarkably frank tour d'horizon before the Select Committee, the chief executive of Consignia accepted that about half the network is, in effect, uneconomic. As many as 5 million people are unbanked, and probably unwired as well. They are the main targets of any proposals. Yesterday's interesting written answer states that good progress is being made, that the Government are negotiating on these matters—one would hope that they are—and that they are developing

"a detailed migration and marketing strategy",

the aim of which is

"to ensure that each customer has the best account for his or her circumstances."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 119W.]

The answer also suggests that departmental staff will discuss options with people. Can the Minister assure me that when advice is given, it will be wholly neutral? Departments should not try to pressure people into opening traditional bank accounts or PAT 14, stripped-down versions, instead of Post Office card accounts. According to some estimates, as many as 7 million people could request POCAs. There is a cost involved in providing such accounts, although it is difficult to estimate, as the figures have been difficult to get hold of.

The written answer to which I referred also states that there will be no cap on numbers. I welcome such talk, as far as it goes, but is the Minister really suggesting that the Treasury will write a blank cheque for these accounts and pick up the bill regardless of how many people apply for a POCA? Moreover, according to one estimate, PAT 14s will cost £60 or £70 a year per account. Will the banks or the Treasury bear those costs? According to the Minister's estimate, how many people will want to open such accounts?

Although it is nice to hear that the Minister is still negotiating and developing a strategy, does he accept that the April 2003 deadline is rapidly becoming unrealistic? The key issues of training for sub-postmasters and, indeed, for customers have already been mentioned. For the elderly in particular, keying-in pin numbers and swiping cards will be difficult and unfamiliar tasks. We ought to hear a little more on the migration strategy and the way in which costs will be allocated.

To judge by information that we have received, the consensus is that the "Your Guide" pilot has proved to be quite a success. It has had 150,000 users so far, which is impressive for a six-month pilot in one area that has run for only two thirds of its term. That is encouraging. As co-chairman of the all-party group on older people, I can see enormous potential for helping older people in the community, especially those who are less able to get around. There have been massive benefits through Age Concern, and the surface has barely been scratched. It is a good idea and we are pleased that it is going well. No doubt the Minister will tell us more.

*[Mr. Nigel Waterson]*

The original performance and innovation unit proposal envisaged a 12-month pilot, and there was quite a scramble to get it up and running for the six-month period. Ministers should not just wait for the pilot to come and go, after which people's expertise will dissipate, and then start thinking about what will happen next. A few days ago I tabled a question on that for written answer, to which I have yet to receive a reply. I was hoping for the purposes of the debate that I might get it yesterday afternoon, but I was not as lucky as the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, who received his answer on the universal bank. We deserve to be told about the attitude of Ministers to the pilot. Following all the work that has gone into it from the private sector, are they producing their own detailed proposals on how it will work in practice, or has there been slippage in the decision-making process? What is their timetable?

I recently searched the Government's e-envoy website to see their strategy paper for the coming year. As far as I could see, it made no mention of Consignia or post offices. That rather suggests that the organisation is not necessarily seen as crucial to the delivery of services. I hope that that is not the case. The Minister will not mind if I remind hon. Members that he has not always inspired the IT industry with confidence. In July, a publication called "The Register" questioned whether he had done enough about the internet, and concluded that he had done "nothing at all". By September, its view had changed somewhat, and it said that

"there's no way he's up to speed on what is going on with the Internet".

I am sure that he will wish to refute that.

The real problem is the Government's attitude. When difficulties arise—there are legions in this instance—the Ministers involved tend to say, "It's not me, guv." They have made desperate attempts to distance themselves from the failures of the Post Office, saying, "It's nothing to do with us, it's the company—it has commercial freedom." If they are prepared to stand by while existing services are dismantled, what is their attitude to the new, exciting e-services? The simple message is that they cannot have it both ways. They cannot say on the one hand that it is nothing to do with them, while on the other the Secretary of State effectively sacks the chairman of Consignia, Dr. Neville Bain, during Question Time in the House of Commons. The Government are the 100 per cent. shareholder in Consignia. I have tabled another question, which remains unanswered, on whether they will waive their dividend this year in view of the company's dreadful commercial results.

Ministers are interfering at every level of Consignia's management and organisation. The other day, when 30,000 redundancies were announced, the Minister was reported to have made clear the Government's "concern and anger." Behind the scenes, they are constantly chivvying Consignia in one direction or another. They must therefore take responsibility. If they are not prepared to give Consignia real commercial freedom, so that management can get on with managing and making the decisions that are necessary to bring our postal services firmly into a new century, they must carry the can. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

10.39 am

**The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander):** Like other Members, I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on his success in securing this morning's debate on such an important topic. He was, along with the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), the first Member to seek a meeting with me on these issues when I assumed office in June. I know that it is an issue of special concern to him, not only in his own village or constituency but throughout the country. I am also grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks about the difficulties that I am encountering at home at the moment. The difficulties of which he speaks arise from the very early arrival of a son last week. I am glad to say that he is doing well, as is his mother. Although, on reflection, I think that my wife took rather literally the interpretation of the general election by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister as an instruction to deliver.

I now move on to the substantive issue. I shall direct my remarks first to the issue of the government general practitioner or the "Your Guide" service, as it is now known in the pilot. I will endeavour, in the time available to me, to answer as many of the substantive questions, the very genuine questions, that have been raised by the hon. Gentlemen and colleagues.

First, I shall make clear the context of today's debate. The Post Office is still piloting the concept of post offices as government general practitioners in Leicester and Rutland. The aim is to test the concept of post offices acting as one-stop, first-stop shops providing information, advice and access to transactions within a range of public voluntary sector organisations. The Government have put £25 million into the pilot, which is being branded as "Your Guide" and which began to be rolled out from mid-July of this year.

The pilot was fully up and running in all post offices in the Leicester-Rutland area by the end of August, and was formally launched at the beginning of September. During the pilot, post offices concentrated on a number of limited, key services to core customers, which included advice, information, assumptions, actions in broad areas of retirement, seeking work and local information. The service will include advice and information on pensions, other benefits, job vacancies, local transport, interface with local government, and much more. I hope that that gives some guide to the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale in terms of the Government Departments that have been involved in the project, and in terms of the evaluation.

The services are being delivered through five channels: first, electronically by touch-screen kiosks; secondly, by means of a freephone hotline; thirdly, by over-the-counter service from sub-postmasters who are supported by the network's relatively new Horizon intranet system. In a meeting I had with the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters yesterday, its representatives were keen to emphasise the centrality of the role of sub-postmasters in the "Your Guide" pilot.

They were keen to suggest that this was a means by which we could place leverage on the trust that is felt in many local communities towards the advice and guidance that can be offered by sub-postmasters. The fourth channel is through leaflets, and a much wider a range of leaflets than currently appear in most post offices. The last channel is an expert advice centre that brings representatives from key organisations, such as the Benefits Agency and Age Concern, closer to those in need of face-to-face interviews.

The Leicester-Rutland pilot fulfils the recommendation of the performance and innovation unit report, which has been much discussed this morning. For a range of reasons we believe that post offices would be well placed to offer the services involved. I should add that post offices offer a vital service, not only to vulnerable citizens but to the viability of many rural communities. Often post offices provide the last shop in a village, and may be the only place within reach for less mobile citizens for banking services. The current pilot in Leicester—Rutland provides the opportunity to examine these hypotheses.

The outcome of the pilot will be fully evaluated by the Post Office—I will give some more detail about that in a moment—by those organisations participating in the pilot, and by the Government participating as a whole. The Department of Trade and Industry is co-ordinating an overall Government evaluation of the findings of the pilot. The responsibility of the DTI, the evaluation will examine the extent to which the "Your Guide" concept can deliver services that citizens really want and need. It will also examine the extent to which "Your Guide" can provide value for money for Government Departments and other organisations using it as a channel to offer their services to the public. This includes examining the extent to which "Your Guide" can help those organisations achieve efficiency savings. It will also cover the extent to which "Your Guide" services can improve the ability of Government Departments to meet their service objectives.

The pilot ends on 1 March 2002. The full evaluation report is expected in June next year. I emphasise that this reflects a tight timetable. I will turn to evaluation in a moment. First, there is the question whether the pilot as it stands is going well. The post office network and local and central government departments participating in the pilot have already done a tremendous amount of work to set up the pilot, and have it running within such a short timetable. Indeed, yesterday that point was emphasised to me by the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, which was keen to stress its confidence in and support for Consignia's work.

**Mr. Moore:** I take the Minister back to his point about evaluation being completed in June next year. That is six months later than was envisaged in the original plan, which means that the project is six months behind schedule.

**Mr. Alexander:** The hon. Gentleman will be glad to hear that I heard the section of his speech that dealt with that issue, and I shall address it in a moment.

Full and robust evaluation of the pilot outcomes must be conducted to inform future planning decisions. Among the tasks that the core evaluation must perform is that of interpreting the data that emerge from the pilot. For example, it is easy to measure how many times an individual page of content has been called up on an electronic kiosk in any post office, but a degree of analysis is necessary to establish and measure usage and to understand the extent to which the services provided by the pilot are proving to be useful for customers. The evaluation process includes gathering data both manually and electronically, the conduct of surveys within and beyond the pilot area and the gathering of qualitative data via focus groups, discussion groups and feedback sessions involving the public, sub-postmasters and stakeholder organisations, including both central and local government.

As the Minister responsible, my answer to the question, "How is the pilot going?" is "Please be patient, we must wait and see." I must emphasise that evaluation is taking place and is continuing during the pilot. I have been keen to emphasise both to my Department and to Consignia the importance of expediting the evaluation process for the reasons mentioned by the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale. I hope that by early next year we shall be able to state how the pilot has gone.

Turning to the decision-making process on the national roll-out, the hon. Gentleman asked about the timetable and the procedure. The decision whether to proceed with roll-out of a national government general practitioner service and the form in which it should be delivered will involve not only the DTI but my colleagues in several Departments and, as far as possible, leaders of local government. I am the Minister responsible for the GGP project and I am actively championing it within Whitehall, but given that a range of Departments and organisations are involved, and that they would pay for the national service, the decision must be made collectively.

Turning to the specific question about the timetable for the roll-out of the national GGP service, the PIU recommended that pilots for the GGP and internet access point propositions should be up and running early this year with a view to evaluation and full roll-out in mid-2002. Given that the Post Office had to work on the supporting business case during autumn last year and that the details of funding arrangements and the scope of the pilot, including where it should take place, had to be decided, it was agreed at the end of November last year that it was impractical to put pilots in place until early this year. Consignia has therefore done a superb job in designing, building and rolling out a pilot that commenced last June. That has been a major task involving detailed on-going discussion on the original PIU recommendations with various Departments, local government and the voluntary sector.

We have decided to limit the length of the pilot to six months to address concerns about the timetable. The current pilot finishes at the beginning of March. Full evaluation in line with best practice, project management and public procurement cannot be rushed because there are rules to which we must adhere for the national roll-out of the pilot to be judged a success. Interpreting the data from the pilot and understanding its implications for a wider national service is a complex task. In addition to evaluating the pilot, which will entail looking back and learning lessons from it, there will need to be a forward-looking application of the lessons

*[Mr. Alexander]*

learned. We must involve the full range of potential stakeholders in order to design a service that will meet both the needs of citizens and the service aims of participating organisations.

Paying organisations must examine how a national GGP service could fit in with their wider service delivery plans, how far it could help them in achieving greater efficiencies, how much the service which they find useful would cost them and whether it would provide value for money compared with alternative direct channels to the public. As the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was kind enough to acknowledge, by definition these are complex issues and not to be taken lightly. At this stage, I am not ruling out the option of commencing roll-out of a national service next summer—as proposed by the PIU report. Realistically, it is not likely that it could be a full roll-out of a comprehensive national service. If the pilot proves successful, and paying Departments believe that a national service can provide value for money for them, it is more likely that some services will begin to be rolled out next summer in parallel with on-going longer-term work on a fuller comprehensive service.

A fully comprehensive national service will, of course, not be cheap. The touch-screen facility, mentioned by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, is only one feature of the system operating in Leicestershire and Rutland. That is a relatively costly way forward but, on the basis of anecdotal evidence, it appears popular with certain members of the public. Before committing the funding that would be required, it is therefore essential to ensure that the service is designed in a way that meets the needs of users in the paying Departments.

The Government are approaching the project with urgency. We have already commissioned a pilot that will run for just over six months in all post offices in the area, and a full evaluation will be carried out as quickly as possible while complying with best practice regulations. We will ensure that the various streams of work required—evaluation, funding, service design and such like—are conducted in parallel. If proved a success as a pilot and if the concept is shown to provide value for money, the project will be taken forward with all expedition.

The specific point about the participation of devolved Administrations is of concern not only to other hon. Members, but to me. Administrations received consequential funding for the piloting of GGP in post offices at the same time that money was made available for the pilot in Leicestershire and Rutland. The money was not ring-fenced, so it was for individual Administrations to decide whether to run pilots in their regions. I understand that the Executive in Northern Ireland are actively considering running a pilot, but that neither those in Wales and Scotland have decided to do so at present.

I, too, am a long-standing advocate of devolution, and on some subjects one must accept both the power of and the responsibility for devolved Administrations. Notwithstanding the option of Christmas-lunch conversations, the hon. Gentleman will understand the political reality that although we can suggest the great merit of schemes north of the border, a decision to commit funds ultimately rests in Edinburgh and Cardiff respectively. If the decision is taken to go ahead with national roll-out in the United Kingdom, reserve services could be delivered through post offices on UK-wide. However, it is for devolved Administrations to decide whether devolved services should be included in that programme. I fully acknowledge the point—not least in a Scottish context—about the importance of services that are provided by an Executive being available in a way that is genuinely useful to constituents.

Although a case may be made for tailoring the service in devolved Administrations on the basis of local need—I have acknowledged that in relation to Scotland—on the whole, it would detract from the overall service. It would be a great pity if it were less comprehensive in one part of the United Kingdom than elsewhere. I am happy to say that the three devolved Administration are keeping in close touch with my Department and Consignia about national roll-out following the pilot being taken forward. Like Whitehall Departments, they will carefully review the outcome of the pilot in Leicestershire and Rutland, apply the lessons learned and actively identify services that they might want to offer through post offices.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, a number of other initiatives are being introduced by the devolved Administration in Scotland. They are relevant to his Scottish constituency and deal with social inclusion through the internet. I do not wish to suggest a lack of geographical knowledge of Scotland, but there is a digital highland project at the other end of the country from his constituency, and an initiative—introduced by the Scottish Executive—that addresses public internet access points. There is continuing potential for such initiatives to have a role in post offices in future. However, on the basis of conversations to date between Consignia and the Scottish Executive, Consignia has reached a judgment that those two initiatives had no particular role to play in post offices. Although I welcome the hon. Gentleman's work at local level, scope exists for further discussions, not least involving the Scottish Executive and Consignia, about the possibility of schemes that are not specifically tailored for post offices being made relevant to them as regards social inclusion and digital divide work elsewhere in Scotland.

I mentioned earlier some of the areas covered. The Department for Work and Pensions, the Inland Revenue, the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions have all been involved in the development of the pilot. We expect each of these Departments to be heavily involved in the evaluation process. That addresses the substantive point on the government general practitioner. Unless Members wish to raise any further points on that issue I shall turn to the universal bank.

In prefacing his remarks on the universal bank, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire paid due acknowledgement to the difficulties encountered by the Conservative Government in the original benefit card proposals. It pleases me to say that the revised model Horizon card scheme has been rolled out successfully throughout the post office network. In looking for grounds for optimism about the capacity of both the Government and the Post Office to move forward that

initiative, the £480 million committed to the computerisation and modernisation of sub-post offices over the past year or so should give us great courage and optimism for the future.

The hon. Gentlemen emphasised the terms of yesterday's written answer on ACT migration and marketing strategy. Interestingly and perhaps unsurprisingly, he and the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) held conflicting views on the importance that should be attached to it. I disagree with the suggestion of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire that a marketing strategy is inappropriate given the scale of public education that is necessary on ACT migration. Ironically, I am more inclined to agree with the hon. Member for Eastbourne, who acknowledged that the information must be made available to the elderly. Therefore a marketing strategy will be a key part of that work.

**Mr. Waterson:** Will the Minister deal with my request for an undertaking that there will be total neutrality in the advice given and that people will not be pushed in one direction or another regardless of their personal circumstances?

**Mr. Alexander:** I reiterate the points that I made in yesterday's written answer: we will give advice that allows people to make the best choice dependant on their circumstances. There may be some disagreement on the best way forward on this serious point. We have always recognised, not least in terms of social inclusion, the great merit in moving many of those currently not banking into the banking system and ensuring their full participation. Perhaps the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire did not pay due acknowledgement to the significance of the statement in yesterday's written answer that there would be neither a cap nor eligibility criteria in terms of POCA numbers. Those points were emphasised in our previous debate in this Chamber by many of the usual suspects, as the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale so charmingly put it.

The emphasis of the ACT migration and marketing strategy will ensure, as I have just said, that each customer has the best account for his or her circumstances. Conventional basic bank accounts offer more services than the Post Office card account and do not have its limitations, and so are likely to be the best option for a significant number of people.

As hon. Members are aware, in recent months we have been working on the detail of our migration and marketing strategy. In that context consideration has been given to eligibility criteria and caps. I am glad that clarity was offered in the written answer given to the House yesterday. POCA numbers must be managed to levels that deliver value for money while ensuring that the new system meets the needs of benefit recipients who want to keep their benefits separate from their normal bank account—for example, women with joint accounts who want to keep child benefit separate.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** All that is true, but how much money is going to Post Office card accounts?

**Mr. Alexander:** I fear that I may disappoint the hon. Gentleman. I have to say that the contract negotiations are still continuing. I assure the House that often on a more-than-daily basis I am updated on the discussions that are taking place. As stated earlier, there is the issue of commercial confidentiality, but much detailed work is being done at present, not least that involving the DWP, which is why I was grateful for its involvement in the project management work. We shall have to wait a little longer for information on the details because, by definition, what will ultimately go to the sub-postmaster will in part be a judgment informed by POCA management's decision and also the—

**Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair):** Order. We come now to the next topic for our consideration.

## Barnett Formula

11 am

**Mr. Derek Wyatt** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): First, I want to thank Timothy Edmonds, who did a prodigious amount of work and produced an excellent Library research paper on the Barnett formula, which I am sure that many hon. Members will quote. I also thank Professor Iain McLean—a Scot—of Nuffield college, Oxford, who is currently working at Yale, and who helped me with the debate.

We have been given only 90 minutes for this discussion; the debate in the House of Lords in November was for more than three hours. That may, or may not, be a reflection of the importance of Joel Barnett.

The debate is topical; this morning a headline in the *Financial Times* stated:

"Scotland's fiscal deficit narrows to £4bn excluding oil revenues."

I was going to quote the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who said that it was bogus, but he is present. Statistics and the economy in Scotland are topical north of the border and today, for once, they may be topical south of the border.

The origins of the Barnett formula go back to the 1880s, to a Chancellor called George Goschen. Joel came to it in 1978, using it as an expedient because the Prime Minister at the time, James Callaghan, was caught short; he could not work out how to resolve a technical issue of how to spend our money in Wales, and, more especially in Scotland. Joel told me privately that he thought that the formula would last six months at best; in his speech in the House of Lords he said perhaps a year, but it was meant to be only six months. It has lasted 21 years, which is not bad for a temporary measure. Curiously, it is not a statutory instrument; perhaps we should bless Joel in one way but not in another.

My question is fundamental to how we, as Members of Parliament, work. How do we decide the underlying philosophy of how to allocate our people's taxes, which we sometimes call Government expenditure? Do we do it by head of population, by the needs of our population or by a compromise consisting of the two? I shall return to that issue shortly.

My question is more complicated because we have enacted several relevant pieces of legislation in the past four years—the constitutional reforms that gave Scotland a Parliament, Northern Ireland and Wales Assemblies, and London an Assembly, and the UK human rights legislation, which enshrines some human rights of European law into UK law. Shortly, we shall have the White Paper on regional assemblies; I am sure that there will be elected regional assemblies by 2005, certainly in the north-east, perhaps in the north-west, and possibly in the south-west if we can agree the boundaries. This is the right time to talk about the Barnett formula because England has never had a say on it, which is curious.

As the regional assemblies develop in England, they will all want to have a say and to change the way in which the formula is decided. The local government funding review announced last week has changed the way in which local government will be funded from 2003 onwards. It will be funded according to needs, which is a minor change, but a change nevertheless. The comprehensive spending review takes us up to 2004-05. Considering that block of legislation—some past, some to come—we cannot expect changes to Barnett until 2005-06 at the earliest.

I shall place on the record one or two quotes from the excellent Library research paper. On the mechanism of the Barnett formula, it states on page 9:

"The first key to understanding Barnett is to remember that the formula determines the amount of additional changes to the expenditure of Scotland and Wales. It applies to the margin, not to the bulk of expenditure as determined by past decisions. Secondly, Barnett only applies to some types of expenditure. In particular large expenditure areas such as welfare payments are outside of the formula's jurisdiction. Barnett has played very little role in the overall relative level of public sector provision, but simply produces a value for the increase in a single year."

The next page gives the three parts to the calculation:

"1. The change in planned spending in departments in England.

2. The extent to which the relevant English departmental programme is comparable with the services carried out by each devolved administration; and

3. The population proportion in each country."

Slight changes were made to the Northern Ireland part in 1998. The population of Northern Ireland used to be compared to that of Great Britain as a whole; now, it is compared to the population of England. Northern Ireland has therefore benefited slightly more in the last three years of the Barnett formula. If the Scottish Parliament ever exercised its tax-varying powers, the resources available to it would be adjusted up or down, according to the formula.

In my short period in the House, I have noted that the civil service would rather explore change within existing law or practice—I cite the Child Support Agency reforms as an illustration—than start to make changes from scratch. Therefore, I do not expect any Government to do away with Barnett, but it will have to change beyond 2005, especially as the regional assemblies come on line.

Why will the formula change? It is manifestly unfair to the English taxpayer—of course, I would say that. Those who represent English constituencies will all be able to quote their own figures, and I took mine from the Treasury's public expenditure statistical analysis for 1999-2000. Government spending for Scotland was £5,271 per head; for London, it was £5,035 per head. For the north-east, it was £4,837 per head, and for all England, it was £4,283 per head. The figure for the south-east, which includes my constituency, was £3,734, so I have some reason to wish for an analysis of the Barnett formula and for changes to be made to it.

**Joyce Quin** (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): A few minutes ago, my hon. Friend quoted the excellent Library research paper, and he will know that the formula's supporters refer to it as a way of reaching convergence in spending over time. However, that paper quotes Professor Bell of Stirling university, who

estimates that it will take at least 30 more years to reach any form of convergence. Does my hon. Friend have a comment on that?

**Mr. Wyatt:** I agree with my right hon. Friend. Joel's original idea was that the formula would provide convergence, but it never has and I doubt if it ever will, which is another issue for English taxpayers.

**Adam Price** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I am not clear whether the figures to which the hon. Gentleman refers are for identifiable public expenditure. However, he will be aware that most of the 25 per cent. of Government expenditure that is non-identifiable is spent in the south-east of England, whether it goes on central Government administration or military research and development. If we seek a fairer allocation of Government spending among the countries and regions of the United Kingdom, should we also be looking to redistribute that non-identifiable element and decentralise much of central Government administration to the regions and nations of the UK?

**Mr. Wyatt:** I think that that will happen once we have regional assemblies in England. As I said, wherever we happen to look, statistics are an issue. Of course, everyone argues their point from their background—that is what we are here for—but I shall resolve the statistics issue in a moment and return to the hon. Gentleman's question.

I hope that I have read all the papers on the Barnett formula. There seem to be more from the north of the country and certainly north of the border. I have noticed that there have been many more front-page stories on the issue this year in Scotland than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Whatever figures are produced, it is apparent that the Barnett formula favours Scotland. Martin Wolf of the *Financial Times* suggested that Scotland enjoys Scandinavian services in exchange for British taxes.

Hon. Members from Scottish constituencies will want the Barnett formula to remain: that is understandable. We need to find a consensus on the issue after 2005, but I would like to suggest a way forward between now and then—not the Barnett formula 1.1 or 2.1 but the Wyatt suggestions. Whoever delivers statistics is not trusted among the regions of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. How can we trust the figures, and which Members of Parliament would we choose to ensure that the statistics were fair? Would we trust a Bank of England committee to study the Barnett formula? Would we trust a royal commission, or a special commission such as Lord Wakeham's on House of Lords reform? I suggest that Parliament should do it. My first suggestion is that a joint House of Lords and House of Commons Select Committee be established next year to consider the future of the Barnett formula.

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): The hon. Gentleman suggested a House of Lords and House of Commons Committee. Does he want such a joint Committee to encompass the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly as well, or is he trying to rig the game before it starts?

**Mr. Wyatt:** The hon. Gentleman should have let me finish. Evidence would be taken throughout the United Kingdom. The Select Committee would visit the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, and the Northern Ireland Assembly and take evidence in London. The Committee could be formed next year and report in 2003.

We have to resolve how we divvy up the money. I side with Professor Iain McLean's research. He suggests creating a commonwealth grants board, which

"should agree the apportionment of regional public spending by a qualified majority vote (that is, with the support of more than half the regions represented).

Two extremely important questions remain. How large a qualified majority? And what if they fail to agree? The two are linked . . . Unanimity gives each and every region a veto over any scheme. So the region with most to lose from any change would veto it, and the result would be failure to agree to any settlement at all. Then what matters is the 'default'. What if the inter-regional body fails to agree by the deadline for an agreement? If the default is the status quo, then all who can see that they are better off under the status quo than under any change will tend to block that change."

McLean suggests two rules for a commonwealth grants board: first,

"any formula it recommends must be supported by at least two-thirds of the regions"

and secondly,

"that the default, if the Board fails to agree, is that each region gets the reciprocal of its relative GDP per head."

**Mr. Bill Tynan** (Hamilton, South): Would the decision of that proposed Select Committee be binding on Parliament, or would it be debated in the House?

**Mr. Wyatt:** It would have to be debated in the House. If we were to effect change, some sort of statutory instrument would probably be necessary.

I have started the debate, and I am sure that that will not be the end of it, but it is the first time that we have debated the matter in 23 years in the House. I look forward with interest to the rest of the debate.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair):** Order. Hon. Members seem to be engaging in a conversational style. Comments must be addressed through the Chair. No accusations should be made to the Chairman, although I have allowed them to pass until now. For those who are not familiar with proceedings in Westminster Hall, the winding-up speeches start 30 minutes before the debate concludes. That means that the three Front Benchers must begin their exchanges at 12 noon. Seven hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye to make speeches and 45 minutes are available, so I appeal to hon. Members to help me to help them by making their remarks clear, concise, pertinent and respectful.

11.15 am

**Adam Price** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) for securing the debate. We live in an unequal state, and territorial justice is at the heart of current political issues. There are issues of regional

*[Adam Price]*

equity in England and, as demands for democratic devolution develop in England, the concerns are rightly coming to the fore of English democratic debate.

I will focus on the relationship between Barnett and public expenditure for Wales. Plaid Cymru has some principal concerns about the Barnett formula, which is not needs-based but population-based. As the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey says, it is a stop-gap measure, which remarkably has survived for 21 years. In the case of Wales, it is a short-term political fix to prevent bickering, rather than a real attempt to allocate resources fairly according to need. We last had an official estimate of needs in 1979, and it was found that expenditure in Wales should be 9 per cent. higher than in England according to need. The actual expenditure was 6 per cent higher. There could be at least a tentative conclusion that Barnett has short-changed Wales. There has been no needs assessment since then, so let us have the research that Plaid Cymru has been requesting for some time; we can then consider a different needs-based assessment for Wales.

As the hon. Gentleman points out, Barnett is a convergence formula. The Wales Office estimates that convergence has been happening at a rate of 2 per cent. per annum from 1999 to 2002. One effect is that the rate of increase in spending on a core area such as education will rise by 3.2 per cent. in real terms per annum for Wales over the comprehensive spending review period, compared with 5.6 per cent. per annum for England. So the convergence effect—the Barnett squeeze—is beginning to have a real effect on the rate of increase in public spending.

There is also the problem of the Barnett block. The change in funding for the devolved Administrations arises perversely from an assessment by Whitehall Departments of England's needs. The resulting changes for Wales and Scotland are what are known in the jargon as consequentials—in other words, they are consequential to the assessment of England's needs. The political consequence is that every year there is an absence of negotiation between the Treasury and the devolved institutions on changes to the block grant. That is bureaucratically convenient, but it is hardly in the spirit of democratic devolution. More than half the entire block grant in Wales consists of Barnett formula adjustments, which are nothing to do with the needs base of Wales but are the product of decisions between Whitehall Departments largely in respect of England. To add insult to injury, those discussions occurred during the tenure of a Tory Government. Wales was effectively locked into a mechanistic formula for the reallocation of changes in public expenditure and locked out of wider debates about levels of public expenditure and spending priorities.

Since the introduction of the Barnett formula, Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland have been excluded from departmental spending rounds. Welsh and Scottish Members of Parliament cannot debate on the Floor of the House the need for more resources for health and education without immediately being told that those are matters for the Assembly. In reality, the size of the overall health and education budget in our countries depends on spending plans and political priorities drawn up exclusively in England. We are no more than passive observers of what happens to tax and public expenditure.

Change is never easy, but from my party's perspective, reform is long overdue. We require a needs assessment that examines a wider range of factors. Lessons about fiscal federalism or fiscal equalisation from Australia, Canada, Germany and other countries should be learned. To avoid disruption, any new system will have to be introduced over a long period. However, given the levels of deprivation in Wales, we have nothing to fear and much to gain by replacing an antiquated formula with a more progressive needs assessment for the UK as a whole. A new public expenditure settlement is more important than objective 1 funding and should be one of the central goals of all who are committed to democratic devolution. Without it, the constitutional settlement that we won in the referendum on devolution will be undermined.

11.21 am

**Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): The operation of the Barnett formula and the general financial relationship between Scotland, England and the rest of the UK is often misunderstood. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) that the very title of his Adjournment debate—the Barnett formula—shows how one element of the relationship between Scotland, Wales and the rest of the UK can be taken out of the picture, failing to present an accurate assessment of the real relationships. It is not the case that the Barnett formula gives Scotland—or Wales and Northern Ireland—any extra or unfair share of UK resources. Far from conferring advantage, its effect is to bring Scotland's expenditure into line with the rest of the UK.

In response to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin), my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey referred to the work of Professor Bell on the Barnett formula and needs assessment. A reference to Professor Bell's full work would show that, under present spending trends, the Barnett formula will bring Scotland's expenditure into line with the needs assessment within a mere eight, not 30, years.

**Mr. Salmond:** Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the paper by the Cuthberts suggests an even more rapid convergence than—

**Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair):** Order. I make a plea to all hon. Members to address the Chair at sufficient volume for the Chairman to judge whether remarks are in order. Will the hon. Gentleman please repeat his inquiry?

**Mr. Salmond:** I was asking whether the hon. Gentleman was aware of a paper produced by the Cuthberts, two prominent Scottish economists, which suggests a more rapid convergence than that suggested by Professor Bell.

**Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair):** I am much obliged.

**Mr. Lazarowicz:** I am sure that that is so. The spending policies of the present Government also

underpin the greater trend towards convergence. Indeed, some people in Scotland have suggested that the current formula leads to a Barnett squeeze which they say works against Scotland's interests. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and his colleagues have at times criticised the Barnett formula precisely because it brings about a convergence.

**Joyce Quin:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that the Barnett formula has been in existence for more than 20 years means that, in terms of deprivation in the English regions, it has been a poor way of getting any convergence at all?

**Mr. Lazarowicz:** If my hon. Friend is suggesting that an assessment of the way in which expenditure is allocated in England as a whole is needed, that is well and good, but I do not think that it is a reason for taking an attitude to the Barnett formula and the allocation of spending between Scotland and the rest of the UK that does not reflect reality. As other hon. Members have pointed out, the Barnett formula and the base upon which it applies take no account of many elements of Government expenditure that undoubtedly benefit the London area. The subsidy for commuter travel in London, the channel tunnel link, the dome and all the expenditure that we see around Westminster are not reflected in the Barnett figures.

If hon. Members looked closely at the budgets of other Departments, they would find that their base figures were not chosen as the result of any scientific assessment. Why does my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey think that Government spending in Scotland should be singled out for scientific analysis when that is not applied to other areas of Government expenditure? Even if the figures that he put forward were correct, the benefit to the rest of the UK would average out at only about £17 per head. I accept his concern about levels of Government expenditure in his constituency, but breaking down spending on a constituency-by-constituency basis inevitably leads to anomalies because large elements of Government expenditure are concentrated on certain constituencies. Moreover, the analysis takes no account of the contribution that constituencies make to the public exchequer.

My hon. Friend appears to have been swayed by those who paint post-devolution Scotland as a land flowing with milk and honey, enjoying Scandinavian levels of spending provided by lower levels of taxation. Those of us who represent Scottish constituencies know that that is not the case. He should not allow himself to be too strongly persuaded by those who point to areas where the level of spending on particular budget heads is higher, because spending per head in other areas of expenditure is often less than in the rest of the UK. It is misleading to pick out certain areas of Government expenditure to suggest that Scotland or Wales benefit.

I agree with those hon. Members who have said that the Barnett formula is not perfect. Certainly, there is no way in which the rationale for Government expenditure across Departments as a whole can be regarded as subject to scientific verification. As the UK moves towards regional government, there is a case for looking at the way in which the Barnett formula operates and for conducting a review. However, the suggested commonwealth board or a parliamentary Committee reflect all the metropolitan-centred thinking that has bedevilled debate on these issues over the years. My hon. Friend should not take a line that will destabilise the UK and play into the hands of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and his colleagues.

11.29 am

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): I find myself disturbingly in agreement with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), but I shall begin my comments by mentioning an article by Peter Hetherington in *The Guardian* today. It suggests that a review of the Barnett formula will begin early next year on behalf of the Treasury and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Perhaps the Minister will confirm whether the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) has succeeded beyond his wildest dreams by provoking a review before he even made his speech. I am sure that the House would be interested in her answer, given the number of denials that have been made in recent weeks, not least by Scotland Office Ministers.

The Barnett formula is like the Schleswig-Holstein question, in that only three people understand it: one is mad, one is dead, and I have forgotten. On the basis of a recent television interview with Lord Barnett, I can report that he is among those who have forgotten how the formula was meant to work, noble and true though he is. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith rightly said that Barnett was a convergence formula. It has been pointed out that Barnett has not led to convergence. However, significant changes in the past few years will provide convergence, much to the detriment of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Barnett formula now operates as a population-based formula and is updated accordingly. Thus, there will be a severe squeeze on Scottish spending because any increase will now be relative to total spending.

The right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) suggested that convergence might take 30 years. I believe that she was reading a review of Professor Bell's paper and not the paper itself. In fact, Jim Cuthbert, the former chief statistician at the Scotland Office, and his wife Margaret estimated that the Barnett squeeze on Scottish public spending could be as much as £2 billion over the next three years. Barnett may achieve the desire of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith to squeeze Scottish public spending and amass a huge £17 per head for his constituents, but the view in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is that Barnett is not ideal.

**Mr. Jim Cousins** (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument closely. If he is right, surely he would want a review of the Barnett formula and a proper needs assessment such as that advocated by the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price)?

**Mr. Salmond:** I am coming to that point. The difficulty that I have with many of those who argue for scrapping the Barnett formula is that they do not

*[Mr. Salmond]*

support a needs assessment, as the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) suggested, or fairer distribution of resources. Their argument is about grabbing Scottish money. The comments that have been made by Conservative Members and by many Back-Bench Labour Members can best be described as anti-Scottish. There seems to be a desperate attempt to grab as much of Scotland's money as possible. I can suggest a better option.

I deprecate the motives of many hon. Members who rally against the Barnett formula. They do it not for the best or noblest reasons but to grab £17 per head for their constituents, who are south of the border. Perhaps the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey does not have such a motivation; only he can clarify that.

The best way to proceed would be to give the Scottish Parliament fiscal autonomy. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Government expenditure and revenue in Scotland analysis, which was published this morning. If we accepted GERS, which I certainly do not—for no apparent reason it failed to take account of £1 billion of Scottish income tax in the past three years—and compared its analysis with current estimates of oil revenues, we would have a Scottish economy in fiscal surplus by £1 billion, even on the Government's figures for this year. The hon. Gentleman must explain why he has suggested cutting Scottish public spending, which was the essence of his comments, at a time when there is a substantial fiscal surplus in Scotland. It is unacceptable for the Scottish population to hear such a suggestion, and it should be equally unacceptable to have a squeeze, which is the effect that the Barnett formula is having on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

I have one difficulty with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith, who otherwise made an admirable speech, including his many examples of non-identified public spending that are hugely concentrated in south-east England and London. Indeed, I have seen one survey that shows that London public expenditure is the highest by far of any area of the United Kingdom when all the factors that were mentioned by the hon. Gentleman are taken into account. My difficulty with him, and others who defend Barnett as the only possible formula, is that they do not take account of the considerable squeeze that it will cause in the next few years.

I am in favour of fiscal autonomy for the Scottish Parliament. It would provide the only secure protection from the efforts of the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey and the many other Members who want to raid as much of Scotland's finances as possible. I suggest to him that if he wants a review, or if the Treasury Minister suggests one, it should be carried out on an equal basis. It would be unacceptable to have a review with a Joint Committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons at a time when the Northern Ireland Assembly, Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament are functioning. At the very least, the hon. Gentleman might have suggested a little more than a day trip to Scotland to take evidence from the very people from whom he is trying to filch money. Any review would have to be based on a position of equality, and the arguments for financial freedom and fiscal autonomy for the Scottish Parliament should be heard and should win through.

11.36 am

**Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) on securing the debate. I firmly believe that all areas of public policy and expenditure should be open to constant question and review. I have some concerns about the narrow nature of the press debate in this area, which I believe circumvents reasoned discussion on the allocation of overall expenditure in the UK and sets us at each other's throat. Taking a broad macro and brush-stroke approach clouds the issue when we should be examining micro-situations and what happens in different localities throughout the UK. It is often said that the devil is in the detail. We as politicians have a responsibility to examine that detail and to act accordingly.

In any debate on the Barnett formula, we should discuss the breakdown of expenditure under comparative budget heads relating to different areas of the UK, and review it on a needs basis. I agree with my hon. Friend that some English regions suffer levels of deprivation similar to those found in many communities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and that they should receive similar financial assistance. If there is a failure in the formula or a breakdown in the mechanisms that weigh the vital indicators of need, we should take them in hand and put them right quickly. When the Minister of State, Scotland Office last answered questions on the topic only a few weeks ago, he made it clear that any identifiable regional differentiation in England that needed extra Government expenditure should be addressed, given the programme of increased public expenditure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey made a reasonable case about the national issues that affect us across the boundaries of the separate entities that make up the UK. We should consider, for example, the recent unemployment figures for north-east England, London and Scotland, which are comparatively similar at 6.9 per cent., 6.5 per cent. and 6.7 or 6.8 per cent. respectively. Those areas need Government funding and are addressed through the work of the Treasury and relevant Ministries.

On the micro-level, the Sittingbourne and Sheppey constituency is ranked 284th in the UK, 197th in England and has 3.3 per cent. unemployment. Compare that with my constituency, Dundee, East, which is ranked 40th in the UK, fifth in Scotland and has 6.8 per cent. unemployment. Those regional disparities must be addressed.

I was glad to hear the reference to the Scandinavian services that we enjoy in Scotland. I have travelled widely throughout Scotland as a local government councillor and as a private citizen, and I would be glad to discover where the Scandinavian services are, but ultimately—this is a contentious point—Scottish taxpayers are British taxpayers. They pay their contribution to the Treasury. The Government are increasing public expenditure against the objections of

the European Commission year after year, and are committed in their manifesto to promoting social justice. The Government will not fail to address, where necessary, the issues of deprivation and poverty that arise in dealing with English regions. The central principle of the Labour party, to which the Government's programme rigorously adheres, was set by Nye Bevan when he talked about Labour Governments having to practise the science of priority.

I do not discount the arguments put forward by my hon. Friend in this welcome debate. If there is real need, based on personal experience throughout the UK, that must be addressed. The nature of the UK constitution means that it is imperative that the Westminster Government ensure that allocated spending is spread fairly throughout the UK, and that is what the Barnett formula attempts to do in a crude fashion, primarily on the basis of population. However, I agree that if the squeeze is on, or if convergence is not to be in place for 30 years, or if differentials apply throughout the UK, rigorous criteria should be laid down. Needs assessments should be carried out that are sensitive enough to upgrade the Barnett formula. If the factors of average earnings, population density and spread, peripheral locations and key social factors such as changing structures of industry, levels of poverty and conditions of housing and health, are properly and fairly assessed, they will show the case for the retention of the Barnett formula.

The Government strongly support that position, and that is reinforced by their decisions on how to spend the EU objective 1, 2 and 3 funds of the European regional development fund and social fund allocation. Large tracts of Scotland achieve access to those funds on the just basis of need, which has been identified through the criteria.

In summary, we need to consider the issue constructively. We should examine what is happening throughout the region. In considering how Government finance is handled, we must bear in mind the creation of the Scottish Office in 1926 and the increase in social policy spending in the 1960s and 1970s. The Barnett formula was devised in the 1970s, prior to an expected Bill on devolution that would have created a Scottish Parliament well before its eventual creation in 1999. We should consider the issue of the English regions, because that would provide the vehicle for assessing the needs of the different regions and for enabling the Government to fine-tune their spending policies. I am not arguing for retention without consideration of a needs element to the Barnett formula, but the union between Scotland and England is based on a collaborative effort to do what is best for Britain. The Barnett formula serves that end.

11.44 am

**Mr. David Stewart** (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) for initiating the debate. As he said, it is the first time in about 20 years that the issue has been discussed in the House. His was a well-researched speech and a thoughtful and excellent contribution to the debate.

What we have been told about the Barnett formula today is well known: it is non-statutory and has been used since 1978. The history books show that Chancellor Goschen in the 1890s had a similar formula, which related to the allocation of probate duties between the countries of the Union.

I shall briefly explain my understanding of the formula and make some suggestions for the future. I think that there is some misunderstanding about how the formula works across the UK. As we have heard this morning, the method is based on population, sharing out changes in public expenditure plans between the countries of the Union. It is not used to determine overall spending levels: that is a key point. We are talking about the margins of expenditure, where changes and populations are reflected, not about the base budget.

People might say that I would be bound to say that where Scotland is concerned, but what Scotland receives is a population-based share of changes in spending in analogous programmes in England. Importantly, population factors have recently changed. In 1992, it was agreed that population changes evident from the 1991 census would be taken into account. Now, yearly changes based on figures from the Office for National Statistics are also considered.

I offer an example that was proposed in Library research paper 01/108 in November 2001. It is a good worked example, but I had to examine it carefully because statistics in maths was never one of my strong points. It examined what the figure for Scotland would be if, for example, £1 billion expenditure were allocated to health in England, and how that would be worked out. The figure for Scotland would be £103 million, based on 2001 figures. The formula would be £1 billion x 10.34 per cent. x 99.7, where 10.34 per cent. is the population of Scotland as a percentage of that of the United Kingdom, and 99.7 is the comparability of the English health services to Scotland's. That is a dense formula, and I am sure that my son, currently doing standard grade maths, would be interested in trying to work the figure out in practice. It is important to know where the formula comes from.

We have heard a lot about convergence, and there are differing arguments about whether it will come in eight years or 30 years. However, before we can make those predictions, we must ask what the formula for convergence is. It will of course depend on the growth of comparable spending in England on such things as health and education. It is also—I do not think that this has been touched on much so far—about the relative stability of population changes. For example, if Scotland's population declines relative to England's—it is at the moment, and it is predicted to continue to decline in the next decade—that will offset the convergent effect of the Barnett formula.

I quote figures from 1995-96, when expenditure for Scotland was approximately 19 per cent. and that for Wales about 12 per cent. above the UK average. As the House of Commons Library research paper on public expenditure states, this is

> "not necessarily a simple relationship between the geographic area in which money is spent and the resident who benefits...it is also important to remember this analysis is not exhaustive and only covers around three quarters of total spending"

in the UK. The Barnett formula has nothing to say about the size of the cake; it is about how that cake should be divided up.

*[Mr. David Stewart]*

A further issue, which was touched on by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), concerns identifiable and non-identifiable public spending. We could have a debate simply on that. We must examine hot-spot spending in, for example, growth parts of London—I am aware that there is great social need there—and Edinburgh. There are pockets of poverty and higher need throughout the UK. I have mentioned London, but there are such areas in the north-east, in Wales, in Northern Ireland and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey made clear to me last night, in the south-east.

However, academics such as Professor Midwinter of Strathclyde university have acknowledged that Scotland has higher expenditure needs relative to the UK average. It has higher morbidity rates, sparse population in remote areas, low pay, the islands—which we have not mentioned and where life is very expensive—remoteness and high service costs. I give an example from my own area in the highlands. We were one of the few areas in Scotland that qualified for the old objective 1 funding, because our economic spending was less than 75 per cent. of average European GDP. The problem is the extent to which need is greater, which is difficult to establish.

Following devolution, it is up to the devolved Parliament and the Assemblies to decide their spending within the block and formula grants system. The Office for National Statistics recalculates population shares annually, but the Treasury last carried out a needs assessment in the mid-1970s, in which it concluded that spending on the basis of need would result in per capita spending in Wales and Scotland being greater than average.

In its second report, the Treasury Committee agreed with Treasury officials, who stated that

"there is a long-established practice of looking at the allocation of spending across programmes and across regions to try and get the right distribution".

The Government's response to the Select Committee's 1998 report was that there was no case for reviewing the Barnett formula, but the White Paper on Scottish devolution argued that any substantive revision to the Barnett formula would need an in-depth study of relative spending and full consultation between the Scottish Executive and the UK Government. Interestingly, exactly the same comments were made in the White Paper on Welsh devolution that established the devolved Assembly. The Barnett formula provides Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland blocks with a population-based share of planned changes in equivalent English spending programmes.

We have not touched on redistribution, and time will not allow me to examine that issue, but the Government have addressed redistribution through programmes such as the minimum income guarantee, the working families tax credit and the pensioner credit, none of which are covered by the Barnett formula. The new deal, which is an anti-poverty and employment support measure, is also not covered by the formula. Those programmes are crucial to regional development and totally independent of the Barnett formula.

Today's debate must be accompanied by health warnings. We cannot directly compare spending across various countries and blocks. For example, the Scotland and Northern Ireland blocks include provision for water and sewerage services, which are not included in English spending. If we include non-block programmes such as social security, Scotland receives only 9 per cent. more than the equivalent figure in England.

**Mr. Lazarowicz:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Stewart:** I have just about finished. If the Barnett formula did not exist it would be necessary to invent it. I am not claiming that it is perfect, because it produces inequalities within regions and nations. Perhaps the time has come for a full needs assessment across the UK to deliver the son of the Barnett formula. Until that happens I say, "If it ain't broke, why fix it?"

11.52 am

**Mr. Jim Cousins** (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) on securing this debate, which comes at an important time. As he rightly says, we are about to consider regions and regionalism in England and that is bound to trigger a debate about the distribution of public spending across the UK.

I must speak with some caution, because I represent a city that was besieged and occupied by the Scots in 1644. Nevertheless, I say to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) that this is not an issue over which anyone should develop a Tora Bora complex that leads them to retreat, dig in, hide in caves and hope that it will go away.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) called for a needs assessment that would stretch into the non-identifiable areas of public spending. Many representatives of English constituencies will echo that approach, and it will certainly be echoed in my region. We would be happy to work on that approach when we discuss English regionalism.

**Mr. Salmond:** I am still trying to work out the relevance of the Tora Bora complex. Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that many Scottish people would be suspicious of a review based on reducing Scottish public spending? He heard me say that financial autonomy for the Scottish Parliament is an entirely different matter, but does he support financial freedom for the Scottish Parliament?

**Mr. Cousins:** No, I do not. On this issue I am clearly a Unionist. We should try to hang on to the fiscal integrity of the United Kingdom, which is an important part of a proper sense of British Unionism. The hon. Gentleman should understand that many of us are asking for a proper needs assessment for the English regions not because we think that Scottish expenditure is too high and should be reduced, but because it would provide a benchmark against which we can compare the needs of our own regions. Neither I nor my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) has ever said that Scottish expenditure is too high; nor have we regarded

it as a pot to be raided to serve the needs of our own region. Such a description is a misrepresentation of our case.

In considering the so-called Barnett squeeze, it is important to bear in mind the fact that the Barnett formula was originally a makeshift needs allowance. As matters have progressed, more makeshifts have been added to it, so to prevent the Barnett squeeze the comparison of English and Scottish expenditure has itself been changed. Two years ago, London Transport expenditure was added to the comparison with Scotland. However, that addition was never properly explained to Parliament, and it proved very difficult to dig out of statistics. The Treasury does not have a history of replying clearly to parliamentary questions on the matter. The addition was a neat trick, which enabled Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to get more resources without a penny extra being spent on London Transport. Such a "makeshift within a makeshift" destroys the integrity—such as it was—of the Barnett formula.

Public expenditure is growing, so the time is right to address this issue and to consider a needs assessment. In paragraph 6.56, on page 114, the pre-Budget report states that

"the 2002 Spending Review will assess how departments' policies impact on different regions and seek to ensure that spending is fairly distributed and targeted at those areas where it is needed most".

I look forward to hearing the Minister's explanation of what the regional spending review will mean. She is unfailingly helpful, so I am sure that she will not let us down. Will it be stretched to cover Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, or confined to the English regions? What form will it take and how can Parliament be involved in the decision-making process?

The Barnett formula is a makeshift that has run its course. The time is right to move to a needs assessment on the broad basis set out by the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr.

11.58 am

**John Thurso** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I begin by adding my congratulations to the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) on securing this debate. As he said, this subject has not been debated in the House for some time, although it has been discussed in the other place on several occasions. Until the issue is resolved, I hope that it will receive the same treatment as the issue of post offices, which arises regularly.

A few days ago, I had the honour of being the first person to inform the hon. Gentleman that he had secured today's debate. I asked him the simple question, "Are you for or against?", to which he replied that he was against. I therefore thought that I would be able to quote "Julius Caesar", in saying that he had come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. However, he had slightly more praise for Lord Barnett than he had given me to understand, and it was more a case of burying with faint praise.

The Barnett formula has become shorthand for general discontent about various aspects of the financial settlement relating to the nations, and I deprecate the narrow nationalism that has crept in both in England and in Scotland. We need to reconsider what it seeks to achieve and how to achieve it.

The formula has been roundly attacked. On 7 November, Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale said in another place that it must have something going for it if it is attacked on one side for being too generous and on the other for not being generous enough. Lord Barnett said:

"I had always assumed that the arrangement would be temporary until a more sophisticated method could be devised which took account of needs. In fact, not only has there been no change to take account of needs, there have been only minor changes to take account of changes in population."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 7 November 2001; Vol. 628, c. 225.]

This mechanism, which was last only six or eight months, is still with us because a formula is required. That was made clear by Lord Campbell of Croy. He explained, on the basis of his experience as a Minister and Secretary of State, the difficulties that arose prior to Barnett, when negotiations had to be undertaken annually. The one aspect of the formula that can be defended is that it has provided relative stability and a framework. I come neither to bury it nor to praise it. We should accord it its due, but consider what to replace it with.

Any new formula must be needs-based. Given the diverse economy of the United Kingdom, we must consider the differing needs of the various regions and make available corresponding funding to match those needs. In fact, Barnett does no particular favours to some regions of Scotland. For example, the latest figures show that in 1998 gross domestic product per capita in the highlands and islands was some £9,000, whereas that for Scotland as a whole was some £12,000. Those figures are not reflected in expenditure. The area was compensated to some extent by objective 1 finance, but that has now been lost. Scotland has differing needs in terms of expenditure, as do England and Wales.

**Mr. Salmond:** I do not want to interrupt the flow of the hon. Gentleman's even-handed speech, but can he tell us whether the Liberal and the Labour parties in the Scottish Executive have a common position on the Barnett formula and, if so, what it is?

**John Thurso:** I have no idea of the position in the Scottish Executive, but I can clarify our position in this place. We felt that there was a strong necessity to maintain the relative stability that Barnett had produced and that that stability should be maintained by keeping the formula for the first two Scottish Parliaments, but that the underlying policy should be a review to produce a new formula to take account of needs. When asked what he would do about it, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) put it very well. He said:

"Quite simply—reform it! We would review the current formula and replace it with a needs-based one which would look at the UK region by region giving each region the amount it needs. Therefore, places like the North East which need more funding, would be fairly treated."

That is our position.

The formula should not be based only on population. In many regions—for example, the north-east and the highlands—per capita allocations for expenditure

*[John Thurso]*

simply do not work. The formula should recognise that many areas of expenditure, such as roads, require a different basis. As was suggested by a number of hon. Members, we must examine existing needs in the diverse regions and economies of the United Kingdom and allocate a new formula that takes account of those needs, based on expenditure that is not currently part of the Barnett formula, expenditure that is best driven by population and expenditure that is best driven by other methods. That should be negotiated between the devolved Assemblies and the Treasury. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey that the best way of doing that is through a joint Select Committee of both Houses. It must be properly negotiated, and the relationship must be akin to that between our Ministers and their European ministerial colleagues. With our devolved settlement, it is impossible to imagine devolved Parliaments and Assemblies being excluded from the process.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) referred, as he is wont to do, to the squeeze. The point about the squeeze is that it is a reduction not in Scottish expenditure but in the increase in Scottish expenditure compared with that in England. He cannot call for fiscal autonomy and boast of a surplus in the Scottish economy while at the same time saying that it is foul and unfair that there is a squeeze. He cannot have his cake and eat it. The hon. Gentleman suggested that the appropriate way to deal with the problem was to give Scotland fiscal autonomy.

**Mr. Salmond:** I am tempted to say that Liberal Democrats can have their cake and eat it in almost any place I could mention. It is fair to argue for fiscal autonomy—he may not know this, but some members of his party have argued for it in the Scottish Parliament—while at the same time being concerned about the review of the Barnett formula, which, in the minds of some people, has as its prime objective further squeezing of Scottish expenditure. Is that not a fair and consistent position?

**John Thurso:** I was talking about fiscal autonomy. I feel strongly that fiscal autonomy would bring with it almost as many difficulties as the Barnett formula. Where exactly are the borders of fiscal autonomy defined? Does one say that defence is included, but foreign policy is excluded? When looking for provision for the needs and economies of Scotland, fiscal autonomy holds out no greater hope of benefit than the current system. We need to reform the current system. We need to recognise the relative stability that having a formula has delivered, and to recognise that any new formula must be based on needs.

The Barnett formula has stood the test of time in one sense. It has provided relative stability. However, to ensure that expenditure is fairly allocated across the whole of the United Kingdom, we need to change to a formula that recognises the varying needs of the various parts of the United Kingdom. To achieve that, we need to be able to—

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair):** Order. I appreciate the hon. Member's inconvenience and discomfort, but time is being squeezed.

**John Thurso:** Then I leave it at that, Mr. Winterton.

12.10 am

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): Thank you, Mr. Winterton. It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Chair, and I am sure that we can anticipate that combination of gravitas and panache that you invariably bring to our proceedings.

I congratulate all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate, not least the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt). I do not think that he has resiled from his opposition to the way in which the formula works. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) should recognise that the hon. Gentleman was just making his argument in his usual gentlemanly and understated way. His message was certainly pretty clear to me; he is not entirely sanguine about the way in which the formula works.

I also congratulate the hon. Members for East Camarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price), for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke), and for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart), not to mention what I might describe as the representative of the north-east, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins). I think that I am right in saying that he speaks also for the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin), who spoke on this subject on 19 July in Treasury questions. She signalled her growing disquiet about the way in which the formula operates to the disadvantage, as she sees it, of the north-east of England.

There is a tendency for positions to be polarised in this debate. My starting point is to observe that the Barnett formula is neither a godly blessing nor the devil's curse. It is rather curious that it has subsisted for the best part of 22 years. As a number of hon. Members have observed, Lord Barnett expected that it would last perhaps six months, possibly a year, but was very unlikely to go beyond that. The fact that it has lasted for as long as it has might suggest that it has benefits. That is not of itself justification for its continuance. One commonplace and truism that I can utter without dissent from anyone who has taken part in the debate is that successive Secretaries of State for Scotland representing both parties have judged that the formula has merits. It has merit in terms of stability, merit in terms of flexibility, and merit for the people of Scotland.

Secretaries of State for Scotland have been spared the annual ordeal of having to negotiate with the Treasury, which is not something that should be taken for granted. For example, I was interested to learn on studying the debate in the other place that Lord Forsyth of Drumlean was himself a supporter of the Barnett formula, and he remains so. Anybody who knows the noble Lord will testify that he is not exactly scared of confrontation: he is always prepared to argue his corner. However, he is of the view that the merit of being spared that annual negotiation and the stability that the formula has brought about in the past 20 years are not inconsiderable benefits.

There is some misunderstanding about the purpose of the formula. It is to ensure not a cut in Scottish expenditure, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan

unworthily and inaccurately suggests, but simply to secure a reduction in the differential between per capita expenditure in Scotland and England. We can argue the toss about whether and to what extent that objective has been achieved, but it is important not to misrepresent the initial purpose. The idea is to ensure that, in relation to expenditure that is comparable between England and the rest of the United Kingdom, proper provision exists for Scotland based on its population and what is admittedly a grossly outdated assessment based on 1976-77 figures for local needs.

**Mr. Salmond:** In the interests of not being misrepresented—no one wants to suffer that—I would like to ask a question. On 7 February this year, the shadow Leader of the House, who was then a Back Bencher, charmingly asked the Prime Minister:

"When will the Prime Minister end the scandal of English subsidies for Scottish benefits?"—[*Official Report*, 7 February 2001; Vol. 362, c. 928.]

Does that represent the view of the Conservative Front-Bench team or any significant part of it?

**Mr. Bercow:** I am disappointed in the hon. Gentleman. I have made many speeches over the years that have attracted vociferous criticism and complaint, but when I have sat down to discuss my views with people, they have rarely been in any doubt as to my position. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is now a distinguished member of the Opposition Front-Bench team and, as shadow Leader of the House, he accepts collective responsibility. I will tell the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan the exact position taken by my right hon. Friends the Members for Bromley and Chislehurst and for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), the chairman of the Conservative and Unionist party. We are all engaged in a thorough-going and heart-searching review of policy across the field and we will report on our findings in due course.

It is fair to point out that there has been a significant downwards change in the population of Scotland during the intervening 22 years. That can be cited by hon. Members for English constituencies, including those for constituencies in the north-east, but it has not been reflected in public expenditure. Similarly, it is a fact that gross domestic product per head in Scotland is £[illegible],512, whereas it is £10,449 in Wales and only £10,024 in the north-east of England. That is not reflected in expenditure per head, which is greater in Scotland at £5,271 than in Wales at £5,052, or in north-east England at £4,837.

In the past, the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West has pointed out that six of the nine English regions receive less funding per head than Scotland. That must be taken into account. Seven Back-Bench speeches have been made today, whereas 22 speeches were made during the 7 November debate initiated by Lord Barnett in the other place. It would be an exaggeration to say that there were 22 differences of opinion, but a miscellany of different views were expressed. It is fair to say that most reasonable people in Scotland—it would be rash in the extreme to include the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan in that category—judge that the formula has worked well for Scotland. The leader of the Conservatives in the Scottish Parliament, Mr. David McLetchie, has said that the financing arrangements have served and continue to serve the people of Scotland well.

I agree with Lord Barnett that there is a compelling argument for a review of his formula. An undeniable and unanswerable case exists for a thorough needs assessment in 2001; we should no longer depend on the hotch-potch that resulted from an examination of the situation 24 years ago. Any review should be wide-ranging, all-embracing and thorough. In the context of the formula, I note a slight difference between the position enunciated at the last Scottish questions in the Commons by the Minister of State, Scotland Office and that expressed by Lord McIntosh in the other place. The Minister of State said that the system was stable, fair and flexible and that the Government had no plans to review it. There was a difference, at least of tone and nuance, during the debate in the other place, when Lord McIntosh of Haringey splendidly said:

"We have no commitment to review the Barnett formula. On the other hand, it is not fixed in stone."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 7 November 2001; Vol. 628, c. 262.]

That is a splendid example of the two-handed lawyer.

We should have a thorough review. It should be systematic and comprehensive. It will necessarily take some time. There is a strong case for the creation of a royal commission to consider all the arguments as far as the people of Scotland, Wales, the north-east of England and the other English regions are concerned. After that detailed and thorough consideration, which the Opposition favour, I will be able to enunciate my party's conclusions with the clarity and specificity that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan requires.

12.20 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly):** It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr. Winterton. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) on securing this important debate. It is a topical issue and I am delighted to be here to debate it. My hon. Friend's contribution was well researched and interesting. As various hon. Members pointed out, Lord Barnett himself did not expect that the formula that bears his name would last so long. The longevity of the Barnett formula is a tribute to its effectiveness in determining the allocation of public expenditure to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are at least two reasons for that longevity.

First, although no formula is perfect or above criticism, the Barnett formula has produced what have been perceived as generally fair and broadly acceptable distributions of public funds since it was first introduced. It has been used by both Labour and Conservative Administrations. It underpinned the devolution settlements with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and is not perceived to be politically biased. Secondly, as the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) pointed out so eloquently, the formula has avoided the need for separate negotiations between Treasury Ministers and their counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland during public spending reviews. It has provided a transparent, durable and simple rule for reaching spending settlements without direct negotiation.

*[Ruth Kelly]*

A frequent misunderstanding is the widely held impression that the Barnett formula is responsible for determining the level of spending per head on services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That is not the case. The formula is a device to allocate to the devolved Administrations a relative population share of changes in planned spending on comparable UK Government Departments' programmes. The formula was not used to determine the initial baselines, which have been inherited from the past. Furthermore, the Barnett formula is used to determine only the overall increase in the assigned budgets of the devolved Administrations. It is for the devolved Administrations to decide how they want to allocate their budgets to individual programmes. The UK Government do not determine the levels of spending per head on devolved services such as health and education.

**Mr. Bercow:** In order to remove one bogus argument from the agenda, will the Minister confirm that use of the tax-raising power by the Scottish Parliament could in itself raise only £450 million, which is just 3 per cent. of the total allocation of funds to Scotland? Therefore, it is a complete red herring to suggest that the use of that power could make a dramatic difference to Scotland. Manifestly, it could not.

**Ruth Kelly:** Of course the use of the tax-raising power is up to the Scottish Parliament itself. It is an important tool that it may choose to use at a particular time, but I do not suggest that it is particularly relevant to the Barnett formula.

We have heard a wide range of views in today's debate. Questions have been asked about the comparison of per capita public spending in Scotland and the equivalent figures for English regions such as the north-east or the north-west. However, the Barnett formula does not determine the allocation of resources within England—which is generally a matter for English Departments and reflects Department's various needs-based allocation systems—or baselines inherited from the past, or non-devolved spending in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Salmond:** It is reported in *The Guardian* today that Ministers are moving towards a full review of Whitehall spending throughout the UK. Will the Minister endorse that as a "report", or knock it on the head as a "story"?

**Ruth Kelly:** Even though I used to work for that newspaper, I am reluctant as a Minister to endorse every single line written in it. We have neither a commitment nor any plans to review the Barnett formula, and there is no tension between that position and the fact that the Barnett formula is not set in stone. We have to review it in the run-up to spending reviews and it changes according to population shifts, so reviewing the detail is an on-going process.

A comparison between spending in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and in the English regions shows that there is a substantial variation in need within regions as well as between them. Outside London, the north-east has the highest level of public spending per head in England.

The Government are committed to improving prosperity in all regions and countries within the UK. Since the 1997 election, youth unemployment has greatly declined and long-term unemployment has been reduced. All regions are benefiting from the new deal, the working families tax credit, the introduction of the minimum wage and cuts in corporation tax and capital gains tax.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) asked about the reference in the pre-Budget report to public spending decisions being

"fairly distributed and targeted at those areas where it is needed most".

It might be helpful to put that in context. At the time of the pre-Budget report the Government published a paper on "Productivity in the UK: the Regional Dimension" which sets out the economic analysis underlying the Government's approach to regional economic policy and the institutional framework necessary to deliver it. Working in partnership with the Government, regional development agencies and other local and regional economic bodies have put in place a substantial programme of policies designed to tackle economic failure—at every geographical level—and deliver sustained improvements in the UK's economic performance.

The forthcoming spending review provides an opportunity for the Government to consider the lessons of the first years of this new regional economic policy and incorporate the analysis into our evidence-based approach to public spending. Reference is made to public spending that takes place in England, but that does not imply any fundamental rethinking of the Government's approach to the Barnett formula. It is all about learning from experience and building up an evidence base to inform public spending within the overall context.

There has been criticism from some in England that the Barnett formula is too slow in delivering convergence in per capita total identifiable spending between the four countries of the UK. I would point out that the speed of convergence is affected by a variety of factors, including the rate of increase of comparable English programmes, changes in relative population between the countries of the UK, and changes in relative public spending per head on programmes that do not fall within the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland assigned budgets.

On the other hand, there has also been criticism in the opposite direction that spending percentage increases in Scotland and Northern Ireland are lower than elsewhere in the UK—sometimes referred to as the Barnett squeeze. In fact, no fixed or predetermined convergence path is built into the Barnett formula. The so-called convergence characteristic simply reflects that fact that population-based increases represent a smaller percentage increase where baseline levels of spending per head are higher.

The Government's policy on funding the devolved Administrations, including the Barnett formula, is set out in the statement of funding policy published by the Treasury in July 2000. The statement fully and transparently sets out the details of the funding arrangements, and was agreed with the Secretaries of

State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, following consultation with the devolved Administrations. It allows for operational change. We have updated the population figures, for example, and the comparability factors are kept under review.

We have heard a wide range of—sometimes conflicting—views. The Barnett formula has served us reasonably well, but we will continue to listen to various representations.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair):** I regret that time is up. We thank the Minister for her reply. We move to the next debate.

## Wolvercote Clinic

12.30 pm

**Mr. Philip Hammond** (Runnymede and Weybridge): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this issue, which is of great importance to my constituents, and to allow the Minister to place some important points on record. I also thank the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) for attending the debate. He may not have an immediate or obvious interest in what goes on in my constituency, but he has historic connections with it and Opposition Members are grateful for his support.

The Wolvercote clinic is a therapeutic facility that is run by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. It treats approximately 20 convicted paedophiles and seeks to educate them into departing from their offending behaviour to ensure that they can become safe members of the community again. It operates a contract regime. People who are in the clinic are not prisoners: they enter into a contract with the clinic to stay there for the duration of their treatment, but they are free to go whenever they choose. At present, the clinic is at Epsom, on the site of a large, disused psychiatric hospital that included a medium-secure psychiatric unit. The Secretary of State for Health has sold the site for development and houses are being built. Therefore, the clinic must move.

I emphasise that the debate is not about the clinic, which I have visited. I have no reason to suppose that it is not doing a good job: more than 80 per cent. of those treated in the clinic do not reoffend. The debate is about the Home Office's handling of the relocation proposal. The need to relocate the clinic was not sudden or unexpected—but there had been six years to plan the move. Ministers appear to have taken the decision to relocate the facility only on 11 May 2001. The clinic was relocated to Silverlands near Chertsey, which is owned by the Department of Health. That decision was not announced, no one local was briefed, and I was not informed as the Member of Parliament for that constituency. Given that the decision was taken just a few weeks before the general election, one can perhaps understand why.

I was first informed about the decision on 12 October, by which time there were less than six months until the date by which the clinic had to vacate its premises. I want to put on record that the Minister was not responsible for that decision because, of course, she was not there. When she reviewed the decision in the summer, she identified concerns about the decision-making process. She described it as one that:

"could have been better handled."

Local people were relieved when the Minister announced that she would review the decision that was taken in May behind closed doors. However, there is great concern in my constituency to ensure that all options are genuinely reviewed and that the review does not repeat the shortcomings of the original decision-making process. I have had more than 2,400 representations on the matter, which is easily the most that I have received on any subject since becoming a Member of Parliament.

*[Mr. Philip Hammond]*

The debate will not primarily be about whether Silverlands is an appropriate location, but about the decision-making process and the procedure that was followed. However, I will briefly outline some of my constituents' concerns about the location of the facility at Silverlands. It is in a residential area and is directly overlooked by at least two properties. Many schools and child care facilities are in the immediate vicinity, St. Peter's hospital and two creches are on the site, and a psychiatric unit and the White Lodge centre for handicapped children are close by.

The large and diverse traveller community in that part of my constituency has clear views about the issue. After some difficult years, that community has integrated well with the rest of the local community. The key to integration has been Lyne and Longcross primary school, a small Church of England school that is attended by many children of travellers, sometimes on a seasonal basis. The school is coping well and facilitating their integration into the community.

The building that the Department is proposing to relocate the clinic to is a grade 2 listed mansion. Some of the security arrangements that have already been put in place, without the nicety of obtaining planning or listed building consent, have already damaged its setting.

I share the strong local belief that the criteria used to select the site for a facility of this nature must include some measure of the effect on the community in which it is placed. It is well established that perceptions have an important effect: fear of crime is as damaging as crime itself. I submit that special factors make the community particularly vulnerable to the effects of such a facility.

However, I do not wish to engage in special pleading. I ask only for a fair and objective evaluation of all the alternatives, confident that the case against Silverlands will stand on its merits. There is no evidence that the May decision was made on the basis of rigorous evaluation and it was manifestly made without consultation. Such a decision is unsatisfactory and vulnerable to challenge. I believe that the Minister has recognised that and therefore agreed to a review. Other communities will raise other concerns, but I will accept the outcome of an objective evaluation procedure that is fair, transparent and rigorous. I wish to discuss the process that is necessary to ensure such evaluation.

How will the Minister apply the criteria to evaluate the different sites? The Home Office issued a list of criteria, but there is still some confusion. It is not clear whether they were prepared at the outset or reactively during the process. According to a Home Office minute of a meeting in my constituency the Minister said that the criteria for selection were simply that the site was big enough and was part of the Government estate. The Home Secretary wrote to one of my councillors that

"a nationwide search throughout the NHS and Prison Service estate"

had taken place. He said that the advantages of Silverlands were that it was of the right size and could be refurbished to meet Home Office requirements and that

"the existing, experienced staff could transfer easily; and the site is already in Government ownership".

The published criteria are ambiguous. Officials made it clear to me that Government ownership is not an issue, but the criteria could be interpreted to require that it be taken into account. I hope that the Minister will be able to confirm that all options will be considered, regardless of ownership. I understand that instructions have been given to property consultants to look for suitable sites throughout the country.

The conflicting statements sometimes leave us with the impression that the selection criteria have been cobbled together during the process, rather than carefully thought out in advance. Nevertheless, we now have a set of 15 criteria. Most of them are sensible and uncontroversial, if somewhat inward looking: they tend to deal with the suitability of the building, rather than the effect on the community. However, I wish to ask the Minister about a few specific difficulties with the published criteria.

I do not want a lengthy debate on the European convention on human rights, but rights are affected by a decision to locate that type of facility. Regardless of human rights considerations, the least onerous solution that has the least negative impact on the community should be sought. The Home Office criteria do not refer to impact on the community, which should be the primary criterion. Does the Minister agree that minimal impact on the community should be one of those criteria?

Criterion 3 details the retention of specialist and experienced staff. That is a sensible aspiration. Due to the time scale—only four months are left until the backstop date for relocation of the clinic—we are concerned that the criterion introduces a narrow geographical bias against Silverlands. That appears to contradict what Ministers have said about undertaking a nationwide search for suitable sites. I accept that relocation across substantial distances will pose difficulties in that short time scale and may involve temporary arrangements, but it is not impossible. Not all staff live close to the current site in Epsom. Crucially, criterion 3 cannot have been one of the original criteria used, because we were told that a nationwide search was undertaken. At this stage of the review, I would be concerned if a new criterion were introduced that, for geographical reasons, biased the search against Silverlands. Will the Minister confirm that geography will not be a determining factor, as it was not in the original decision?

It is not clear whether the criteria will be weighted when taking a decision on an application, or whether some of them are absolute criteria with which a site must comply. Will the Minister confirm that there will be a transparent scoring system so that any location can be objectively evaluated and seen to be so? Ideally, I would like a matrix at the end of the process that identifies possible sites, and the criteria against which they are measured, and that scores them in a way that the public can scrutinise and challenge. I hope that the Minister will accept that the Government must publish details of evaluated sites and must make open to scrutiny the basis for any conclusion that a given site is the most suitable according to the defined criteria. Will the Minister assure us that she will publish the data that underpin her decision?

The Minister told me on 12 October that a review process would be conducted, followed by consultation of local people in the preferred location. That is her position, but since that statement, Ministers have been at pains to avoid the use of the word consultation. The Home Secretary wrote:

"It was always intended that there would be a process of dialogue."

The Minister herself referred to engagement with community concerns, which is not the same as consultation. That shyness over the word consultation may relate to the fact that courts have established that a proper consultation must occur when the decision-maker's mind is still open and the decision may still be influenced.

It is not clear how the views currently gathered from local people and representative groups will influence the decision-making process. None of the 15 criteria relates to impact on the local community. Via her mechanical scoring process, will the Minister explain how the views of the local community will be scored and plugged into the evaluation system, along with more mechanical issues such as the quality of the property and its appropriateness? If the process is to be credible, it must be seen to be even handed. There is a perception of bias in favour of Silverlands, partly because of the time scale. It appears that a new criterion has been added that biases the playing field against us.

Despite the announcement of a review of the original decision, a £2 million contract for work on the Silverlands mansion has been let. That work continues unabated. There is deep suspicion locally, which I hope is misplaced, that the decision has already been made and the review is really an exercise in propping up a faulty and vulnerable process. I hope that the Minister will reassure us that, in the Home Secretary's words, this will be a "genuine" and "wide ranging" review and that "all possible alternatives will be properly investigated".

I would be grateful if the Minister would put a time limit on my constituents' agony by making it clear when she expects to reach a decision. The clock is ticking and there is a tension between the need for a full and thorough review procedure, which we understand, and the fixed deadline for the clinic's removal from its present site in Epsom. We believe that the dice are becoming increasingly loaded against Silverlands. I look forward to the Minister's response.

12.46 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes):** As the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) indicated, I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate and to put on public record some of the important issues concerning Wolvercote and the decision-making process, as well as the wider context of how we better protect children from sex offenders.

I shall deal with four areas. The first area is the reason why Wolvercote has had to move and the initial decision on the Silverlands site. Secondly, I shall deal with how that initial decision is being reviewed—I shall answer some of the hon. Gentleman's questions. Thirdly, I shall touch on the work of the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. Finally, I shall consider some of the broader questions—how we better protect children and the difficulties we all face as policy makers and in local communities in trying to implement measures to protect children effectively.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Wolvercote Clinic had to move because its site at Horton hospital was only temporary. It was always known that it was unsuitable. It was in poor physical condition—now, it is in extremely poor physical condition. In any event, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the site is being sold and the clinic has to be relocated.

Prior to my coming to this post, an extensive nationwide search was conducted through the national health service and Prison Service estates for possible alternatives, in which the Silverlands site was identified. Although many would argue that there is no ideal site for such a facility, those making the decision thought that Silverlands had several advantages. It was of the right size, it could be refurbished to meet security and health and safety standards, experienced staff could transfer there easily, which was highly important, and it was already in Government ownership as part of the NHS estate. Ministers agreed that Silverlands was a suitable site for the clinic.

However, substantial issues of finance, security and listed building status had to be resolved before my former colleagues could be sure of the viability of Silverlands. It was clear that they always intended that there should be dialogue. Arrangements were set in train to organise that process, starting with an information day for everyone concerned, including the public. Officials were in contact with the chief executive of the local authority about that proposal.

**Mr. Hammond:** Can the Minister clarify whether this was dialogue post the fact, or consultation which could have some bearing on the decision?

**Beverley Hughes:** I am speaking with hindsight, because I was not party to the information, but I think that it is fair to say that Silverlands was certainly the preferred site at that stage. My colleagues clearly recognised the need for, and desired, a process that involved the local community. I had concerns about the proposals. After I had discussed them with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, I decided that we should review all the alternatives and that community concerns should be heard and included in the decision-making process.

**Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): The head teachers in the surrounding area, which I think is peppered with a large number of schools, did not know about the matter until October. That is a matter of fact, which I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will bear in mind. If consultation was embarked on before, some people with primary interests were not consulted until October.

**Beverley Hughes:** I am aware of that, which is partly why I decided to review the decision so that community concerns across the board could be heard and, more specifically, included in the decision-making process. At that stage, I briefed the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge on the situation. Let me deal with some points that he raised about the review process.

On 20 October, I appointed Tony Raban from the National Probation Service to head a project team to review all possible alternatives for a new site. On

*[Beverley Hughes]*

31 October, I met a group of local stakeholders and gave them those assurances. To be fair, I think that people accepted that what I said was genuinely and sincerely meant and that the process would be robust, fair and objective.

The project team's work continues. The search for alternative sites throughout England and Wales has included a comprehensive review of Government properties, which involved the Department of Health, the Prison Service and the Ministry of Defence. The review included what we learned about what might be available in the private sector.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the criteria and suggested that there might be conflicting statements. When we started the process, we had a broad remit, asking those agencies to tell us about any property or site that might be suitable as regards size and facilities. Once names of sites started to come in, the evaluation criteria were applied. The initial trawl was wide, with no criteria set down other than the broad parameters that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary mentioned in his letter. The criteria are necessary to evaluate those sites.

Chief officers in all 42 probation areas have been asked to assist. The search conducted by the Department of Health has been undertaken through not only the regions but 400 health trusts. We have employed an independent consultant to search for properties in the private sector and we have been following up a contact that the hon. Gentleman gave us about a company specialising in private residential care.

I emphasise that the process of searching for and evaluating alternative sites has been thorough, systematic, open, rigorous and objective. I wholly reject any suggestion that the process was tipped towards selecting Silverlands. I would not be party to that and I will not entertain the suggestion because it is not true.

**Mr. Hammond:** To ensure that people in the community accept that the process has been open and rigorous, will the Minister undertake to publish the resulting data, so that they can see which sites have been evaluated and how they scored against the defined criteria? People would then see that there was a clear and objective case for whichever site was ultimately selected, rather than being asked to rely on the Minister's judgment on a set of data that she had seen behind closed doors.

**Beverley Hughes:** I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman appears to continue to question my integrity and the way in which I am approaching the review. I have reassured local people about it, and with hindsight, local people will be able to examine our process and judge for themselves. I insist that the review is as open, transparent and comprehensive as possible. I shall take advice on what can be published and I have no difficulty in publishing the detail of the scheme, its criteria and the how they have been applied. I will not guarantee at this stage the publication of the details of all the other sites that we considered, because to do so could have implications for other places in England and Wales. I shall ask for advice on that, but I shall publish what detail I may.

Any property identified—the search found many—was first subjected to a desktop review against criteria, which I have made available. Sites that were assessed as having potential were visited and a full evaluation took place. The second task for the project team was to continue the dialogue with local people. I understand fully the concerns of parents and local people and it is for that reason that we have conducted the review and guaranteed that their views would be incorporated into the decision-making process. The meetings that have taken place between Tony Raban, the project team and local people have enabled us to hear directly their concerns and clarify some issues of misunderstanding.

**Mr. Hammond:** I in no way questioned the Minister's integrity. You would have ruled me out of order had I done so, Mr. Winterton. However, does the Minister accept that it will be difficult for local people to accept a decision if they do not know the other sites against which Silverlands has been compared? They will always stand accused of nimbyism. They do not want to be accused of that; they want to conduct a fair and objective assessment of the alternative sites on offer.

**Beverley Hughes:** I will be able to put into the public domain the evaluation process, our criteria and the weightings that consultants advised us to apply. The criteria try to create a balance between the two issues that the hon. Gentleman identified—the needs of the clinic and the impact on the local community. We have used weightings to ensure that both factors are given importance. As I said, I will take advice about publishing the names of individual sites and identifying them by location, but I am happy to publish the scheme's details because I am confident about our process.

The work of the Lucy Faithfull Foundation is important to the debate. The hon. Gentleman said that the debate was about Silverlands, Chertsey and the decision-making process, but it is not. The issues that he raised would be important in decisions to locate such a clinic anywhere in the country. They are the natural concerns of people, but we must examine them in the context of trying to protect children. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation and clinic are undertaking pioneering work in the field of child protection. It is critical that the clinic continues its work somewhere in the country and child protection would be much worse if it could not do so. I am determined that we will find a suitable location.

The protection of the public, and of children in particular, is clearly a high priority of the Government and one at the forefront of our minds after the recent conviction of Roy Whiting for the murder of Sarah Payne. There has been much debate about how we can better protect children and whether public access to the sex offenders register, for example, would help. We have concluded that it would not. Child protection is best served by the police and others knowing where sex offenders are, keeping them under supervision and providing treatment to reduce the risk of further offending. Clinics such as Wolvercote make a significant contribution to that. If we are to keep known sex offenders in our sights and enable the police to know where they are, clinics such as Wolvercote are essential. There is not an abundance of possible locations that are removed from housing and proximity to schools, so

wherever there are clinics and hospitals, these issues will be raised and politicians and members of the community who, understandably, want to protect their children must face up to that.

## Melbeck Park, Manchester

1 pm

**Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise an issue that has annoyed and upset some of my constituents for more than two years. For reasons that will become clear during my speech, it has also caused considerable irritation to their Member of Parliament.

The constituents live on a new, private development known as Melbeck Park. They came to see me following a series of burglaries on their estate where there are 170 houses, all built by the developer Redrow Homes. I warmly welcome the significant growth of private development in my constituency in recent years; Wythenshawe was traditionally known as the largest council housing estate in Europe, and the fact that there is now a greater diversity of housing tenure is helping to give the community a broader, more sustainable social base. None the less, in this case, the conduct of Redrow Homes falls well short of the manner in which a responsible company should behave.

On its website, Redrow describes itself as

"widely acknowledged to be one of the UK's leading residential and commercial property developers, with an excellent reputation for quality."

Redrow won the *Daily Express* best national house builder award for three years running. In the company's latest annual report, chairman Robert Jones reported that the group's pre-tax profits had risen to more than £72 million pounds. He commented:

"We have had an outstanding year in terms of public recognition of our achievements".

In the same annual report, Redrow's chief executive, Mr. Paul Pedley, said that the awards recognised his company's

"focus on quality, design, customer care and environmental awareness."

He said:

"Redrow fully recognises its responsibilities to the wider community. In tandem with creating an excellent living and working environment is the need to add significantly to the daily life of the communities in and around our developments."

One might expect such remarks from an organisation that recently sponsored the annual lunch of the City of Westminster home safety committee under the theme "Safer Homes in the new Millennium", but they are not reflected in the experience of my constituents.

I was first approached by some Melbeck Park residents in 1999. Their homes had been burgled and they took the view that the poor quality window units installed by Redrow Homes were largely responsible for making their homes vulnerable to crime. During the whole of 1999, 2.5 per cent. of UK households were victims of burglary with entry. On the small Melbeck estate, in the six months between April and November 1999, there were 14 burglaries, which is equivalent to an annual rate seven times the national average. In 12 cases, the burglars got into the property by removing the kitchen window. The residents told me of their fear and insecurity. One had reluctantly decided to put her home on the market. One does not have to be an expert on double glazing to understand why it was so easy to break into the houses: the double-glazed kitchen windows

*[Paul Goggins]*

were made of uPVC and externally beaded. All that was required to break in was a knife to cut the beading before lifting the window out.

In May 1999, I wrote to Redrow Homes asking the company to replace all the kitchen windows on the estate; it refused to do so. In addition to my representations, a few months later Greater Manchester police also brought the windows' security defects to Redrow's attention. In a letter to Redrow's customer services manager, GMP's architectural liaison officer stated:

"Most of the burglaries have been carried out through the same location to each property. The rear ground floor kitchen window is concealed from natural surveillance, offering the opportunity for the criminals to peel off the external pvc glazing bead to the windows. The ease with which this is carried out is normally without damage to the components. The glass panel is removed and entry is made to the property. This action would create no noise and the burglar would be confident in the knowledge that articles could be removed without risk of being seen particularly if an intruder alarm is not fitted."

He went on:

"The police are aware of the problems that external beading to windows causes to occupants and we always encourage, particularly with the installation of uPVC windows that all ground and first-floor windows, including french windows and patio doors, are beaded internally and then with secure clips. We would further suggest, in certain circumstances, that windows are glazed with laminated glass. The problems current indicate the wisdom of this course of action."

The letter continued:

"You will appreciate we are always concerned that the components specified in buildings meet minimum secure standards. For windows, apart from other design, manufacturing and mechanical specifications, BS 7950 is the accepted minimum security standard for window sets. We would encourage you to consider this specification in the near future."

Given that clear and unambiguous advice from the Greater Manchester police, I wrote again to Redrow in December 1999. The following month, I received a reply from Redrow Homes northern managing director at that time, a Mr. Andrew Swindell, who told me,

"I am aware of the problems which have been experienced by a number of residents on the Melbeck Park development with burglaries. We are concerned that the police appear to be unable to prevent these burglaries, and rather than addressing the issue by more patrolling of the development, they suggest that the developer, in this case Redrow, have not provided suitable windows. The windows fitted on this development are the same as those fitted throughout the Redrow Group, they need to be relevant to building regulations and NHBC standards.

Whilst I do sympathise with the residents of the Melbeck Park development, I feel they should be pursuing the Greater Manchester police to try and provide a better service to the residents of the development".

It is thus perfectly clear: the fact that windows can simply be lifted out of their frame to facilitate a burglary is not a matter for the developer but for the police. That is not my view or that of the Melbeck Park residents, who have a positive relationship with the local police. The residents believe that the police have done everything possible to make their estate safe.

It is a Member of Parliament's responsibility to look for answers to constituency problems. Therefore, given the difference of opinion expressed by Mr. Swindell, I resolved to try to bring Greater Manchester police and Redrow Homes together to discuss the difficulties that the Melbeck Park residents were experiencing. The police said that they were more than happy to meet Redrow, but Redrow were reluctant to meet us.

I wrote to Mr. Swindell in February 2000 to request a meeting; I received no reply. I wrote again in May and in June. Eventually, having telephoned his office on numerous occasions, we fixed a meeting for August 24. On the morning of the meeting, Mr. Swindell's office telephoned to say that he was unable to attend. I was appalled at such a lack of concern for my constituents. I wrote to the chief executive of Redrow Homes, Mr. Paul Pedley, to complain. I subsequently received a reply from Mr. Barry Harvey, regional chairman of Redrow Homes (Northern). He informed me that Mr. Swindell had left the company and that he, Mr. Harvey, would investigate my complaint.

Any initial hope of a breakthrough was dashed when 10 days later he replied with the standard retort that it was unfair for me to take Redrow to task. I wrote again to Mr. Harvey asking him to meet me and representatives of Greater Manchester police. In January this year he wrote to say that he could

"not see any way forward as we have no intention of changing or replacing windows."

That strong denial of responsibility might have been more persuasive but for the fact that in August 1999 Redrow had commissioned Avonside Window Systems, the original supplier of the windows to offer all Melbeck residents, free of charge, the opportunity to have the beading removed from their kitchen windows and replaced with an additional silicone seal. Clearly, the company knew that something was wrong. Only 36 of the 170 households on the estate agreed to the offer—figures that Redrow confirmed in writing to me. The other residents were not persuaded that that would improve their security and, in any event, the majority of them continued to believe that Redrow Homes should replace the entire kitchen window unit. Yesterday evening, Redrow Homes issued a statement in anticipation of today's debate, claiming that 90 per cent. of the estate's 170 residents agreed to extra silicone treatment for their windows, yet it had already written to me confirming that only 36 residents had so agreed. Its claim is therefore so at variance with reality as barely to constitute credible evidence.

All hon. Members are regularly in touch with a wide range of commercial organisations. They might need to deal with a constituent's complaint, with plans for investment, or even with job losses. In my experience, although such organisations do not always share one's views, they invariably show courtesy and respect. I asked to meet the American owners of an engineering company in my constituency that had just announced several hundred redundancies and they readily agreed. As you know, Mr. Winterton, I am trying to help the managers and work force at the Manchester airport division of FLS Aerospace to retain several hundred jobs that are under threat as a result of the recent downturn in the aviation industry. Such organisations are always happy to meet and to respond to my requests. In fact, Redrow Homes is the only company to refuse to have a meeting with me in my almost five years as the Member of Parliament for Wythenshawe and Sale, East.

This sorry saga not only displays a wilful disregard for the residents of Melbeck Park, it also has serious implications for public policy and resources. In a letter

to one of my constituents, Barry Harvey, chairman of Redrow Homes' northern region, remarked that the windows in the properties sold on the estate reflected exactly those on display in the show homes. He said:

"You bought what we sold".

I do not accept that a developer should be allowed to get away with such an irresponsible attitude. A wide range of legislation and regulations deals with customers' rights in respect of the purchase of goods and services. The time spent by police following up the disproportionate number of burglaries on the estate gives rise to considerable public expenditure implications. There is also the question of the distress caused to the families and individuals involved, but all Redrow Homes seems interested in is the house as sold.

My principal purpose in raising this issue is to ask the Minister what action the Government are taking to ensure that developers are not able to wriggle out of their wider responsibilities in the manner of Redrow Homes. In particular, the residents of Melbeck Park would like to know what Ministers are doing to ensure that local authorities are able to enforce effective security standards on new housing estates as part of the planning process.

In recent years, as a result of this Government's actions local partnerships have been established in every area to spearhead the fight against crime. In that regard, I pay tribute to the efforts of Greater Manchester police, Manchester and Trafford councils and other local partners in working together in my own constituency. That work is made all the more difficult, however, when houses are built to a defective design.

An annexe on design attached to Government planning guidance contains a paragraph on security that includes the following advice:

"In considering the design of proposed new developments, local planning authorities, developers and designers should take into account the advice contained in DOE circular 5/94, "Planning Out Crime". In doing so, the approach should be sufficiently flexible to allow solutions to remain sensitive to local circumstances."

Advice and good intentions are not enough, however. When a developer seeks planning permission for a new estate, the council can recommend that the developer consult the police about the estate's layout, but it is powerless to insist that the developer follow police advice. It is also powerless to insist on minimum security specifications for windows or doors. Local authorities need more effective powers to monitor the implementation of approved plans, particularly in respect of crime and security issues.

My constituents bought their homes from a developer with a good reputation, on an estate for which the local authority had given planning permission, yet they were badly let down. I strongly support the "Secured By Design" initiative of the Association of Chief Police Officers, which is standard in all housing corporation-funded schemes and which local authorities increasingly view as a reasonable minimum for new developments. That view is, however, resisted by developers such as Redrow, and the windows that it installed in Melbeck Park would not meet the "Secured by Design" standard.

Recently, burglaries on the estate have decreased significantly, which is largely due to Melbeck Park's residents, who have displayed an impressive sense of community spirit. They have established a residents' association and a neighbourhood watch and they look out for each other, as all good citizens should. However, they deserved a more positive and responsible attitude from the organisation that designed and built their estate—Redrow Homes. Some residents have replaced their kitchen windows at their own expense, but even at this late stage, two and a half years after the issue was first raised, I call on Redrow Homes to reconsider its position and to offer every Melbeck Park resident a new kitchen window of the standard suggested by Greater Manchester police.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will endorse my request and I look forward to hearing more from her about the action that the Government are taking to make developers more accountable for the delivery of public safety, more responsive to public authorities and more responsible to those who purchase properties from them.

1.16 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) on securing this debate and raising this important issue. He has conveyed the serious concerns that have been raised by his constituents about public safety on the Melbeck Park estate and I was sorry to hear about his constituents' difficulties.

I shall deal with planning issues and briefly touch on building regulations, but first I must state that there should be no doubt about the Government's willingness to tackle crime and the fear of crime wherever they exist. We have determined a course, of which planning, house building and neighbourhood management are important parts, to help communities to fight back against crime.

Many of my hon. Friend's comments relate to the quality of detailing on new private housing schemes. Although planning regulations can stress good standards in design, unfortunately they cannot solve the problem of crime. However, when they are co-ordinated with other measures, including sensitivity to designing-out crime by developers, their contribution can be significant. Well-designed developments can reduce the fear of crime, make crime harder to commit and increase detection rates. There have been too many cases in which criminals' work has been made easy and people's lives have been blighted unnecessarily—the Melbeck Park estate seems to be a case a point.

As my hon. Friend said, the planning system must play its part in tackling crime, which is why the Government intend to review and update the existing circular advice on planning-out crime to which he referred. We want to drive home the fact that crime prevention is a key objective in planning. Local authorities already know that crime prevention is a possible material consideration when planning applications are determined because it is a social issue to which their development plans must pay attention. We shall remind local authorities that they can insist on appropriate crime prevention measures and refuse planning applications where they have concerns about community safety. Local authorities must not step beyond what they can legitimately pursue under

*[Ms Sally Keeble]*

planning legislation, but there is no reason why community safety and crime prevention should not be central concerns for local authorities when they exercise their planning responsibilities.

In recent planning policy guidance, we have already underlined the importance of thinking about crime prevention when designing new developments. For example, our new approach to planning for housing, which we set out in PPG 3, requires local authorities to adopt policies that promote designs and layouts that are safe and take account of crime prevention and community safety. We are reinforcing that guidance with advice on sound practice: "Better Places to Live", which we published in September, provides sound practical guidance on how the planning system can help to achieve quality residential environments. It emphasises that good design is concerned not only with the appearance of a development but with matters such as community safety.

My hon. Friend rightly feels strongly about tackling crime on the Melbeck Park estate. Although by no means a whole solution, thoughtful planning and design can be effective in creating more secure environments. Most crime is opportunistic. Design principles based on common sense, such as encouraging natural surveillance and ensuring that such areas as kitchen windows can be overseen, can help to improve security for people and property. Through good design, we can secure safe neighbourhoods where people want to live and that are well connected to an inclusive city.

I am sorry to say that once a development has been completed, the main opportunity to incorporate crime prevention measures may have been lost. That is why we expect crime reduction to feature in the discussions that authorities have with developers and their designers right at the outset of the design process. Local authorities are advised to consult police architectural liaison officers on planning applications for developments where there is potential to eliminate or reduce crime through the adoption of suitable measures at the design stage. That is especially important for major developments such as new housing estates. We have stressed the importance of consulting the police architectural liaison officer at an early stage and my hon. Friend drew attention to the problems if the officer is consulted only after building has finished.

My hon. Friend touched on the "Secured by Design" scheme promoted by police forces throughout the country. Given that scheme's potential, I can appreciate why he wants to see the best use made of it. There should be no doubt that local authorities can insist on appropriate crime prevention measures and refuse planning applications where they have concerns about design safety. However, as he may know, "Secured by Design" covers a wide range of issues, some of them reaching beyond the boundaries of planning control.

In reviewing our planning guidance, we will examine how the principles in "Secured by Design" can best be employed. As part of the review, we propose to build up collective knowledge of what works in designing out crime. Our aim is a pool of good practice guidance relevant to local planning authorities and police that is practicable and robust in a wide range of circumstances.

**Paul Goggins:** My hon. Friend the Minister rightly lays great emphasis on the need to follow and share good practice. She has also emphasised the need for developers to consult the local police architectural liaison officer and has spoken in support of the "Secured by Design" initiative. However, is not the problem that although those are noble aspirations, when a developer such as Redrow takes no notice of that good practice, or, as in the case that I have quoted, of the advice of the architectural liaison officer, the residents are very badly let down?

**Ms Keeble:** I take my hon. Friend's point and have some points to make in reply. There is clearly wide discretion for local planning authorities when considering and approving plans. We provide them with the tools to make the best possible decisions, in the interests of all parties involved. The final decisions are down to them, but we give them strong guidance on how to consider such matters. I have clearly set out that community safety is a material consideration that they can properly take into account.

In examining how we can best use the "Secured by Design" principles, we will take account of considerations such as those that my hon. Friend mentioned in relation to the residents of the estate that he highlighted. The aim is to prevent just such problems arising. On his point about the architectural liaison officer, it may well be that had his advice been given earlier, the circumstances for my hon. Friend's constituents might not have turned out as they did.

I want to deal with other issues relating to building regulations, which I hope will reassure my hon. Friend about the seriousness with which we view community safety, building design and building standards. In addition to the planning system, building regulations cover health and safety, welfare and convenience, but not the protection of property, which would require an amendment to the Building Act 1984. We are looking into that and I will ensure that my hon. Friend's views are passed on.

Every house buyer in a private housing development will have a contract with the house builder. They will have seen the property, had it described, and probably had a survey. If there is any suggestion that purchasers were misled when they bought, there may be an opportunity for them to take legal action for breach of contract. I appreciate that that is difficult for an individual, but my hon. Friend is referring to an estate. If residents have specific worries about the way in which the developer has behaved, they may wish to bring the matter to the attention of the local trading standards office. However, I cannot comment on that, because such cases require careful consideration.

On the standard of new housing in general, the non-statutory Buildmark new home warranty scheme run by the National House Building Council covers a large proportion of new homes built for sale. The scheme standards specify that doors and windows must be designed to resist unauthorised entry. That reflects the point that my hon. Friend made about the windows on

the Melbeck Park estate. The NHBC's guidance manual states that ground floor windows should have key-operated locks and that windows in general should be designed to prevent opening from the outside. However, that design must reflect the fact that windows, especially above ground floor level, may provide an escape route in the event of fire.

Under the NHBC's Buildmark scheme, any non-compliance with scheme standards that comes to light in the first two years of the 10-year cover must be put right by the builder. In this case, the problem started almost exactly two years ago. In years three to 10, cover is mainly confined to repairing structural damage. Any home owner whose home is registered with the Buildmark scheme can contact the NHBC to check whether a problem with their home is covered. If my hon. Friend is unaware of the NHBC, I shall be happy to give him its contact details after the debate.

I thank my hon. Friend for drawing the matter to our attention. I extend my sincere sympathies to his constituents and congratulate them on the way in which they have tackled their problems by establishing a residents' association and taking local action to help to reduce the crime rate. I assure him that I have taken note of the serious issues that he raised. I have already mentioned our intention to review and update the existing circular advice on planning out crime, and I will ensure that his views are passed on. I will also ensure that attention is paid to the details of house design that he mentioned and pass on his concerns about building regulations and any efforts to update them. When I meet house builders, I always underline the importance of good design, especially designing for safer communities, because I understand its importance to the well-being of people in their homes. I shall continue to do that strenuously.

I hope that I have helped my hon. Friend's constituents to find some immediate solutions to their problems by suggesting several avenues through which they can seek assistance. I hope that I have also reassured him as to the seriousness with which the Government regard planning, home design, building standards and community safety. It is our intention to continue to work to ensure that people are safe in their own homes.

## Foot and Mouth (Devon)

1.30pm

**Mr. John Burnett** (Torridge and West Devon): I am grateful to have been given this opportunity to raise the impact of foot and mouth in Devon. I am grateful to Devon county council, Torridge district council, West Devon borough council, Dartmoor national park, South West Tourism, the National Farmers' Union, and numerous other farmers and business men in my constituency for the help that they have given me in preparing for today's debate. I should also put on record that I farmed for more than 20 years in my constituency and I still own farmland there, which is rented out.

I believe that it would help the Chamber if I gave some stark statistics about this years' outbreak of foot and mouth in so far as it has impacted on Devon, and particularly on my constituency, which was the most severely hit of all the Devon constituencies that suffered foot and mouth. We had by far the largest incidence of the disease. The constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), had the second largest incidence of the disease in the county.

In Devon, we had 173 confirmed cases of foot and mouth and 4,500 farms were placed under D form notices and movement restrictions. Taken together, nearly half the farms in Devon were directly affected. A total of 386,203 animals were slaughtered in the county and 3,000 miles of footpaths were closed when the disease was at its height. I hasten to add that they are virtually all now open. We lost 2.6 per cent. of the county's gross domestic product, which meant that about £316 million went out of Devon's economy as a result of foot and mouth. In West Devon borough, of which my constituency envelopes the bulk, 89 per cent. of firms reported a downturn in business as a result of foot and mouth.

It should be borne in mind that in Devon, 32 per cent. of our population earn less than the EU average. Devon county council has estimated that over a 12-month period, job losses have reached nearly 8,000, of which slightly more than 1,500 are in agriculture. Nearly 3,000 are in ancillary industries, and some 3,332 jobs were lost in tourism.

I am anxious to highlight some real problems in Devon and in my constituency, but nevertheless, I shall point to some positive signs. The people of Devon will never lie supine in despair in the face of any catastrophe. They have the courage, foresight, imagination and energy to recover. I intend to stress the steps that we are taking to recover towards the end of my speech.

The Minister will know that on a number of occasions I have raised the problems of Ash moor, which is in my constituency. It is in the parish of Petrockstowe. At the height of the foot and mouth crisis, there was real confusion in Devon. We kept being told that some half a million carcases had not been disposed of, and that was the justification for constructing and purchasing Ash moor. As it happens, that was a gross overestimate of the number of carcases that had not been disposed of. In any event, Ash moor was just about the most unsuitable site for a carcase burial site that one could find. Carcase burial is about the worst method of disposing of animal carcases. Far from being impervious, the land below the site at Ash moor is

*[Mr. John Burnett]*

extremely porous. There was no environmental assessment and no microbiological study. Worst of all, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), told me in reply to a parliamentary question that the water table is between 1.3 m and 3.5 m below ground level. The burrows are more than 20 m deep, so if the site were ever brought into use and however many pumps were available, one flash flood would cause thousands of gallons of pernicious effluent to flood the valley and poison the water supplies of many thousands of people.

In response to the same series of questions, the Under-Secretary told me that the cost of the work at Ash moor at the beginning of November this year was around £5.6 million. However, he qualified that figure because it is subject to confirmation following negotiations that are taking place with, I believe, the main contractor. That figure also excludes the cost of purchase of the site. I estimate that the cost of the site—a white elephant—is currently in the region of £10 million. In addition, the weekly cost of monitoring and keeping the site is £20,000 a week, or more than £1 million a year just for upkeep. The Minister informed me that if Ash moor were ever brought into use further costs would be more than £1.5 million and that odour control, long-term maintenance, monitoring and testing would cost, in addition, approximately £400,000. Ash moor has been and continues to be a vast waste of public money. I hope that the Minister for Rural Affairs will confirm today that the site will be dismantled and restored to its former use as a peaceful wildlife habitat.

I have never understood why during the foot and mouth crisis the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food did not liaise with local authorities and other local bodies. If it had done so, it would never have made plans for four or five huge pyres within half a mile of Holsworthy hospital. The weather in Devon is far from predictable. Fortunately, after a series of negotiations and demonstrations, we had to suffer only one smaller pyre at Holsworthy, but it is time for Arscott farm to be restored to its former use as a farm.

The events at Ash moor and Holsworthy demonstrate two reasons why we need a public inquiry into what happened during the foot and mouth crisis. West Devon borough council, with the full support of the three political groups represented on the council, wrote to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs requesting a full statutory inquiry into the causes, course and handling of the outbreak with the purpose of promoting understanding and an improved response to any further recurrence.

I hope that the Minister will have the opportunity to address some additional points. First, as he knows, due to movement restrictions during foot and mouth, many cattle went over the 30-month limit. I know that he has been tackled about that before. Farmers whose cattle went over the limit suffered a direct economic loss as a result of foot and mouth. Will the Minister reconsider his Department's decision not to pay compensation in those circumstances?

Secondly, there is currently a 20-day cooling-off period for stock movements. We all appreciate that this is important to the prevention of disease, but can the Minister tell us what is proposed for the future? If, following a significant movement, other animals from the same farm cannot be moved for 20 days, that will cause real problems in the agricultural industry. For example, I have bred suckler cattle and if a calf dies, it is imperative to get another one to replace it right away. I hope that the Minister will consider a 20-day cooling-off period only so far as the moved animals are concerned, provided that they are isolated and that proper biosecurity rules are adhered to. It should not be necessary to prevent movements of other animals on the farm for that period.

Thirdly, the European Court of Justice has recently ruled that the French ban on British beef is unlawful. The French have unilaterally decided to disregard that ruling. Will the Minister please tell the House what action the Government propose to ensure that the French abide by the rule of law and do not flagrantly flout it? As the Minister knows, exports add a vital base to prices. Are the Government satisfied with the adequacy of our import controls? We still receive numerous consignments of beef with spinal cord.

Fourthly, speculation in the press has been that the Government are proposing that every British farm should be linked to the Minister's Department by computer and that farmers will have to report regularly to Whitehall on what is happening where on their farms. We do not want the state to run the agricultural sector; we want the industry to be freed up as much as possible. I hope that the Minister will concede that it would be unfair to penalise farmers who cannot, or cannot afford, to go online.

Fifthly, during a debate in the Chamber on 4 December the Minister stated that the Inland Revenue and Customs had given an undertaking to continue to be sympathetic about the repayment of deferred tax and value added tax. I hope that the Government are speaking to the clearing banks on the matter and that they are providing similar forbearance.

Sixthly, the south-west regional development agency worked well during the crisis. As the Minister knows, Lord Haskins recommended an immediate increase in the business recovery fund by some £40 million. The Government's response has been £24 million but I hope that that will be reconsidered and increased. Both West Devon borough council and Torridge district council have made applications under the Bellwin rules. They have incurred substantial extra cost for giving rate relief, so I hope that the Minister will be sympathetic to their requests.

If there is one thing that the Devon tourist industry requires, it is further worthwhile marketing campaigns. I highlight the fact that per capita spend on tourism is £4.03 in Wales, £3.77 in Scotland and only 26p in England. That puts the south-west at a severe disadvantage. The regions of Britain should be treated the same and although I appreciate that tourism is not the Minister's responsibility, I hope that he will make my point to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

At various taskforce meetings during the crisis, I raised the inadequacy of the loan guarantee scheme, which is extremely expensive. The cost of funds is about 4 or 5 per cent. above base rate and the scheme is

cumbersome and bureaucratic. I wonder whether there was there any take-up of the loan guarantee scheme during the foot and mouth crisis?

I am endeavouring to get financial support for the Council for Voluntary Services in Okehampton and Tavistock. The voluntary sector is vital in the west country and a mainstay of our rural communities, providing, among other things, child care and some social services. Mrs. Carmel Fanconi and Okehampton's CVS initiated, organised and ran the advice and assistance centre at Hatherleigh during the foot and mouth crisis. Lack of assistance for those services is just one area of concern highlighted by Devon county council in its admirable recovery plan. The council has welcomed the Minister's interest in the initiatives proposed in that plan. Innovative and positive actions have been suggested, and we look forward to seeing him in the west country in January because we know of his commitment to "Taste of the West" and other west country initiatives. The headline in *The Western Morning News* on 29 November 2001 stated: "Be wise, eat well and we'll prosper". Our regional newspaper launched this campaign and it is designed to achieve a huge increase in the purchase and consumption of local food and produce.

On the positive side, as I said to the Minister earlier in the debate, the people of Devon will overcome this crisis and we are working hard to do so. We do not ask for special favours; all we ask is to be treated like any other region of the United Kingdom.

1.45 pm

**The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) on securing the debate, on the content of his contribution and on the manner in which it was delivered. It will be challenging to cover all the points, but if I fail to address them all I undertake to write to him. May I also say how pleased I am to see you here, Mr. Winterton? I am sure that the behaviour of both Government and Opposition Members will be impeccable.

The hon. Gentleman rightly highlighted the problems and opportunities, and the determination of people in Devon that should recover their economy and their communities. That reflects my experience of meeting people in Devon and I join him in thanking the groups to which he referred. Those groups have helped and assisted me by putting forward points in both correspondence and meetings that I have held in Devon.

I endorse the hon. Gentleman's reference to "Taste of the West". It provides a model for other regions of how to achieve a clear regional identity and branding while encompassing within that branding local identity and information about quality. I join him in congratulating the newspaper on highlighting the need for people to pay attention to the impact of their purchasing decisions on the local economy.

I met all the party leaders when I was in Devon in the summer and also received representations from the Devon taskforce when it made its presentation, which was excellent, to the rural taskforce. As the hon. Gentleman has indicated, I shall be meeting its representatives in the new year.

The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the fact that Departments have given an undertaking to extend the sympathy with which they are dealing with the deferment of tax and other payments. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and I met the clearing banks through their association, and I have met one or two separately as well. We have discussed the problems in rural areas with them and they gave an undertaking to do all that they can to deal sympathetically with customers and to acknowledge the difficulties that many farmers, particularly those who were not directly affected by foot and mouth but who nevertheless lost income, and people in the tourist industry face. In short, we raised with the banks the impact of foot and mouth on both farming and non-farming industries.

Rate relief has been raised by several hon. Members. The definition of those local authorities that can receive help is clear, but my colleagues at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions have indicated that if other local authorities produce evidence, it will be considered. Relief is available to individuals and compensation is available to local authorities and we have sought to target the measures on those areas that were most directly affected.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government have no plans to use the Ash moor site for the disposal of animal carcases. At the height of the foot and mouth outbreak, the preferred methods of disposal—rendering and incineration—could not keep pace with demand. That was also true in Devon. Before June, when I was a Back Bencher, the question of carcase disposal on a site in my constituency arose, so I am familiar with such problems and I understand local concerns. However, our judgment must be based on the progress of the disease and it is now—thank goodness—well over 60 days since a new case has arisen. We must stand prepared for the possibility of a further outbreak, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that my officials plan to meet Devon council officials shortly to discuss possible future uses of the Ash moor site in the light of the cost and benefit to the environment and the community. I am happy to expand on this issue, but I recognise that time is short and I am willing to give way if necessary. Work ceased on the site in May in response to the local state of the disease and the need for disposal. In effect, the site has been mothballed.

The hon. Gentleman asked several questions about 30-month limit and 20-day movement issues. One understands the wish of farmers and all those involved in the rural economy to return to normal as quickly as possible, but Ministers must strike a difficult balance between doing so and ensuring that we act only in accordance with the veterinary risk assessment. We must do nothing that might exacerbate the problems, should there be a further outbreak. None the less, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that my colleagues who are dealing directly with those issues are mindful of the wish of everyone to loosen requirements as soon as it is safe to do so.

On the French ban on importing British beef, we welcome the recent judgment and hope that France will comply with it by lifting the ban as soon as possible. It is probably unwise to say more than that at present, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are as keen as he is to see matters progress. It was interesting to hear restaurateurs and others in Paris who were interviewed on the day of the judgment say that they are looking forward to consuming British beef.

*[Alun Michael]*

On the adequacy of our import controls, I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are looking afresh at the way in which they are implemented. Commercial imports and imports for personal use are both important issues and we are keeping them under review, although I should point out that some of the scare stories are not justified by the evidence.

On computer links, the Department certainly wishes to deal with more business electronically and to make it easier for farmers to do likewise. Using modern methods to avoid paperwork could make a significant difference, and would be very much in the interests of farmers. Many farmers are computer users, so they would not find it at all strange to use such methods. We want to develop that opportunity, but there is no question of each farmer being filmed by a camera as they do their daily work, in the fashion of "Big Brother". In that regard this issue has been reported with a certain amount of journalistic licence.

I certainly endorse the hon. Gentleman's point about the importance of encouraging farmers to act entrepreneurially and to develop a business without being unnecessarily constrained. Of course, some constraints and regulations are necessary in respect of public protection, food quality, traceability and so forth. However, we certainly do not seek the kind of "Big Brother" controls that have been mentioned.

I endorse the hon. Gentleman's emphasis on the importance of the voluntary sector. That is partly why we put a lot of money into match funding for voluntary organisations such as the rural stress action group, which deal with strain and pressure. Those organisations play an important role. The support that they receive, which was increased during the foot and mouth outbreak, comes jointly from my Department and from the Department of Health. Of course, supporting the voluntary sector locally is primarily a matter for local authorities, but I share the hon. Gentleman's view about its importance in reconstructing local communities. In the new Department, we are considering how to increase the ways in which we work with the voluntary sector in rural areas towards that end.

The most important objective for the rural economy is to return it to normal. The hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned the need for further efforts to promote tourism, which was one of the prime recommendations of the rural taskforce. I hope that he has seen the document that was published last week, "England's rural future", which responds to the taskforce report and to the report by Lord Haskins and sets out the progress that has been made in the past year on the implementation of the rural White Paper.

One of the document's most important recommendations concerned the business of encouraging people to return as visitors to the countryside. The taskforce is meeting again tomorrow to discuss that issue with several additional representatives, whose presence will ensure that we widen the discussion about how to promote tourism and visits to rural areas in the coming year. We want to talk to the right people to build up an inclusive campaign in the new year, or as soon as we can be confident that the countryside is open—a situation that we want to accelerate towards as quickly as it is safe to do so. Tomorrow's meeting will include representatives from Devon, and the discussion will form part of the debate in the forthcoming meeting with Devon representatives in the new year.

Tourism is the responsibility of the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. I have been working closely with him and with several other Ministers to pave the way towards helping the recovery of the tourism industry. The grant in aid was the equivalent of £3.77 per head of population for Scottish tourism, £4.03 per head for Welsh tourism and 20p per head for English tourism. There are many more heads of population in England than in Scotland or Wales.

In the past 30 years, trying to promote tourism in Wales, especially in my own attractive constituency, the capital city of Cardiff, has been an uphill job. That is reflected by the fourth report of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, which was published in October. The hon. Gentleman would find that interesting reading. In their response, the Government say

"the record of success of tourism in England stands up to any comparison with that of Scotland or Wales".

They say that

"comparisons of grant-per-head of population may be misleading. They say nothing about the extent to which financial support is needed to address market failure in different parts of the UK or about comparative success in attracting tourism earnings."

That is what we should measure. Incoming visitor expectations per head of population in England are higher, at £227 per head, than in Scotland, where the figure is £154, or in Wales, where it is £91.

We need to help tourism to rural areas of England to recover and to grow and I assure the hon. Gentleman that that is at the forefront of my mind. We have introduced a package of measures to help business. The loan guarantee scheme to which he referred is only one of several such schemes. In recognition of the wider impact of foot and mouth disease, we made £74 million available for the business recovery fund—

*It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.*

# Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 19 December 2001*

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

## Shipbuilding

*Motion made, and Question proposed*, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

9.30 am

**John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): Given that this country is an island, it may not be surprising to learn that shipbuilding has been one of our main industries for many centuries. This country built its standing through its naval strength and its merchant trade throughout the world. Although times have changed, ships are still a necessity in Britain and the world. Someone once said, "If you wish to see the future, then look at the past." If anyone does not understand that saying, it means that history has a way of repeating itself. In this case, I certainly hope that it is true. In today's debate, I want to consider the need for shipbuilding in general, why we in Britain need to build ships, the impact of current Government policy and the direction in which it should go.

Some hon. Members will consider shipbuilding from the perspective of their own part of the country, and with that in mind I shall use the Clyde as my main point of reference. At its peak, shipbuilding on the Clyde employed more than 100,000 men. During the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century, the yard constructed some of the world's largest ships. In 1879, it showed its skill in building transatlantic liners such as the Arizona. Two years later, it built the Alaska, followed by a host of other ocean-going vessels of the same brand. By 1914, it was fully integrated into the war effort, and was to build 50 warships, 24 destroyers and 9 submarines. Even during the inter-war years and the great depression, the yard remained an important part of Britain's economy. In the 1930s, it built 24 destroyers and a string of other vessels, and was to make a huge contribution to the war effort.

In modern times, the picture is rather different. As recently as 1960, nearly 200,000 workers were employed in British shipyards, but by 2000 that figure had declined to some 30,000. Before the first world war, the UK merchant fleet was the biggest in the world, accounting for 42 per cent. of the world's tonnage. By 1938, it accounted for 26 per cent., and rapid decline led to the building of only 1 million tonnes of commercial shipping in 1965. By 2000, that figure was down to 104,000 tonnes. The history of shipbuilding in Britain in the past century is therefore one of sad decline.

If one compares those statistics with worldwide figures, a rather disturbing picture begins to emerge. In 1995, Spain built 47 ships, but in 2000 it built 91. In 1995, the United States produced 26,000 gross tonnes of shipping, but in 1999 it produced a staggering 185,000 gross tonnes. Although it is true that countries other than the UK have also experienced decline, overall worldwide figures show a steady rise from more than 22.5 million gross tonnes in 1995, to 31.5 million gross tonnes in 2000.

Although, as everyone in the industry knows, those figures do not take into account the problem of excess supply, we must recognise the fact that the industry is growing worldwide. A White Paper written by the shipbuilding forum in 1998 describes the UK industry as a

"small industrial sector consisting of 11 companies concentrating on niche markets for specialist and high value added ships, such as offshore oil exploration vessels, local ferries, dredgers and tugs."

In today's market, there is not much requirement for such work in Britain, but there are reasons for it. Various problems have led to a decline in the industry. In 1983, the then holding company British Shipbuilders was privatised under the British Shipbuilders Act 1983. Subsequent events in the industry saw the piecemeal sale of British Shipbuilders' individual assets. The privatisation of Scott Lithgow in 1984 was followed swiftly by the sale of other yards to the private sector. In July 1984, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced his decision that British Shipbuilders should dispose of those parts of the corporation engaged wholly or mainly in warship building. They included Vickers, Yarrows, Vosper Thornycroft, Hall Russell, Brooke Marine and the composite yards, Cammell Laird and Swan Hunter.

A big problem facing the warship yards in the early 1990s was a significant reduction in Ministry of Defence orders as part of the peace dividend and the collapse of the Soviet threat that had once been perceived. Companies sought to survive the new era. Cammell Laird, for example, responded by changing its status to a mixed yard to allow it to tender for non-naval work. It could therefore apply for European Union grants for aid to shipping. Two years later, however, its owner, VSEL, announced that it would not be seeking orders once the current ones had expired.

Who can tell, in an uncertain world, especially in the light of recent events, when we might need to use our naval forces? The problem is that we privatised but did not modernise. Our yards are in poor condition, which does not help them to seek new contracts. Let us look at the situation in Germany. Its yards are of good quality and, under EU regulations, it has applied for subsidy. That is to subsidise not the industry, but the yards, which has been crucial. Does the Minister agree that it is time for the UK to follow that example?

Because the yards in Germany are in better shape, it costs less per person to produce each tonne, and the process is quicker. Fewer people are needed, and Germany can undercut the UK in its bid for contracts. Arguably, the strength of the pound has also played a part in that. Joining the euro, and stabilising the comparative costs, would also help.

In October last year, the MOD ordered six vessels, worth £240 million in total. Two went to the Belfast shipyard Harland and Wolff but the other four went to Germany. I understand that the two ferries that went to Harland and Wolff are the only orders that it has on its books—a further example of the industry's sad decline. The Govan and Scotstoun shipyards missed out on the bid, and although they won an order to build two MOD ferries worth £150 million there were doubts about the Clyde's future.

At the time, concerns were expressed that, although Govan and Scotstoun had been handed something of a lifeline, the old problems remained about when the work

*[John Robertson]*

would commence, and whether there was already sufficient work on the books to bridge the period until it did. As a result, last summer, 1,000 redundancies were announced just as the orders were awarded for the type 45 destroyers.

Another competitor, South Korea, is the world's largest shipbuilder with some 40 per cent. of the world market, compared with 29 per cent. in 1997. It has been suggested that South Korea has won orders at prices below production costs, by using funds from the International Monetary Fund. Although those allegations have been strongly denied, the EU has agreed that member states need to collect evidence of any anti-competitive behaviour. Can the Minister tell me what those investigations have achieved so far, or whether, as has been suggested, they have been swept under the table so as not to cause offence?

The UK must be in a position to compete on a level playing field, which, at the moment, is not the case. In March 2001, my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment and the Regions, then the Minister for Competitiveness said:

"We are working closely with the shipbuilding industry to help it to improve its competitiveness".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 28 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 321WH.]

In his reply, I would appreciate an update on that point so that I can ascertain the progress that has been made.

European shipbuilding regulations are important. In 1997, the Commission proposed refocusing aid for shipyards to improve competitiveness by moving away from operating aid towards other types of support. The measures include restructuring aid for structural adjustment, closure aid including aid to mitigate the social effects of shipyard closure, regional investment for upgrading existing yards—I suggest that the Minister looks at that—and investment aid for innovation and environmental protection.

Our shipbuilding industry, especially on the Clyde, is dependent on military orders. The Clyde was once the name in world shipbuilding, but after the latest job losses there are fewer than 3,000 workers in two yards. The loss of the roll on/roll off ships to the German yards was a body blow to shipbuilding, as they were for military use, but under EU rules they were classed as non-military vessels and were put out to tender both inside and outside Britain. We cannot compete with German yards because they are more efficient and competitive than ours. Would those orders have been lost if 1980s Governments had invested in yards instead of closing them? Although the Government have helped by placing orders for type 45 frigates and alternative landing ships logistics, the size of the industry is shrinking year by year on the Clyde.

My questions are open to all, but the Minister and the Government must answer them. Has the time come to subsidise our industry and break EU rules? Should we consider ring-fencing our shipbuilding? Should we copy the Germans and upgrade our yards? Should we accept the ultimate demise of the industry and buy from the cheapest market? What do other countries do? We must examine other European countries, America and Japan, which have all grasped the obvious advantages of subsidy and investment. Our failure to do so has left UK yards at a competitive disadvantage.

How can we compete? Do we want to be at the mercy of market forces or shall we dictate what happens? Is it time to consider the industry as a whole and put together a policy for the 21st century? Skilled labour cannot be replaced because training takes years. If we lose shipbuilding's skilled workers the industry will not be resurrected. A decision must be made now, not later, on whether we want a shipbuilding industry. If we do, we must take control and support it by working in partnership with companies and the work force. We shall be able to compete only when we have modern equipment and the best-trained work force in situ as that would allow us to see how or whether shipbuilding works.

The alternative is to have no shipbuilding in Britain, which would mean the loss of an industry that once had tradition and pride. What price can be placed on the loss of our greatest heritage? We must look at the overall picture to ensure sustainability in the long term.

**Mr. John Lyons** (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. In terms of sustainability of the industry, does he agree that diversification is important? For example, sustainable energy and the wind farms will be important issues in the next 10 years. We currently import all wind farming equipment from Scandinavia. That could be an important consideration in terms of diversification.

**John Robertson:** I thank my hon. Friend for making a good point. He is right that we must examine diversification, but how can we provide financial support for that under European rules? I agree with my hon. Friend, but at the end of the day we still have to concentrate on shipbuilding.

We need to look at an overall picture to ensure sustainability in the long term. We also need to ensure that there is sufficient work available so that lifelines do not need to be thrown. We need to examine all the issues that lead to decline, as well as subsidy and financial support, training and productivity, the quality of our yards and future sustainability.

Shipbuilding has a proud history, but that does not mean that we do not need to apply modern practices to ensure its survival. In fact, not doing so could mean that there is no future for the industry at all. The costs to this country of losing the industry are manifold. The first, and perhaps most obvious relates to job losses, which I have already discussed. There is also the issue of national security if our naval vessels are built abroad. We do have a proud shipbuilding heritage and we need to keep it alive.

The Government are taking the issue seriously. The Ministry of Defence has said that the forward shipbuilding programme for the Royal Navy is going to be the largest for many years, reversing the decades of decline. There is a plan to bring 30 new ships into service over the next 15 to 20 years. These will include two large carriers, up to 12 type 45 destroyers and three new Astute class nuclear-powered submarines. The procurement programme also involves major enhancements to our naval support. In 2003 there will be two new multi-role survey vessels in service, and two new landing platform docks. What pleases me most is that the Ministry of Defence has said that these vessels will be built in the UK yards.

Britain was once the master of the waves; we were the seafarers others aspired to be and the yardsticks by which others measured themselves. We have given up that leadership. Do we want to be just another buyer, or do we still have aspirations to lead by example? If we can resurrect the industry, and make it once again the envy of the world, then let us do it. If we cannot or will not, then it is time for the Government to say so.

9.47 am

**Mr. Michael Weir** (Angus): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on securing this debate. It might surprise him that I agree with much of what he said.

It may seem strange to hon. Members that someone from a predominantly rural constituency is speaking in this debate. The biggest ship that was ever built in my constituency was a fishing boat, and it has been years since many of those were built. I would say in my defence that my grandfather worked in the shipyards in Dundee, when they existed. Nowadays, however, as the hon. Gentleman has pointed out, most of Scotland's shipbuilding is concentrated on the Clyde in the two yards in Govan and Scotstoun.

One of the problems affecting shipbuilding nowadays is an undeserved image problem. Many people seem to think that shipbuilding is what used to be referred to as a smokestack industry, something old-fashioned and out of time, a throwback to a lost industrial age. Indeed, in the not too distant past one Minister referred to it as a metal bashing industry.

I came across a good example of this recently. Members from the west of Scotland will know that there is a plan to develop the former John Brown yard in Clydebank for retail use. A newspaper report stated:

"The area has suffered in recent hard times as shipbuilding followed other manufacturing industries and gave in to recession, with several famous companies folding and giving way to acres of derelict space."

That speaks of shipbuilding almost in the past tense, but as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, nothing could be further from the truth. Shipbuilding is and should be very much a part of a modern high-tech industrial landscape. Indeed, it should have a bright future. The shipbuilding industry on the Clyde has problems with the modernisation of its yards, but it is a modern industry employing very highly skilled and flexible workers. Some 4,000 people are employed directly in Clyde shipbuilding and many more are dependent on it.

When we think of shipbuilding, we seem to see grainy old films of John Brown's and launching the Queens. However, in recent years the yards in Govan have built a prototype command ship for launching communications satellites into space and an oil drill test well vessel for drilling and processing oil on board. That is very much at the forefront of Scotland's high-tech economy, and shows that shipbuilding can move into the 21st century and be viable. However, it needs help from the Government, which is where Government policy comes in.

The shipbuilding industry, like many of Scotland's high-tech industries, is under threat. The recent announcement of the orders for type 45 destroyers and ALSLs was welcome, and it would be churlish not to say so. However, there are still to be redundancies at the yards at Govan and Scotstoun, the exact scale of which is not yet clear. It is also not entirely clear how much work is guaranteed to those yards. At the time of the announcement of the type 45 contract, it was stated that it would guarantee work for the next decade, but more recent estimates have given a shorter time scale. How do the Government envisage that current work on the Clyde will provide employment in the future?

We must ask ourselves why an efficient, high-tech industry with a skilled, flexible and dedicated work force is facing such difficulties. There are many reasons, as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland said. Some are under the control of the Government but, to be scrupulously fair, some are not. It is noteworthy that when Kvaerner announced its withdrawal from shipbuilding back in April, a spokesman stated that the strength of the pound had had

"a negative impact on our ability to be competitive".

That problem may become more widespread with the introduction of the euro into much of mainland Europe next month, and it will go far beyond shipbuilding. The Government must give serious consideration to the impact of the euro on our manufacturing industry.

When the Secretary of State for Defence announced the contract for type 45 destroyers earlier this year, he said:

"The key point for our shipbuilding industry is that our shipbuilding companies should be given a platform from which they can properly invest and that—crucially for them—allows them to compete for the many orders that exist throughout the world."—[*Official Report*, 10 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 678.]

In other words, our shipbuilding industry cannot rely on Government orders alone. As I understand it—the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—the Government can favour UK yards only if the order is predominantly military. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland said, that creates problems where there is a mixed use for the ships that are being ordered—for example, ro-ro ferries.

Many shipbuilders in Scotland and other parts of the UK complain about the fact that they do not compete on a level playing field. I am sure that the Minister is aware that the global competition faced by other shipbuilders is often seen as unfair. For example, it has long been alleged that South Korea is illegally subsidising its shipbuilding industry using IMF loans and allowing yards to run at a loss. However, it seems to be difficult to substantiate that, so can the Minister tell us what progress has been made by the European Union in investigating the matter? It is of great concern for Govan, because it is part of a consortium bidding for an extremely valuable contract for ro-ro ferries and one of the other bidders proposes to build the ships in Korea.

Shipyards in Scotland do not have the ability to get such help. The shipbuilding intervention fund expired at the end of last year, and there is now, officially at least, no Government funding for shipyards available anywhere in the EU. Scottish shipyards are still at a disadvantage, as Germany was able to invest in shipyards in the former East Germany following reunification. That gave their shipyards a much more modern infrastructure by which to compete with Scottish and other UK yards. We are often told that the industry is held back, so it is essential that the European Union takes up the matter of Korea if Scottish and other European shipyards are not to be put in jeopardy.

*[Mr. Michael Weir]*

Like many other hon. Members, I have met representatives from Govan and Scotstoun during the past months and have been impressed that the shipbuilding workers have bent over backwards to ensure that yards remain viable and efficient. Clyde ships are renowned throughout the world, and have been for nearly two centuries, for being superbly built. There is still a future for that industry provided there is a level playing field, which is not asking too much for shipyard workers. If Government policy is anything it should be to work with the European Union to get rid of the perceived unfair practices operating in other nations so that everyone is on a level playing field. If that happens, the Clyde and other UK yards will get the orders and be able to survive as a high-tech industry into this century and beyond.

9.55 am

**Mr. Frank Field** (Birkenhead): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on winning time to talk about shipbuilding. He presented the subject so comprehensively that many of our speeches will be shorter than they would have been. However, that allows me to concentrate on the absence of shipbuilding in my constituency. If my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) contributes to the debate, I know that she, too, will want to comment on its absence in her constituency.

The background to the closure of shipbuilding on the Mersey is as follows. Cammell Laird went into receivership and there is no dispute over whether the Royal Bank of Scotland should have sent it into receivership. However, I want to discuss the bank's role in the closing down of shipbuilding in Merseyside and in the destruction of highly skilled jobs in my constituency from that point onwards.

Before I acquaint hon. Members with this sorry and horrid tale, I have two comments. First, the Cammell Laird yard and its businesses were sold to A&P shipbuilders, which is responsible for a number of jobs around the country. I do not want to harm the well-being or future of that company, because it is totally separate from the charge that I want to make against the Royal Bank of Scotland. Secondly, I want to highlight the role that the trade unions played in our yards when they were told that closure was inevitable. They were led by the chairman of stewards, Dave Hulse, and a small team of fellow stewards. I think that I can say, without contradiction, that had our trade union movement been led by people of that quality in the 1970s and 1980s, we would not have needed the Thatcher reforms and this country would have been even richer than it is today. Those people are the silver lining to the black cloud that I am about to describe.

Once the receivers, PricewaterhouseCoopers, were appointed by the Royal Bank of Scotland, they were called in and began their work. Hon. Members should also know that the Royal Bank of Scotland not only sent in the receivers, which it had the right to do, but that, through its equity arm, it owns 85 per cent. of A&P. The receivers then asked for a series of bids. Towards the end of that process, one of the groups bidding for Cammell Laird's Birkenhead yard was told by the receivers that they were mindful to go for a bid that embraced not only the Birkenhead yard but the yards in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar. That bidder, who was backed by the Mersey docks and harbour board, then asked whether the receiver would allow it to go into the Redcar yard and it agreed to do that within days of learning that the receiver wanted to sell the yards on both sides of the country to a single bidder. I believe that that was arranged on the Wednesday or the Thursday. The following day, despite the receiver having agreed that the Mersey docks and harbour board would go over the other yard on Sunday evening so as to begin its work, to value it on Monday and then, on Monday evening or first thing Tuesday morning, to submit a new bid, the receiver decided to sell to A&P on the Friday, a day or so after agreeing that timetable. I remind hon. Members that 85 per cent. of A&P is owned by the equity arm of the Royal Bank of Scotland.

I therefore asked two questions: one of the receiver and one of the Royal Bank of Scotland. I asked the receiver whether he was satisfied that he had accepted the most generous bid for the assets he was selling. The receiver declined to give an answer. I also asked the Royal Bank of Scotland a simple question: did it directly or indirectly try to influence the receiver in the decision to which he came on the sale of the yard and, particularly, did it influence him to sell to A&P knowing that the bank had not only appointed the receiver but owned 85 per cent. of A&P through its equity arm? The Royal Bank of Scotland also refused to answer the question. I suggest that it did not answer it because it did not wish the answer to be made public. My charge against the Royal Bank of Scotland is that behind the scenes in a squalid, dirty little move it decided that it was in its best interests to sell the Cammell Laird yards to A&P, although that may not have been in the best interests of my constituents or the shareholders of the Royal Bank of Scotland.

I am raising the matter now not because companies do not behave in that way, but because the Royal Bank of Scotland dines out on a particular image. It sells itself as the bank that cares about its customers, the bank that cares about the industries that it supports and the bank that cares about the people who work in the industries for which it holds the purse strings. As the Member for Birkenhead, I find that image high cant and I give notice that this is merely the first occasion on which I shall raise the matter in the House of Commons. Henceforth, I shall seek every opportunity on the Floor of the House and in this Chamber to raise the conduct of the Royal Bank of Scotland and its squalid little moves that destroyed jobs in my constituency.

If anyone believes that this is merely a one-off performance, I beg them to look at my track record. Most of the campaigns with which I have been involved have lasted 10 years or more. If necessary, I will continue this campaign for 10 years or more and to see out the present occupants of the board of the Royal Bank of Scotland. As the campaign gets under way, I shall seek every opportunity to raise questions about their conduct and every opportunity open to a Member of Parliament of Member to highlight the difference between the image on which they dine out—on which they attempt to win extra business—and the reality behind that image and how it has operated in my constituency. The board may

decide that it would be easier to get off the treadmill and allow those who wish to buy the Cammell Laird yard—and the yard in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar—to do so. There are bidders who want, almost immediately, to allow our constituents to return to work. The board will realise that that would be the more sensible decision and the House of Commons is quite good at providing a face-saving formula to enable it to do that.

I am grateful to be called to speak in the debate. It is not the first time that I have participated—in my 22 years in the House—in a shipbuilding debate when there has been no shipbuilding in Birkenhead. There will be shipbuilding in Birkenhead again, but we have to prise the dirty little fingers of the Royal Bank of Scotland off the assets of Cammell Laird. I will pursue—for as long as it takes—the Royal Bank of Scotland's wretched, squalid deal, that it thought it had got away with, and which destroyed jobs in my constituency. My aim is not to damage the Royal Bank of Scotland or its employees, but for the bank to behave properly, sensibly and nobly in its own interests and those of my constituents.

10.6 am

**Vera Baird** (Redcar): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on securing the debate. His excellent exposition will shorten my speech considerably. However, I urge him to be more optimistic. Twenty-four thousand people are directly engaged in shipbuilding, ship repair and conversion in the United Kingdom. A further 50,000 are employed in the subcontract, supplier and support industries. The UK shipbuilding and repair industry generates between £1.6 billion and £2 billion per annum for the economy. United Kingdom yards compete strongly for orders, and build between 25 and 30 merchant vessels a year. I have been informed by Mr. Brian Slade of the Association of European Shipbuilders and Shiprepairers that there are, in total, more than 100,000 seagoing merchant ships. The association has assessed that, for the remainder of the decade, there will be a need for some 2,000 vessels to be delivered annually and that 80 per cent. of those will replace vessels that are no longer seaworthy or capable of economic operation. Ship maintenance, repair and conversion on a global basis is thus worth about £6 billion per annum and continues to be big business. It is important that the United Kingdom has an appropriate share of that.

The British shipbuilding industry, along with other traditional heavy industry sectors, has changed enormously over the past 30 years. It has declined, and is no longer the world market leader. However, I agree with what the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) said earlier. Decline is far too frequently uppermost in people's minds when considering the industry. That is an unhelpful approach. There is a perpetual danger that the fact that we are no longer the world leader will prejudice those who could support and encourage the industry into thinking that it is a sunset industry. It is not.

In the face of overwhelming market forces, primarily that of Korea—which has already been adequately alluded to—the industry in Europe has retrenched into more sustainable market sectors, and has moved away from that competition. Leaving aside warship production, in which the UK is a world leader, the industry in Europe covers the highest technological segment of world ship production. There are many examples, such as sophisticated passenger ships, advanced container vessels, ferries, ro-ro ships, multipurpose and shuttle tankers, offshore platforms and floating production, storage and offloading units, chemical and gas carriers, high standard fishing vessels and the manufacture of small and specialised ships.

The United Kingdom has a worldwide reputation for repair and conversion work. Europe is a world leader with about 40 per cent. of the global market and the UK is now one of the top three converters in Europe. Conversion is often a viable alternative to new build, especially in some specialist market sectors. There is no doubt that the United Kingdom can continue to be strong in shipbuilding and that shipbuilding can continue to make a positive contribution to our economy. That is particularly so in regions such as my constituency, where such work has been traditional and skills and expertise continue to subsist. While building 25 to 30 ships a year, British yards have the overall capacity to build as much as that again. If the Association of European Shipbuilders estimates that about 2,000 new ships per annum will be required over the decade, it is reasonable to aim to increase the UK's share of that to more than 50 ships a year.

My primary interest is the South Bank shipyard in my constituency. That working shipyard was closed last April when Cammell Laird fell foul of the Costa Classica fiasco and went into receivership. That had nothing to do with such a viable yard. A short time after Cammell Laird went into closure, a local business man who had managed the shipyard successfully for many years before it became Cammell Laird had offered to purchase it and restart it immediately. It was not a thriving yard at the time of its closure, but he had clear views about the reason for that. The business man had a management team and a pool of skilled labour that he was sure would attract business back to the yard quickly and said that, with some recapitalisation, the South Bank yard could strongly succeed. Smith's dock, as the yard was known formerly, is a byword in the north-east for shipbuilding skills of the highest order. An apprenticeship at Smith's dock was much sought after. The local business man, Mr. Welsh, was a former apprentice from Smith's dock.

Mr. Welsh's bid was not successful. All of a sudden—it seemed to us in Redcar as it clearly did to those in Birkenhead—the yard and other former Cammell Laird assets were sold to A&P. As hon. Members know, A&P is an 85 per cent. subsidiary of the principal Cammell Laird creditor, the Royal Bank of Scotland. The role of the bank in such events has been fully canvassed as an opener by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who has said clearly that action will not stop. For the Mersey docks and harbour board standing ready and willing to purchase on the Mersey, read Mr. Welsh standing ready and willing to purchase on the Tees when something strange suddenly happened and the opportunity was lost.

There is a clear division between the Mr. Welsh's optimistic view of the yard's immediate potential and that of its current owner, A&P, which has wider company interests and no doubt wider shareholder

*[Vera Baird]*

interests. It has a yard on the Tyne and insists that it will be faithful to its employees. It says that it will not put them at risk for the sake of assisting the Tees. It is sometimes accepted and sometimes denied by A&P that it has removed from the South Bank yard all that can be moved, such as welding equipment and the contents of the stores and buildings, including the cutlery from the canteen. I have been told that that was not in order to sterilise the premises, so that no one else can commence a business there and compete with other interests and, still less, that that was asset-stripping.

A&P's management has explained that it makes common sense to use equipment from the South Bank yard in Redcar, instead of buying new equipment for its other premises. Taking that at face value, we hope that the employees of A&P in Falmouth and Southampton, who were clearly unable to eat their food satisfactorily hitherto, are now feeling much better with the assistance of the cutlery that was taken from the South Bank yard in Redcar. They must be glad that Cammell Laird went down just in time so that our cutlery could be trucked down the motorway to them, while they still had the strength to lift their food to their mouths.

**Mr. James Wray** (Glasgow, Baillieston): Does my hon. Friend understand our anxiety? One of the reasons for securing today's Adjournment debate was that 1,000 people have lost their jobs in Scotland. There has been no scheme for shipbuilding or repairing since 1997. That makes folly of new deals. It costs maybe £1.2 million to keep those 1,000 people on the dole. Surely we should be investing. She says that the shipbuilding industry is growing in the United Kingdom; it is certainly not growing in Scotland.

**Vera Baird:** That was a helpful intervention for which I am grateful. I must consider the position in Redcar, although there is not a word that my hon. Friend has said with which I do not agree.

A&P says that it will open a shipcare project at the Redcar yard next year. It intends to turn the yard into a depot from which skilled workers will go out to repair and maintain ships while at sea or during their charter, in order to minimise the time that ships spend being expensively maintained and repaired in dry dock. That will employ a few people. I am told that, if the market grows, A&P hopes to work the yard fully again in due course, which does not seem to mean soon.

According to A&P, excessive competition in the European market is holding it back. As hon. Members will appreciate, despite the reservations and caveats that have been expressed about the Royal Bank of Scotland and my scepticism about A&P, the function of a Member of Parliament in such circumstances is to support whoever will generate new business and create jobs. A&P says that the market for ship work in northern Europe is highly competitive and that Governments elsewhere seem far more prepared than the United Kingdom Government to find ways of providing systems in one form or another to help yards win work.

In addition, in Redcar and, I believe, elsewhere, there is a legacy of contamination around dock areas, because earlier generations paid less heed to environmental protection than we do today. The clean-up burden can be onerous. A&P makes a case for Government help in both sectors that seems to have a strong and sensible foundation.

We on the south Tees seem to have locally the entrepreneurialism, capital, management, labour and skills to operate a profitable shipyard, yet we do not. The factors that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead explained suggest that we are not allowed to have ownership. Those who do have ownership have an overview of the industry that suggests that if help can be provided soon, the picture for the Redcar shipyard is not pessimistic. I add from my small, local point of view my support for the notion that the Government should reconsider the support that they give the shipbuilding industry.

**Mr. David Amess (in the Chair):** We have just 42 minutes left. Christmas is approaching, and I should like to call all hon. Members who are trying to catch my eye. I should be grateful if in making contributions they would bear that in mind.

10.18 am

**Jim Sheridan** (West Renfrewshire): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on having secured the debate. His campaigning work in the field is well recognised by his constituents and mine, and they are deeply appreciative of it.

I may be unique in the Chamber in that I have spent a significant period of my working life in shipyards. I have family and many comrades still working in the industry. Shipbuilding is an industry in which skills have been developed over years. Apprenticeships have been formed, and training has been at the forefront. The people who work in shipbuilding, both men and women—several women work in shipyards now, and make a valuable contribution—have faced up to many challenges. There is little, if any, demarcation in the shipbuilding industry now. That is why it is at the leading edge of competition.

Shipbuilding is a craft of which our country should be proud, and we should support it. For an example of naval work that we depend on, we need look no further than at what our naval personnel are doing in Afghanistan. They are playing a valuable role using ships that were built by British workers.

I should like to focus on defence diversification in the shipbuilding industry. I strongly believe that our industry is too dependent on naval orders. I have argued long and hard for a Government procurement strategy. When the Government are placing defence orders, they should also place a responsibility on the companies to consider defence diversification. Our industry cannot continually depend on defence work. We need to encourage companies to break into and exploit the commercial market, as some of our competitors are doing.

Shipbuilding includes ship repair. Last week, in this Chamber, my colleagues and I met with the trade unions involved in naval bases throughout the United Kingdom. They are extremely concerned about the proposed privatisation of some of the work done on naval bases. Regardless of whether the trade unions are

luddite in their approach to privatisation—there are arguments for some privatisation—they have a pragmatic view of the issue and they want a level playing field.

The trade unions are happy to meet Ministers and have produced a document that states that they would like to discuss privatisation with the Minister. They strongly believe that their work and that of the naval bases can continue, but privatisation is not a panacea. Will the Minister consider the document produced by the trade unions? Will he meet with trade unions involved in ship repair so that they may put forward their case?

**John Robertson:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the trouble in the shipyards started in the early 1980s with privatisation?

**Jim Sheridan:** My hon. Friend is right. Privatisation started the decline in the shipbuilding industry. We need look no further for an example than companies such as Kvaerner, an asset-stripping company that was on the verge of closing shipyards in Glasgow. It was only the Government's help that saved those yards from closing. My hon. Friend is right to say that privatisation is not a panacea in the shipbuilding industry; indeed, it caused the industry's decline.

Those involved with naval bases would appreciate it if the Minister would meet the appropriate trade unions to talk through their concerns and listen to their offers about what they can do to keep the yard open.

10.23 am

**Mr. Bill Tynan** (Hamilton, South): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on securing the debate, and on the way in which he has presented his case on the shipyards. My hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) and for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) have worked tirelessly on behalf of the shipbuilding industry in Scotland, and I pay them tribute.

The previous excellent contribution contained many serious questions and, I believe, solutions to the problems facing the shipbuilding industry. I declare an interest; I am a member of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union. I was involved in the shipbuilding industry in Glasgow. It had to reinvent itself to ensure that it is relevant today. The old demarcation lines have been put aside, and the workers have joined together to ensure that they can compete in a world market.

We are talking about history, and the history of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders. We had a tremendous campaign to save the UCS; it was absolutely vital. I am concerned that we are in the same position today. I listened to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who said that some of his campaigns had lasted for 10 years. I am here to tell hon. Members that the shipbuilding industry campaign has lasted for 30 years. I wish him well in his campaign in the future. The shop stewards have been here on many occasions to discuss with Members of Parliament the questions and problems that the industry faces. It is right to recognise how important shipbuilding is to the people of Scotland and the United Kingdom. Although the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union is campaigning in Scotland, it recognises that a viable shipbuilding industry in the UK is essential to the economy of this country—24,000 people are directly involved in the industry, and 50,000 are involved in subcontract work.

**Mr. Ian Davidson** (Glasgow, Pollok): Is my hon. Friend, like me, the proud possessor of a Bank of Scotland card, rather than a Royal Bank of Scotland card, and therefore unlikely to be attacked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead's fatwa? Would he agree that the problem with shipbuilding is not only a British one but is partly a failure of the European Union to take the case of British shipbuilding and European shipbuilding to the World Trade Organisation? That failure is preventing us from competing with South Korea, which currently sells ships for 40 per cent. less than it costs to make them.

**Mr. Tynan:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I was going to come on to that in my speech, but I am conscious of time. The South Korean yards have been producing ships on the basis of cost price. We must embrace the argument that the EU should take the matter to the World Trade Organisation. However, I am concerned that we will not do that quickly enough to save the shipbuilding industry. We must consider other methods. The EU does not ensure recognition of a level playing field, and we must convince the EU and the UK Government that there is a need to create such a level playing field when unfair competition has taken place. Unlike my hon. Friend, I do not have a Bank of Scotland card; I have a Royal Bank of Scotland card. Therefore, I may be subject to the campaign, and I shall consider changing it.

Serious concerns exist about the shipbuilding industry, which is a lifeblood for people in Scotland and the UK. We can make progress if the Minister will accept the reality that South Korean yards and other yards in the far east are creating unfair competition for the shipbuilding industry in this country.

10.27 am

**Mr. Mohammad Sarwar** (Glasgow, Govan): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in today's debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on securing such an important debate and on raising key issues affecting industry on the Clyde and across the UK.

I have a great interest in shipbuilding. Govan is home to Britain's biggest merchant shipbuilder, and has a proud heritage and a reputation for Clyde-built quality. It is the major employer at the heart of my constituency. This year, the rollercoaster ride has continued for the skilled work force in Govan. After a long campaign across Scotland last year, involving Members of Parliament and shop stewards led by yard convener Jamie Webster, we secured its future by winning a major order for landing ships from the Ministry of Defence. Delays in design meant that the gap in the order book was not filled as quickly as planned. Despite being awarded the lion's share of the type 45 orders in July, BAE Systems announced its plan to cut 1,000 jobs on the Clyde at Govan and Scotstoun. Since then, after a

*[Mr. Mohammad Sarwar]*

great deal of effort by Ministers, unions and management, that number has been brought down to 450, and no redundancies will be finalised until next year. None of us wants to see redundancies in shipbuilding. However, two years ago, Govan shipyard did not have an owner. There were no orders in Govan shipyard's order book. There was no future for Govan shipyard. However, because of the Government's help, we managed to secure the future of Govan shipyard, and of jobs on the river Clyde. Steel work began this week on the two ALSLs, providing continuity in employment until July, when work will begin on the six type 45 destroyers on the Clyde. I pay tribute to the skilled and dedicated work force at Govan and Scotstoun, and to their families, for the resolve and strength that they have shown again this year. They worked tirelessly to demonstrate that shipbuilding is not out of date, but that it is a competitive high-tech industry.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister, and the Government, for showing active commitment to shipbuilding in Britain. Shipyards across the United Kingdom have benefited: major orders have been made, and a secure foundation has been laid for the coming decade as a result of the Ministry of Defence's procurement plan, which has led to the type 45 orders, and the refit work at Rosyth on HMS Illustrious and HMS Invincible. However, although that provides a strong foundation for the healthy future of our yards, they cannot thrive on British defence contracts alone. They must compete effectively in overseas markets. Last year, there was an increase of 56 per cent. in global orders for new ships, compared with the previous year. There are real opportunities, if we can win more work from the growing number of contracts. If we are successful in that regard, our shipbuilding capacity could more than double by 2006.

Our shipbuilders are adapting to meet that challenge. Vosper Thornycroft recently announced an increase of almost a third in sales of support services, such as training and fitting. Swan Hunter has brought shipbuilding back to Tyneside. Govan's partner for the ALSL order has 250 apprentices, and does not see any sign of orders slowing down.

On the Clyde, we also take great pride in the fact that apprentices are being taken on for the first time in many years to learn their skilled trade, but there is a real threat to the future of all of our yards. We do not have a level playing field with our competitors. The row over subsidies to Korean shipyards has rumbled on for too long. I recognise that we have been involved in tough negotiations, alongside our European partners, on this issue for the past three years, but unfair trading practices have caused severe difficulties for our shipbuilders. The European Commission has found mounting evidence that state owned and state controlled banks in South Korea have been instrumental in financing unviable shipyard operations, with average losses on orders of 14 per cent.

Last year, Europe won 16 per cent. of orders, compared with Korea's 38 per cent. We do not always bid for construction of the same vessels, but without fair trade our yard will never be able to compete. I urge the Minister to work closely with colleagues across Europe, and to continue to exert pressure on Korea to stop unfair subsidies and to encourage real competition in the industry.

**Mr. Davidson:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the case that the industry has presented to the European Commission clearly establishes that the Koreans are cheating in this market, and does he agree with me that it is a failure in European Union policy that the Commission has so far refused to submit the case to the World Trade Organisation?

I also suggest that the hon. Gentleman considers changing his bank to the Bank of Scotland, because I suspect that the transfer of his business will have more impact than the transfer of mine.

**Mr. Sarwar:** My hon. Friend has made a good point. It is important for the shipbuilding industry that there is a level playing field. The European Commission has done very little.

With regard to the question about banks, my hon. Friend has a card from the Bank of Scotland, but I am glad to tell him that I do not have a card from that bank, or from the Royal Bank of Scotland. Only rich people can afford to have them.

In the past year, concerns have also been expressed by our shipbuilding unions over the differences in support across Europe itself, particularly when Britain is compared with Germany and Italy. I know that the Government will continue to examine measures to address the issue without hindering the competitive edge needed for our yards to flourish in the future. We have a shipbuilding industry with a proud past. We also have a Government that will ensure that our yards have a bright future.

10.34 am

**Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): I add my congratulations to those given to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson). I have a sense of the depth of feeling and knowledge that he and his Clydeside colleagues share. About 30 years ago, I represented a part of Glasgow on the city council that contained workers from Scotstoun and other yards. As the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) reminded us, that was a time of hope because it was a period when Upper Clyde Shipbuilders was occupied and then saved. Alas, that was a false dawn, and the industry has continued to decline. We are all prisoners of our history; I still carry a Bank of Scotland card that was taken out from the Maryhill branch.

An irony of the debate is that I suspect that my constituency in suburban London has more shipbuilding workers than many yards on the rivers Tyne, Mersey and Clyde. That is because we make virtual ships, not real ships. The high value added end of the industry is about computers, simulation and software. Much of that work comes to companies such as British Maritime Technology, which is in my constituency and employs hundreds of workers. My constituency, like the Clydeside yards, hinges on successful British industry.

I turn to the wider context and the underlying competitiveness of the United Kingdom industry. Is the problem that of competition with Europe, or of

European competitiveness with Korea? The answer is more the former. The brutal truth is that the pound appreciated against all other currencies by roughly 30 per cent. at the end of 1996. It has remained at that level and is, frankly, hopelessly uncompetitive for manufacturing industries that produce price-sensitive products such as bulk ships. There is no way in which British yards can win contracts against other European countries, let alone the far east.

When considering Korea, there is a misunderstanding about the IMF. The IMF does not lend money for shipbuilding but for countries' balance of payments support. During the 1998 crisis, the Koreans got an IMF loan that led to a large devaluation of their currency, which has made Korea competitive. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) may be correct that cheating and, effectively, dumping is going on. If that is occurring, the case should be brought to the World Trade Organisation.

**Mr. Davidson:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that the industry has produced a case that European Commission experts accept demonstrates that the Koreans are selling ships at 40 per cent. less than it costs to make them. The money that comes from the IMF allows the Korean banks to write off loans to the Korean shipyards. That allows them to start with a clean sheet of paper. It is a hidden subsidy.

**Dr. Cable:** If the hon. Gentleman is correct that there is blatant dumping, it is the Commission's job to bring a case to the World Trade Organisation, which exists for that purpose and is a court of law. No doubt the Minister will explain why that action has not been taken.

The constituents of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) sent me a bundle of papers about Cammell Laird, and they were extremely complimentary about his role in the matter. There are conflicts of interest that probably require further information. I am sure that what the right hon. Gentleman said about the Royal Bank of Scotland's role is right, but the issue goes further than that. I understand that the matter has been referred to the Office of Fair Trading on the rather narrow issue of whether a threat to competition was created in the shipbuilding industry because A&P has interests in Southampton as well as Birkenhead.

Is there a wider conflict of interest? I was especially worried about the role of the receivers, PricewaterhouseCoopers. It had a serious conflict of interest because it acted on behalf of the Royal Bank of Scotland as receivers and, additionally, it is the auditor for A&P—it was working for the poacher and the gamekeeper.

I asked about the conflicts of interest with the directors of PricewaterhouseCoopers a week ago. I asked about a wider issue, because the matter does not apply only to Cammell Laird. We have probably two or three leading international accounting companies. Ernst and Young has the same problem in relation to Equitable Life and the Financial Services Authority. It is monopolising all the big contracts for audit and receivership, and in many cases it is acting for opposing sides of the same argument. That gives rise to the serious issue of competition policy. I am sure that it is entirely honest and professional in the way that it goes about its business, and it has its chinese walls. None the less, the enormous temptation exists to behave improperly, and I hope that the Department of Trade and Industry will look carefully at this issue, not simply in relation to Cammel Laird but in terms of the wider conflicts of interest.

My final point also relates to competition policy, and to a key issue in shipbuilding that has yet to be raised: potential conflicts of interest in the type 45 contract, for which BAE Systems has won the bulk of the business. When we debated the shipbuilding industry in March of last year, the major concern was expressed that, as the prime contractor, BAE Systems could squeeze out Vosper Thornycroft and other smaller companies. The DTI and the Ministry of Defence have subsequently worked on that issue. The Rand Corporation was called in to devise a new strategy, and it has found a role for Vosper Thornycroft. However, those who have read the correspondence on this subject will know that serious concerns remain. Vosper Thornycroft is asking basic questions such as whether it will be given a minimum amount of business, whether it will have a stake in derivative boats, and what will happen to unpredictable cost elements.

The underlying problem, which I hope the Minister will address, is whether the Government have a proper strategy for handling the relationship between BAE Systems—a world-class company that is increasingly taking the bulk of defence contracts—and its many British subcontractors. Exactly the same debate arose in relation to the A300X airbus. The suspicion is beginning to grow that the Government formulate contracts in such a way as to protect the interests of the prime contractor, rather than those of the many other companies down the supply chain. I hope that the Minister will explain how the Government have dealt with the enduring concerns of companies such as Vosper Thornycroft.

10.42 am

**Mr. Robert Key** (Salisbury): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on securing this debate. It is important to have an opportunity to air such issues. For more than a year, my party has requested a debate on shipbuilding on the Floor of the House, but the request was rejected on the ground that there is too much parliamentary business. Such an opportunity would have enabled the many Members of Parliament who represent shipbuilding interests, but who are not here today, to have participated in the debate.

I have a nomadic interest in shipbuilding. I was born in Devonport in 1945, which built quite a lot of ships at that time, and moved to Salisbury in 1947, where ships are not built even though the town is at the confluence of five rivers. However, Dunlop Hiflex and Woven Electronics, which are in my constituency, respectively make the hydraulic piping with which most Royal Navy ships are fitted, and much of the electronic cabling that is used in submarines in particular.

My real knowledge of shipbuilding began in 1967. On leaving university, I was appointed to found an economics department at Loretto school, in Musselburgh. The chairman of governors, Sir Iain

*[Mr. Robert Key]*

Stewart, who was also chairman of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, charged me with the job of ensuring that sixth formers were taught by people who really knew about all aspects of the shipbuilding industry in Scotland. The first guest whom I invited was Jimmy Reid, who became a regular visitor thereafter.

Like other hon. Members, this Christmas I shall be singing "I saw three ships come sailing in on Christmas day in the morning," but when I do I shall be thinking, "Where were they made?" People do not recognise that the British shipbuilding industry is a high-technology industry. I have seen as much for myself on the Clyde, at Barrow and on Tyneside. The Secretary of State for Defence disparagingly described it as a metal bashing industry, but there is no doubt in my mind that it is a high-technology industry that should be given a fair chance. It is important to put on the record that only this week the former John Brown shipyard, which built the Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mary and the QE2, has been sold in an £8 million deal. The land ended up being owned by the UK-Norwegian engineering firm Kvaerner and UIE shipbuilding, which is French. Now we are to see a massive redevelopment of that site.

There are still many great shipyards, however, around the shores of the United Kingdom and on the Clyde in particular. Britain is still an important maritime nation. People have the idea that most of the freight coming into or going out of the country travels by jumbo jet, but it does not. Some 95 per cent. of the UK's trade still arrives and leaves by sea. We should never forget that the UK shipping industry as a whole is the fourth, or perhaps the fifth, biggest service sector exporter for the UK. It is bigger than communications, films and television and computer services. The shipping industry, in the widest sense, is extremely important to the future of our country's economy.

We have heard one or two stories of unfortunate incidents, including about Korea, to which I will return in a moment, but that is not all. UK shipyards have been very good at specialist high-technology ships. I was, therefore, very sorry to see an item on BBC News Online on 3 December about UK shipyards having lost out to China. The story was about the £22.5 million ship that was to be commissioned by the engineering firm Mayflower. It was to be a high-tech ship that would have been important in the installation of wind turbines, a point referred to earlier in the debate. In my view, that should not have gone to China.

Whether we are discussing the Clyde or the other shipbuilding yards around the country, one or two common threads run through the discussion. We have heard a lot of talk about A&P, which is based in Southampton and has yards all around the UK, including in Falmouth, Southampton, Wallsend, Chatham, Dover and Ramsgate. I do not see any of the Members of Parliament who represent those constituencies here today, another reason why the debate should perhaps have been held on the Floor of the House. A&P is an interesting company. I do not want to disparage it, because I think that it is struggling in the best interests of shipbuilding in this country. However, the Government should get closer to it.

The Government should also sharpen up on their naval procurement programme. It is one thing to announce a very substantial increase in naval shipbuilding, but the laying of the first steel is another and there is a gap between the two. That problem is faced by many of our shipyards today. I have seen that for myself, around the country. That gap is what particularly concerns the trade unions.

Other aspects that worry me very much include what has happened with Vosper Thornycroft in Southampton. It was originally hoped that Vosper Thornycroft would receive a legally binding commitment from the prime contractor, BAE Systems, by the end of September this year, with a detailed contract for the type 45 ships being placed by the end of March. That has fallen by the wayside. I had hoped that there would be an announcement before the House rose today. Vosper Thornycroft desperately needs a legally binding commitment before it can commence work on its planned investment. The situation is very serious and deteriorating.

We have also seen problems with naval procurement from Spain, where state-owned naval yards, in particular the Bazan yard, merged with a civilian yard to form Izar. The European Commission has decided to investigate whether that purchase, at a token price, was a hidden subsidy. I also flag up the problems of the Gibraltar shipyards, for which the MOD no longer has direct responsibility. They are a remarkable facility, and we should not neglect the people who have worked in them for many years.

The situation in Korea is perhaps not as simple as some hon. Members have suggested. From its point of view, Korea has been engaged in an argument with the European Commission, which has been seeking to increase world shipbuilding prices in line with what it says that the market will take. This is about the trade barrier regulation. Can the Minister update us on the trade barrier regulation inquiry and participation in talks? The European Commission seeks to include ships in segments of the large container ships sector for example, as well as liquefied natural gas carriers—which will be crucial for our economy—and liquefied petroleum gas carriers. The Koreans see it as an attempt by the European Commission to rig prices in favour of European shipyards. The issue is rambling on and no doubt will do so for some time, but I would be grateful if the Minister would update us.

Finally, I would like to talk about what we might do in the future. I commend the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions on taking a remarkably relaxed and flexible approach . It is not calling for subsidies; it simply wants a more imaginative response from our Government. It wants the British Government to operate within the boundaries of European law in an imaginative way. Other European countries appear to be able to find more imaginative ways of favouring their yards. It was a tragedy when the ferries were not all built in Britain, as four of them went to German yards. If the French had been building them, they would have stuck a gun on the front and called them warships, and then circumstances would have been different.

I see the skills base in shipbuilding being lost if we do not do something to ensure that there is continuity. We need imaginative schemes, not only to procure orders

but to maintain the skilled work force around the country. The focus is not just the Clyde, although that is the biggest and proudest shipbuilding tradition left in the UK now, but small yards such as Appledore at Falmouth, and others at Portsmouth and Southampton. The skills base of the country is at risk here as well as the big ships that sail the ocean. Let us make sure that the Government take this very seriously, and I invite the Minister to tell us some good news for Christmas.

10.51 am

**The Minister for Employment and the Regions (Alan Johnson):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) not just on securing this debate but on his genuinely eloquent and interesting speech, which set the tone for an excellent debate. I hope that hon. Members will accept that in just eight minutes, I have to do justice to my hon. Friend's points, and I will not be able to get around to all the individual points raised.

My hon. Friend rightly emphasised the excellence of UK shipyards and the important role that they play in local economies within the UK, not least on the Clyde. The Government are confident that the industry has a sound future. I would like to mention a number of steps that we have taken since 1997 to help the industry achieve its potential.

I am aware that shipyards, especially those building merchant ships, face difficult challenges in a very tough world market. The estimate is that the current capacity globally exceeds demand by at least 33 per cent., so it is a tough competitive environment out there and UK yards are finding it difficult to win the orders against that fierce competition.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy, who has responsibility for this issue, cannot be with us today because of an unavoidable commitment abroad. However, as my hon. Friend recognised, he has been involved in numerous meetings with the unions, the industry and concerned hon. Members. We entirely share their worries about current difficulties and I can assure them that the Government remain absolutely committed to working closely with the industry to help it meet the difficult challenges ahead.

The key challenge that was recognised by my hon. Friend when he said that German yards have higher productivity and are much more competitive, and is recognised by everyone in the industry, is to improve its competitive performance. It is nothing to do with the work force, who have improved their performance extraordinarily over the past 10 to 20 years.

Let me set out briefly what we have been doing to help the industry. First and most importantly, in 1998 we set up the shipbuilding forum comprising trade unions, the industry, training bodies, the national training provider—the Engineering and Marine Training Authority—Government Departments, the Ministry of Defence and the Scottish Executive. It was the first time, in the history of this maritime nation that unions, industry and Government had ever sat around the table together. As a result of setting up the forum, we received the first report in December 1998, which concluded that the industry's long-term future depended on its ability to improve its competitiveness.

The forum set challenging targets: doubling the number of merchant ships built over a five-year period and increasing the turnover of the repair sector by 30 per cent. during the same period. To achieve that, the forum's 1998 report made 43 recommendations, including improved productivity, better marketing, enhanced finance packages and improvements to training and skills. It is important to stress that these recommendations were aimed at all participants, and not just the Government. This debate concerns not only what the Government can do, but what the industry can do to help itself.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland mentioned that we must look at other countries. When the forum was formed, one of the first things that the Department of Trade and Industry did was sponsor a visit to the Netherlands. It was an extraordinary visit on which the forum found no evidence of employees working harder than those in the UK. The productivity of the work force was no greater in terms of the effort put into the job, and there was little evidence of better yards or higher investment. The secret, if it is a secret, was that the Dutch yards were more successful because they co-operated with each other. They co-operated in order to be able to compete internationally, which is something that the UK yards have traditionally not done, and they had better marketing and extensive subcontracting. Following that visit, which was eye opening, the Shipbuilders and Shiprepairers Association set up a group to examine how the UK industry could co-operate to compete. We have taken several measures and I do not have time to discuss them all, but that one is important. We are improving competitiveness through the forum, which is bringing the industry around the same table as the unions and the Government.

The international situation is crucial. The international marketplace is difficult and we share the industry's concerns about Korean unfair trade practices—make no mistake; they are unfair trade practices. The best means of tackling Korea is to launch action in the World Trade Organisation as recommended by the European Commission's May 2001 trade barriers regulation report on which all member states are agreed. Unfortunately, WTO action has been delayed because the commission has insisted on linking such action to the reintroduction of limited shipbuilding subsidies for container ships and product chemical carriers.

My hon. Friend asked whether we should subsidise the industry. There is no evidence of illegal subsidy occurring elsewhere. I remember Brett Martin, who has sadly departed, of Cammell Laird, saying in the forum that he would produce evidence of illegal subsidies; it did not materialise. Germany had considerable state aid for reunification, but there is no evidence of illegal subsidies anywhere else. The shipbuilding intervention fund existed for 36 years and at one time it paid up to 33 per cent. subsidy, but throughout that period British shipbuilding and ship repair declined. It was the view of the industry and the unions in 1999 that we should abolish the SIF throughout the European Union, and that happened on 1 January this year.

The reason for the delay in pursuing the WTO claim against Korea is that it is linked to the reintroduction of a form of subsidy that will not help British shipbuilding

*[Alan Johnson]*

because it concerns vessels with which we do not deal. The Commissioner is effectively proposing the partial reintroduction of operating aid, which was abolished at the end of last year. The commission proposal is likely to be difficult to operate in practice and risks undermining the EU position by opening up the possibility of Korean action. We must move ahead with the European Union agreement on taking WTO action against Korea, and we will work to that effect.

I must say a couple of words about the Clyde, and I apologise for not having more time to do so. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) said, if one looks back to what the yard faced as recently as a year ago, then looks at the position now, it is clear that it has the best prospects for many years, and we believe that it is secure for at least the next 10 years.



## Camelot

11 am

**Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): The debate comes at a good time, because Camelot's new licence starts on 27 January 2002, by which time it will have a new chairman in Michael Grade, and the Government are considering their response to the recommendations in the Budd report on gambling. It is rumoured that next spring the Government will start a review of national lottery legislation that is relevant to the new licence that will start in 2009. That seems a long way ahead, but if we are to reach agreement on the legislative changes that will have to be implemented in time for bids for a fresh lottery licence to be invited on that new basis, we have to start quite soon.

The lottery licence runs to 164 pages. I shall not dwell on much of it, but emphasise two parts—condition 12, which relates to player access, and condition 15, which relates to distribution management.

Condition 12 requires that there should be a minimum of 24,250 online retail outlets and a minimum of 9,150 Instants-only outlets. For reasons that are not stated, in 2006 those minimums will be reduced to 23,750 and 4,500. I hope that the Minister can explain why the Government imposed the relaxation of that condition.

Condition 15 states:

> "The licensee shall ensure that clear and fair criteria are specified and applied for retailers to qualify for selection and de-selection."

Those criteria must be available for public inspection. I submit that Camelot is not applying fair criteria for the selection and deselection of retailers, especially with the introduction of a minimum sales requirement of £1,500 per week. For Camelot, "reviewing the retail network" is tantamount to

> "cutting back on the retail network of small independent retailers".

I shall illustrate my point with reference to the case of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, who run a small retail newsagents and tobacconists in Wimborne road, east in Ferndown. They sell between £1,000 and £1,200-worth of lottery tickets each week and have been told that if they do not raise their sales to £1,500 each week they will have their lottery licence taken away. As one would expect, before the licence is taken away they will be offered a period of counselling lasting 24 weeks to show them how to boost sales. Since they have spent the past seven years running their shop, the idea that somebody else can come in from outside and tell them how to do it better is surprising. Of course, at the end of the 24 weeks they will realise that they cannot magically increase their sales to £1,500 and will therefore lose their licence.

Some retailers are under the impression that the lottery licence imposes a maximum number of outlets for Camelot. Indeed, that is such a widely held misconception that a senior member of one of the national trade organisations recently repeated it to me. But the licence does not do that—it specifies a minimum. Why does not an organisation that wishes to maximise sales of lottery tickets and proceeds for good causes seek to expand, rather than contract, its network of retailers?

It costs about £5,000 to install a lottery terminal, but after that the running costs are negligible. If the cost of installation is a problem, that has already been incurred because a condition of the new licence was that Camelot had to install 24,500 new terminals at a cost, I am told, of £120 million. That was to ensure that they could be operational before 27 January. If ever there was an example of a waste of money, that is it. The existing lottery terminals were perfectly adequate, but to establish a level playing field for the bidders of the new licence, the requirement was that whichever company won—even if it were the incumbent—would have to replace all terminals. That is a waste of £120 million.

What justification can there be for imposing an arbitrary minimum sales requirement? Provided that a lottery retailer's premises are open during the hours in which the public want to purchase tickets, and that the retailer acts with honesty and propriety, what is the problem? Mr. and Mrs. Smith have a supporting petition with 1,400 signatures. They have raised their concerns on radio and television, and during a Radio Solent phone-in, they received an unparalleled 98 per cent. support for their cause to be allowed to continue to retail lottery tickets from their shop.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith have wondered whether there are too many lottery outlets close by in Ferndown. However, that cannot be the problem, because Tesco, Sainsbury and one independent supermarket have outlets on Ringwood road, while Mr. and Mrs. Smith's outlet is the only one on Wimborne road. I have discussed the issue with the Federation of Small Businesses and the Federation of Retail Newsagents. Both are worried about the adverse impact of Camelot's policies on the retail network of small shops. The FSB told me:

"It is important that Camelot, in satisfying its duty to the local community, actually favours installing the terminals in as many independent, community based businesses as possible."

However, the trend is the other way, with Camelot favouring supermarkets, petrol forecourts and other multiple outlets. The Government have given the impression that they are not concerned about the retail network and I secured this Adjournment debate as a result of the negative response from the Minister to my questions. I hope that in today's response, he will link his remarks in with the Government's response to the better regulation taskforce shopkeepers' report, published on 17 October. In paragraph 3.1, the Government state:

"Nigel Griffiths as Small Firms Minister will champion the interests of small retailers."

He has a good opportunity to start fulfilling his role as champion of small retailers by challenging Camelot on its unfair review of the retail network.

The Minister should make the point to Camelot about the lack of incentive, under the present arrangements, for a small retailer to build up his lottery sales so as to add value to his business for when he retires or sells out. Why are lottery licences not transferable on a similar basis to liquor licences? No publican or licensee has an absolute right to transfer a licence because the transfer must be approved by the court, but the norm is that, where the transferee is a fit and proper person, the transfer takes place. Why does Camelot not operate a similar system for its licensed lottery retailers, who would then have an additional incentive to build up their retail business? Camelot told me that its objective in reviewing the retail network is to maximise income for good causes, but closing down outlets, rather than opening more, seems an odd way to go about it.

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): I have much sympathy with my hon. Friend's argument. Does he agree that the pressure on Camelot to contribute to good causes—I shall explore the reasons for that later—puts pressure not only on the organisation but on individual licensees such as Mr. and Mrs. Smith?

**Mr. Chope:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, but if the pressure is on Camelot, it is self-induced. Both Camelot and Mr. Branson's People's Lottery said that they could raise £15 billion for good causes during the lifetime of the new licence. The National Lottery Commission reckons that £10 billion is more realistic and, as my hon. Friend knows, £10.7 billion has been raised since the lottery started. The details of the licence show that there are no penalties on Camelot if it does not succeed in selling enough tickets to raise £15 billion for good causes, although it would not make as much profit as it would otherwise do, so there no justification for putting this enormous pressure on small retailers.

Small retailers are being made scapegoats for the steady decline in sales of lottery tickets. It was reported on 28 November that combined sales of lottery tickets and scratch cards fell by 5.4 per cent. to £2.4 billion in the six months to 30 September. Sales would have plummeted further but for a 6.8 per cent. increase in scratch card sales. Why are sales of lottery tickets falling? Could it be that there is increasing disillusion about the so-called good causes that the lottery supports? Today's news reminds us that £628 million of lottery money was wasted on the dome; some £120 million was given to the Football Association for Wembley stadium, which will not now be spent on that project; some £20 million was given to the royal armouries, which then went bust. Could it be that potential purchasers of lottery tickets realise that very little of the money they might spend would be used for what they believe to be good causes, and that even less is returned to their local communities?

On 11 December, total lottery sales since the launch on 14 November 1994 were £35.2 billion. Camelot has been unable to break down that figure between constituencies, but if the gross sum is divided by 659 constituencies, the average is £53.3 million per constituency. I am not making allowance for the fact that my constituency of Christchurch has a slightly larger number of constituents than average and a higher proportion of people in the older age group, who are apparently more likely to buy lottery tickets. We are told that people aged between 55 and 64 are most likely to do so, while young people aged between 16 and 20 are least likely to do so.

Taking the average, £10.7 billion has been raised for good causes and if good causes in the Christchurch constituency had received a pro rata share, they would have received £16.21 million. It will not surprise you, Mr. Amess, to know that they have not received anything approaching that amount. Indeed, the information that Camelot provided to me and other hon. Members this week, broken down by constituency,

*[Mr. Chope]*

shows that the amount that has been given in national lottery awards to Christchurch is £3.9292 million—that is, less than 25 per cent. of the pro rata entitlement and less than 7.5 per cent. of the total sales of lottery tickets in Christchurch.

My constituents are contributing grossly disproportionately to good causes, and not-so-good causes, elsewhere in the country, and they now find that Camelot is trying to undermine the viability of small retailers in Christchurch through its retail network review. If Camelot wants to boost lottery ticket sales in Christchurch, I suggest that it puts pressure on lottery distributors to return more than 7.5 per cent. of gross sales to good causes in Christchurch. I have examined the figures for the past four years since 1 January 1998. During that period, my constituents have had just over £400,000 returned from the lottery—less than 1.5 per cent. of their gross expenditure on lottery tickets—and some £145,000 of that was given to an organisation called Adelphi Playclubs Ltd., which has gone bust and is in receivership. Is it surprising that there is growing disillusionment among my constituents and others about the way in which the lottery operates? I advise my constituents that, if they want to support local good causes, the last thing that they should do is play the national lottery.

That brings me to the Budd review of gambling, and the absurd letter from Camelot that I received this week that said that good causes in Christchurch would suffer to the extent of £500,000 if the recommendations for society lotteries were adopted. The reality is quite the reverse. If the people of Christchurch raised £53 million through a society lottery and a minimum of 20 per cent. had to be returned to good causes, as is proposed, Christchurch's good causes would be three times better off overall and 10 times better off than over the past four years.

Society lotteries have an important role to play. They could introduce competition, which is severely absent at the moment. Society lotteries are public lotteries promoted on behalf of a society that is established and conducted wholly or mainly for one or more of the purposes that are set out on page 156 of the Budd report. Those purposes are effectively charitable, and include sport, recreation and the arts.

Under present regulations, society lotteries may have prizes of up to 55 per cent. of their income. However, no prize may exceed £25,000 or 10 per cent. of ticket sales. It is not possible for an individual society lottery to have ticket sales that exceed £1 million. A minimum of 20 per cent. of the funds must go to deserving good causes.

There is much to be said for society lotteries, yet Camelot says that if society lotteries were introduced with larger prize payouts and the ability to attract gamblers who aspire to a lottery win that would be a life-changing event, sales would increase. However, owing to the language of Camelot's scaremongering letter, hon. Members may be surprised to hear that the figures for 1999-2000 show that for every £1 spent on the national lottery, only 2p was spent on society lotteries. Even if society lotteries increased twentyfold, they would take less money than the national lottery.

Society lotteries could introduce the element of competition that is lacking. Retailers that are not permitted to sell tickets for Camelot could sell tickets for the local society lottery. If local people felt that Camelot and the national lottery distribution organisations were not giving their local causes a fair share of the resources raised, they could show their disapproval by supporting the local society lottery rather than the national lottery.

That recommendation in the Budd review is worthy of adoption as a Conservative party policy, although I do not expect my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) to announce that in her response. I certainly hope that the Government will not fall for the extraordinarily protectionist line taken by Camelot in the literature that was sent to hon. Members this week.

Anybody would think that Camelot was not given the opportunity to make a submission to the Budd review. It made a written submission, and its comments must have been taken into account. Indeed, great passages in the Budd report show that Camelot's concerns about the impact of society lotteries are not well-founded. It is recognised that the advent of society lotteries could mean that a different range of good causes would benefit. However, the notion that there would be a reduction in the amount of money going to good causes overall is rejected.

Before I close my remarks, I want to say a little about the part of the Camelot licence that deals with under-age sales—condition 15(4). Under that condition,

"The licensee shall conduct or procure the conduct of such tests of retailers as the National Lottery Commission may require to establish whether sales have been or are being made or are likely to be made by retailers to purchasers under the age of 16."

A requirement exists that there should be a minimum of 10,000 such tests each year. We are told that Camelot has invested £1.2 million over the past two years in the prevention of problem gambling in the national lottery. On the basis of the evidence produced, it has not been successful in dealing with the problem. That problem centres around scratch cards, which are described by Camelot as

"the UK's leading impulse brand".

The odds of winning on a scratch card are about one in five. Most significantly, however, 96 per cent. of the scratch card market is taken by Camelot.

The National Lottery Commission has commissioned a report on under-16s and the national lottery. That report was dated February 2000, and was prepared by BMRB Social Research. It contains some interesting points. It shows that 11.6 per cent. of 12 to 15-year-olds had spent their own money on national lottery scratch cards in the previous week. That was in 1999, when the research was carried out, whereas in 1997 the figure was 7.7 per cent. Therefore, a substantial and steep increase had taken place in the incidence of people under the age of 16 illegally purchasing scratch cards. The report also found that 60 per cent. of problem gamblers agreed that it was easier to spend more money than they planned on national lottery scratch cards—61 per cent. agreed that some people are hooked on them.

For a Government who preach about social inclusion, the report contains some pretty devastating findings. For example, table 8c deals with the prevalence of problem gambling on national lottery scratch cards among key sub-groups. Looking at the issue of

ethnicity, it shows that 1.6 per cent. of white youths are engaged in problem gambling with scratch cards—Instants—compared with 4.8 per cent. of blacks, and 3.8 per cent. of Chinese. We know that gambling is more a part of Chinese culture than British culture, but it is surprising and alarming that 4.8 per cent. of under-16s from black ethnic minorities are engaged in problem gambling with scratch cards.

Camelot is promoting scratch cards, which is why sales of scratch cards went up over the past six months while sales for the main lottery draw went down. We know that young people have the highest propensity to purchase scratch cards. It is not an exaggeration to say that we are now looking at state sponsorship of under-age gambling. Such gambling is becoming worse, and it will become worse still if pressure is put on small retailers to attain minimum sales targets. How will they be able to increase their sales? They will be under tremendous pressure to sell more Instants scratch cards to the user group that enjoys them, namely the under-16s.

The issue is important, and is relevant to the retail review. Camelot has informed me that, in my Christchurch constituency, not one lottery retailer has lost his licence as a result of selling scratch cards to under-age people. However, I doubt whether that is the position throughout the country.

At page 413 of his autobiography, John Major wrote:

"The lottery has achieved so much in a very short period of time: arts centres here, new sports complexes there, restored churches, new village halls, festivals, new instruments for orchestras, cycleways, inner city parks and a thousand other benefits that give a new lease of life to all those Burkean 'little platoons', who make our country what I believe it to be: the best place in the world in which to live."

Recent experience in my constituency shows that the lottery is no longer delivering that vision. The current pressure from Camelot on small retailers and its monopolistic resistance to competition from society lotteries will be a further blow to the "little platoons".

11.26 am

**Mr. Richard Page** (South-West Hertfordshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on securing the debate. I do not know how long it took him to obtain an hour-and-a-half debate, and I do not want him to tell me, because the last time that I tried to achieve such a debate, it took me about six months and that burnt on my soul.

I have always been a firm supporter of the lottery. Having been in the House for several years, I have discovered that if I stand still long enough the wheel will turn and the same scenery will go by again, at which time I can evaluate and compare what happened the previous time with what is being proposed now. At the time of the first contest for the lottery licence, I studied all the applicants. Without any doubt, Camelot was the most efficient and effective. It presented its case in the best manner. The worst applicant was the noisiest, and I leave it to hon. Members to work out which one that was. I had an added interest in that at least two of the applicants were to establish their headquarters on the edge of my constituency between Rickmansworth and Watford. I hope that they stay there for a considerable time.

Camelot's is one of the world's most successful lotteries. Apparently, it launched itself to the outside world without a hitch and it worked smoothly. It then started to be knocked in the media, because it had brought out some of the worst characteristics of the British. The lottery was not knocked because it was doing so well, but some of the personalities involved were criticised for unjustifiable reasons. A characteristic of the British is that, if someone does well at something, we must have a go at it. However, I am wearing my Christmas tie, and given that seasonal charity has overcome me, I shall not labour that point.

I worried from the start about the Government's action, which widened the scope on which lottery moneys could be spent. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch touched on the expenditure on the dome. If anyone wanted to be turned off buying lottery tickets, to see the money squandered in such an horrendous fashion was ample justification for that. We do not know exactly what is happening about the dome's future—whether it has been given away or it is a special deal. We would love to hear the inside story. Perhaps the Minister will bring us up to date—and get himself some headlines—but I have a funny feeling that he will avoid discussing that problem.

The lottery suffers because it has a series of distribution bodies—they are listed in a document that Camelot has sent to hon. Members. All those bodies run publicity schemes and profiles, in which they seem to go out of their way to say, "Actually, our money comes from the national lottery." They seem to present it as their money, which reminds me of the way that the Millennium Commission—that glorious success—spent its money.

A parallel can be drawn with the European Union. When one drives around certain parts of the country, one sees lots of big blue boards adorned with a circle of gold stars and the slogan, "Project funded by the EU." There are never any brackets underneath containing the message, "By the way, it is your own taxpayers' money coming back to you." Similarly, some of the distribution organisations associated with the national lottery are not fulsome about stating that they are fuelled by lottery money—good causes money.

I have a wish list. The operation of the application process for the second licence was a shambles, and we must thank Lord Burns for rescuing the day by producing a result that got everything back on an even keel. We must ensure that that does not happen again. I do not know whether that can be achieved through the review of legislation that will take place, or through some form of internal diktat; I leave that decision to the Government. However, I wish clear-cut rules and procedures to be established before the third round of licensing applications takes place, because we cannot allow that appalling situation to occur again. It put the future of the lottery in doubt, and it did not give it a good image. That had nothing to do with the applicants for the licence; it was caused by the Government's attempt to control the way in which the licence was allocated.

Let me deal with new licences and the issue of timing. When the licence comes up for review, the entire staff of the operating company—which, in this case, was Camelot—get jittery about their future. Immediately before the review of its licence, Camelot had to spend a

*[Mr. Richard Page]*

lot of money on bonuses to stop people going when it was thought that the company might lose its licence. Would it be possible for the people in charge of the application process to have closer discussions with the lottery operator, in order to reassure those working for it? Perhaps the new operator should be chosen much earlier, so that it could promise the old operator's staff jobs. That would ensure continuity of, and greater security for, staff.

Although I have been critical of the Government, I now congratulate them on going ahead with the betting review by sir Alan Budd, because it is excellent. Slot machines are the only problem. If that aspect were allowed to come through, it would ruin every British Legion club in the country.

**The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn):** And Conservative clubs as well.

**Mr. Page:** The Minister is right: it would have a little impact on Conservative clubs as well. Perhaps there are slot machines even in Labour clubs, though not as many. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Mr. Amess, I am suffering, and I am finding it hard to go on because of my voice.

Gambling is a billion-pound industry throughout the world. This country has some of the most reputable bookmaking systems in the world and could receive a big chunk of overseas business.

**Miss McIntosh:** Does my hon. Friend share my embarrassment for the Minister, who, after a debate on the subject, felt unable to visit the Labour clubs in his area because of the validity of that point? He was too embarrassed to go.

**Mr. Page:** I thank my hon. Friend for causing what is known in American football as "interference". It gave me a chance to take a sip of water and get my voice back.

This country has a reputable gambling industry, and it is a business that can go forward. I welcome Sir Alan Budd's work on that industry and should like to make a couple of points before I collapse. First, the lottery operator should not be blamed for a fall-off in sales. If extra gambling opportunities are introduced, those should be taken into account. Secondly, Camelot should rethink its review of the retail network, because in some villages, just as the post office is under attack, the removal of lottery machines from small shops would have a disastrous impact on village life, which we want to keep going.

I have no objection to competition in the gambling industry—that is part of the industry's ethos—but I am concerned about side betting, which rides on the lottery's work and profile. Side betting would be damaging for Camelot and any other lottery operator. Only in Ireland is it legal; in the rest of the world, it is not.

11.37 am

**Nick Harvey** (North Devon): In introducing the debate, the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) focused on three issues: retail distribution of lottery tickets, under-age purchase of tickets, and the Budd report. I shall comment on each of those.

The National Lottery Commission grants Camelot a licence that requires it to provide a terminal for each postcode district within which there are at least 2,000 residents. Camelot must also make available for public inspection its criteria for selecting, or deselecting, the retailers that it uses. It is up to Camelot to exercise its commercial judgment in applying those criteria, and the commission is responsible for overseeing that.

It is legitimate for the hon. Member for Christchurch to raise the specific example of Mr. and Mrs. Smith of Ferndown or any other example. However, whether the Minister can reasonably be held accountable for every decision that Camelot makes in exercising its commercial judgment is another question. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about that.

There are 25,000 online lottery terminal operators and a further 10,000 scratch card retailers, so it is fair to say that Camelot reaches most parts of the country. Particular provisions are in place for sparsely populated areas that might not otherwise fulfil Camelot's commercial criteria. Reference has been made to the award of the second licence and certainly, as the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) said today, and as the Select Committee said at the time, that process was a shambles. The national lottery licence is a licence to print money and is, in that sense, a state-backed monopoly. It is interesting that the main business of De La Rue—one of the major stakeholders in Camelot—is printing money. The licence requirements must be taken seriously and drawn up carefully.

Despite the criticism that it has attracted, notably for some of the payments made to its directors, Camelot is one of the best lottery operators in the world. I noted the criticisms made by the hon. Member for Christchurch, but I am not sure that they are fair. A 1998 survey showed that Camelot was returning more to good causes—and, indeed, to the Treasury—as a percentage of sales than any of the other 34 lotteries that were monitored. The salaries of its board members have been trimmed. Despite falling sales, the proportion of income that goes to good causes continues to increase. As part of its social and ethical audit, bonuses have been reduced to a uniform level and linked to the national lottery distribution fund. Camelot operates on a margin of 1 per cent. That is worth remembering when people criticise it.

Despite its problems, Camelot has been a successful operator and it is against that background that we should judge the proposals in the Budd report. The hon. Member for Christchurch welcomed its recommendation that the monopoly should be broken, allowing others to compete with Camelot. Camelot has been stoically defending its position, and has argued that exposure to competition would be unwelcome. I urge the Minister to weigh up carefully that argument before proceeding.

The hon. Member for Christchurch was cavalier in his dismissal of Camelot's argument. I do not swallow hook, line and sinker everything that Camelot has said in its defence, but there are arguments that need careful consideration. A deregulated lottery market would probably be dominated by large national organisations with the means to invest in the relatively high capital and operating costs, and the strength to compete with the

national lottery. The Budd report recommends that commercial companies should not be allowed to operate in competition with the national lottery. However, charities that are large enough to do so on a meaningful scale would, to all intents and purposes, be operating in the same way as a commercial company.

Camelot passes on a high percentage of its revenue to good causes. The Budd report proposes that competing companies would be required to guarantee distribution of 20 per cent. of their ticket sales. That is considerably less than the 40 per cent. that Camelot distributes. There is a genuine threat that, in total, the sums that find their way through to good causes would be smaller. Even if the variety of good causes that were benefiting was more widely drawn than at present, we risk diluting what we can achieve with the moneys.

**Mr. Chope:** I know that the hon. Gentleman listened carefully to what I said. In Christchurch, significantly less than 5 per cent. of gross sales is being returned to recognised good causes in the local community. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it would be much better for the people of Christchurch to have the option of spending money on a lottery that delivered 20 per cent. for local good causes, as opposed to less than 5 per cent.?

**Nick Harvey:** Possibly, but not necessarily. The hon. Gentleman divided the revenues into equal amounts for constituencies and said that his constituency had benefited from less than 5 per cent. of the whole. If his constituency has been badly served by the distribution bodies, he and other public authorities should set about those distribution bodies with their cudgels. If the market were completely liberalised, the critical mass of the national lottery would be diminished and smaller proportions of ticket sales would go to charities as a whole. Thus there is no guarantee that the recipients in Christchurch would receive more than they do at present. On balance, it sounds as though the hon. Gentleman's constituency has been rather badly served by the distribution bodies. His energies might be better devoted to that end of the equation and to breaking the critical mass that the national lottery currently involves.

Camelot estimates that adopting the proposal could result in a loss of more than £1.28 billion to good causes. I am not taking its brief and suggesting that that figure is necessarily absolutely correct. I have no doubt that we shall take such matters with a pinch of salt. However, a substantial loss on that front seems possible.

The second report was on side betting. I do not know about the impact of that aspect. Clearly, it will divert some of the money that players currently pump into the lottery. The disadvantage is that none of that money will go to good causes, and not much will go to the Treasury, either.

**Mr. Page:** Unfortunately, I did not have the stamina to develop the point about side betting. There is probably more clear evidence in that case than in any other of the effect on Camelot. We have the Irish experience to draw on, and we are looking at a considerable reduction of some 20 per cent. The hon. Gentleman may agree that the only way for side betting to continue is for people to have to pay Camelot for a licence to side bet on its numbers.

**Nick Harvey:** It is an interesting proposition that that is the only way to guarantee that some of the money will be invested and ultimately go to good causes.

The third recommendation of the Budd report was a universal minimum age of 18 for all gambling. As the hon. Member for Christchurch said, young people are becoming addicted to the purchase of scratch cards. There is no doubt that that is a serious problem. In 1997, a hotline was established for those who suspect retailers of selling tickets to under-age players. The commission has discussed with Camelot how to patrol the matter, and Camelot is committed to 10,000 under-16 tests on retailers in the forthcoming year. Retailers must fill in a refusal register every time they turn away what they suspect to be an under-age player.

Serious issues are involved. We are all aware that the proceeds of the national lottery are waning and diminishing. I do not believe that anyone seriously blames independent retailers for that, as the hon. Member for Christchurch suggests. Whether those diminishing sales would be combated by competition, and whether people would be willing to donate more if they knew which cause their money was going to, are issues that are worth debating. However, I urge the Government to proceed with caution.

Another option is simply to increase the number of terminals. However, we must recognise that that would have serious cost implications, and whether it would pay for itself is a matter of doubt. Camelot must remain commercially viable, and in terms of extra sales it simply would not be worth connecting a huge number of extra terminals if only a small number of people used them. As I said, Camelot ring-fences up to 1,000 outlets in which the terminal allows a small business to serve a community as a shop or other useful commercial premises. That is very much appreciated, especially in constituencies such as mine.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's response. Clearly, not all is entirely well with the operation of the lottery, but Camelot has, I believe, been a successful operator. The licence conditions under which it operates are legitimate matters for us to debate, but I do not believe that some of the criticisms of it have been entirely fair.

11.49 am

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): I am grateful for the opportunity to wind up for the official Opposition. I am delighted to see the Minister in his place, and it would be most welcome if he would also respond to the points that I made in a previous debate on the Budd review. I shall certainly give him plenty of time to gather his thoughts.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on securing this welcome and timely debate. He has raised a number of very important issues, which I hope the Minister will address. It is also a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), who made some excellent points. The hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) might not realise that my married name is Mrs. Harvey. It is probably a good thing that I am speaking today under my maiden name, as that will avoid any confusion between the official Opposition and the rest.

*[Miss Anne McIntosh]*

I should declare an interest in respect of the lottery grant funding—almost £6 million—that the Vale of York has been fortunate to receive to date. The manual that we received this week from Camelot was impressive, and in that regard I am grateful to the previous Conservative Government. The lottery was a great Conservative initiative, and it is pleasing to learn that the hon. Member for North Devon shares the view of the official Opposition that it has been a huge success. It has made a significant contribution to sport, the arts and local initiatives.

A fundamental Conservative principle, which we always followed, was that good causes such as health and education should not be funded by taxpayers' money that they otherwise would not receive. In setting up the lottery, we had two guiding principles: arm's-length operation, free from Government interference; and additionality, whereby any money was additional to Treasury expenditure. It is with regret and disappointment that I record that the Labour Government reversed both those principles in their first term.

The renewal of Camelot's licence, over which the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport presided, proved shambolic. The 1997 Labour party manifesto—that dreadful document—states:

"When the current contract runs out, Labour will seek an efficient not-for-profit operator to ensure that the maximum sums go to good causes."

In January 1999, the former Secretary of State appointed a National Lottery Commission to oversee operation and regulation of the lottery, and to choose the next licence holder. The commissioners took up their posts on 1 April—a noteworthy date—1999. The Government then reversed their pre-election pledge and ruled that the next operator would be allowed to make a profit.

**Mr. David Amess (in the Chair):** Order. Those responsible for recording our proceedings advise me that we are not making ourselves clearly heard. If hon. Members could speak directly into the microphones, such technical difficulties might be sorted out. The problem has probably been exacerbated by the fact that various hon. Members have had difficulty breathing.

**Miss McIntosh:** I shall endeavour to be even more robust in my delivery than usual, Mr. Amess, and I hope that the technical difficulties will be dealt with as soon as possible.

The most shambolic of licence procedures was then adopted. The National Lottery Commission announced that neither the new applicants, The People's Lottery, nor Camelot, the then licence holder, would be awarded the next licence. Only the People's Lottery was allowed to proceed, and it had one month in which to improve its bid. Camelot then took the commission to the High Court, and won its case. It was not until 19 December 2000 that Camelot was eventually awarded the licence.

It matters not to me in which direction the Minister cares to look, but he cannot ignore the implication for good causes: that in future, the Government must respond by having a mechanism to protect lottery good causes from legal action. He must also recognise that the 5.4 per cent. slide in ticket sales—a reduction to £2.4 billion in the six months to 30 September—has had a knock-on effect. Camelot attributes that to the controversial licence competition and warns of a further decline for the second half of the year, up to 31 March 2002.

Hon. Members have referred to a threat. I would formulate it differently from my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, but I believe that the Budd review places an enormous dilemma before the Government. It is not for me, as a member of the official Opposition, to provide the answers. I merely humbly submit to put the questions. How will the Minister resolve the dilemma? In the Vale of York, the projected loss over the initial seven-year licence period alone would be almost £800,000. Projected lottery sales nationally would be £51 billion—a 13 per cent. reduction as a result of the gambling review.

**Mr. Chope:** Before my hon. Friend accepts hook, line and sinker the quotation from the letter about the Vale of York, will she compare the figure of £6 million, which I think she said good causes there have received from the lottery so far, with total sales in her constituency of more than £50 million? The good causes there have been getting far less than the 20 per cent. minimum that would be required were there a society lottery instead.

**Miss McIntosh:** My hon. Friend raises a pertinent point, and I accept what he says. However, no matter how frustrating we might find its conclusions, we are looking at independent research commissioned by the Henley centre and PricewaterhouseCoopers, which developed models to predict the impact of the recommendations of the gambling review. I shall say later why I think that there might be further losses in ticket sales.

The independent research brought to our attention this week, in excellent timing for my hon. Friend's debate, suggests that the good causes will lose £2 billion nationally during the seven years. I entirely accept the arguments of my hon. Friends the Members for Christchurch and for South-West Hertfordshire that there are many good recommendations in the Budd report. That was the subject of a separate debate, and we look forward to hearing more on it. However, we must not lose sight of the losses mentioned by many hon. Members in that debate, which could have a huge impact, especially on seaside resorts. They have suffered a huge fall in income from tourism generally this year.

**Mr. Chope:** Is my hon. Friend completely discounting paragraph 35.9 of the Budd report? It says:

"The effect will largely be a shift from good causes supported by the National Lottery to other good causes. The effect on total income for good causes will depend on any differences in the proportion of lottery proceeds paid out".

It suggests that there will be no significant effect on good causes overall, just competition among good causes.

**Miss McIntosh:** That is very interesting, and the Minister must weigh up any disagreement between the conclusions of the Budd report and those that face us today.

**Mr. Caborn:** The hon. Lady was asked the question.

**Miss McIntosh:** The Minister challenges me, and I shall respond to that by using some figures with which I was provided by the Library in preparation for today's debate. The figures make no recognition of any contribution that was the subject of the gambling review. I could almost argue for a different debate, but I would hate to see my hon. Friend ruled out of order. The figures provided by the Library compare national lottery sales with those of leading market brands sold through normal retail stores. National lottery sales, at £4.532 billion, top the table, followed by Coca-Cola with £640 million, closely followed by Instants with £561 million. I share those figures with hon. Members as I welcome Mr. Conway to the Chair.

How will the Government respond to the drop in sales? Will the Minister specifically consider the impact of the new opportunities fund? This is a classic case of the Labour Government raiding the lottery and taking money away for purposes such as sport, the arts and village hall projects. I have heard about several applications that have regrettably been turned down by the community fund because the money is no longer available under the national lottery. Many such bodies fear that there will be even less money in future. The new opportunities fund is being used to distribute money to pay for Ministers' pet projects in health, education and environmental projects. It takes 13 per cent. of lottery money, and that will rise to 33 per cent. once the Millennium Commission has been wound up. One third of all lottery income for good causes will be siphoned off to Labour's pet projects.

The Government must be aware that they are seen to be increasingly prescriptive about how lottery money is distributed. They are dictating strategies and priorities to bodies that are meant to be independent. To take sport as an example, Sport England will be made to ring-fence 20 per cent. of lottery funds for allocation to youth sport, the bulk of which will be spent in schools. That amounts to putting £750 million into school sport over three years. That approach is wrong. Using the lottery to fund health projects means that it works like a regressive tax, for the simple reason that poorer people spend disproportionately more on the lottery than wealthier people. Moreover, lottery money was meant to provide additional funds to the Treasury, not to substitute funds that would otherwise be spent by the Treasury.

I shall conclude in order to give the Minister ample time to respond both to this debate and to the comments that I made in the Budd recommendations debate a short time ago. The debate is timely and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch on securing it and on introducing it so eloquently. He was ably supported by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire and gained the recognition of the hon. Member for North Devon regarding the success of the national lottery.

The debate raised several issues to which the Minister must respond as a matter of urgency. First, the loss of ticket sales must be reversed. Last year, the shambolic licensing procedure led to six wasted months, uncertainty, legal action and the resignation of two commissioners. Secondly, the potential loss of lottery money to good causes through the Budd recommendations poses a dilemma. Thirdly, the new opportunities fund substitutes Treasury expenditure rather than adding to it, and the Minister must accept that that was never the original intention of the national lottery.

12.4 pm

**The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn):** I have enjoyed the debate because it has shown the great divisions between Opposition Front Benchers and Back Benchers. It was quite enlightening. I have no doubt that those differences of view about how the lottery should be run will be taken into consideration when we carry out the various reviews.

I thank the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) for allowing us to debate this important subject, as it gives me the opportunity to put one or two things on the record. I had understood that the debate would be about Camelot's licence, not the Budd report or the distributing bodies. That is what I shall respond to, although I acknowledge that there are wider concerns.

The hon. Member for Christchurch cited three major capital projects: the dome, the royal armouries and the national stadium. All of those were set up in terms of the major capital spends while his party was in government; it was not this Administration who set them in train.

**Mr. Chope:** It is certainly true that the original sum of money for the dome was established under the Conservative Government. However, the money that was put in subsequently—about a 50 per cent. increase—which was then qualified by the auditors as being not good value for money, was put in at the insistence of the Labour Government.

**Mr. Caborn:** The hon. Gentleman might be able to enlighten the Chamber about the national stadium and what his Government did in 1996, and about the armouries. However, perhaps we should leave that for another debate.

There have been many references to the Budd report, and we are considering all the responses to it. It would be premature for me to second-guess what the conclusions will be. We have had a good debate on that as part of the consultation process. We allowed three months for the consultation and made no comment on the Budd report, or the commission's recommendations to the Government, which we put into the public domain. As the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) said, we have had discussions here in Westminster Hall, and questions have been asked on the Floor of the House. All of that will be factored in to our conclusions. We have given an undertaking that early in the new year we shall come forward with both our considered reply and a timetable for implementation. I have no doubt that there will be further discussions on the conclusion that we draw.

Many of the comments made today have been about the implementation of the Budd report, yet it will not necessarily be implemented in its entirety. It makes recommendations to the Government, but we are mindful of the fact that the lottery could be affected, as the hon. Lady said.

It is amazing how people become such experts on these issues. I was interested to read Polly Toynbee's article in one of our national newspapers. I had never

*[Mr. Caborn]*

realised that she was such an expert on working men's clubs, but obviously people read up on those issues from time to time, even if they do not experience them. I read her article with interest, as I did the Henley report and other submissions that have been made. There is no doubt that this is a serious issue, and the Government are taking it seriously in responding to the Budd report.

This morning's debate has clearly shown that there are differences in approach to the national lottery, vis-à-vis Budd—even within the Conservative party. I accept that that is quite genuine, and we shall take it into consideration.

**Mr. Chope:** Does the Minister agree that the debate is not so much between individual members of the Conservative party, but between those Members of Parliament whose constituencies have received far less of the pro rata return from the good causes fund?

**Mr. Caborn:** If the hon. Gentleman wanted to discuss lottery distribution, he should have made that the subject of the debate. I understood that the subject of the debate was Camelot's licence. Camelot has no responsibility for distribution, which is dealt with by the national distribution bodies. If one wants to criticise distribution, that is fine and justifiable, but it is the not the subject of today's debate.

**Mr. Chope:** I take the Minister's point, but surely the national distribution bodies are independent of the Government. My concern is that, because of the way in which they operate, they create a disincentive for my constituents to use the lottery.

**Mr. Caborn:** There is an old saying: one should throw the shovel away when one is in a hole. Whenever the hon. Gentleman wants to introduce a debate on the distribution of national lottery funds, that will be fine and I shall debate it, but it is not the subject of today's debate. The debate is about Camelot's licence.

I give credit to the previous Administration for introducing the national lottery. It was not popular at the time, but since 1994 it has probably become the most successful lottery in the world. Many people have gained from it and nearly three quarters of the population of the United Kingdom participated in it last year. That shows its popularity. I do not think that those people play for good causes—they play to win—but that nevertheless provides a good mechanism for producing the £10.5 billion that has been raised over the past seven years, which is commendable. That income may not be protected, in the strict sense of the word, but we want to ensure that despite modernisation—and regardless of what happens about the Budd recommendations—such income is maintained for good causes. We shall take that point into careful consideration when we review the Budd report.

The success of the lottery to date has not been inevitable or preordained, so credit must be given where it is due. A key point about the lottery is that the operators operate at arm's length from the Government. The hon. Member for Christchurch did not factor in the new role of the National Lottery Commission. The commission was created under the National Lottery Act 1998 to take over the functions of the former director general of the National Lottery. Its statutory duties are to ensure that the lottery is run with due propriety and that the interests of players are protected. Subject to those two conditions, the commission also has a duty to maximise the returns to good causes.

Exercising its own independent judgment, the commission awarded the second licence to operate the lottery to Camelot 12 months ago. We all remember the difficulties and I acknowledge, as the hon. Member for Vale of York said, that they undoubtedly did a lot of damage to the lottery. One can see how ticket sales fell off. The procedure was not good and we must review it, but although the damage was considerable, we have come through it. It is true to say that lotteries need to refresh themselves from time to time, and have new innovations and creativity. The debacle that took place during the awarding of the licence damaged the lottery, but I hope that it is now recovering. Many people jumped on the bandwagon of bashing Camelot and the lottery, which was unjustifiable at that time.

The licensing included not just a choice of operator, but the terms and conditions of licence. The new seven-year licence starts at the end of January 2002 when the current interim licence expires. The new licence includes a number of changes, which the commission believes are significant improvements. The most noteworthy change addresses the incentive for Camelot to increase sales to maximise the proceeds for good causes. I am concerned, as is Budd, about young people having access to gambling, and that has been acknowledged through the new licence. I remind hon. Members that Camelot must establish at least 10,000 under-16 tests each year and the commission can increase that number if it can show grounds for doing so. There is a minimum threshold, and a regulation that relates to young people having access to the lottery and scratch cards, and I know that Camelot will take those seriously.

The gambling industry now recognises the problem of under-age and problem gambling. The Budd report recommended that a charitable trust of £3 million be set up and I am pleased that the industry is now responding positively. It has set up the trust, in which the whole industry is participating, and I understand that funds are approaching £1 million. The gambling industry, including Camelot, is being socially responsible and wants to find the cause of under-age and problem gambling generally. The hon. Member for Christchurch referred to under-16s having access to the lottery. Camelot will take that seriously in the new licence and I know that the commission will be watching what it does.

**Mr. Chope:** What will the sanction be if, as happened between 1997 and 1999, under-age sales of scratch cards increase?

**Mr. Caborn:** I imagine that the commission would take whatever action it has the power to take. I do not know exactly what that is. If it believes that its power is not strong enough and young people continue to have access to the lottery, doubtless the commission will bring that to the Government's attention. We would then have to consider how to strengthen that power in any subsequent licensing. The concern relates not just to the lottery and Camelot; the Budd report raised a wider

concern and the industry is responding to that. The discussion will continue and I hope that we shall eradicate the worst excesses to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

If Camelot's after-tax profits exceed those in the principal forecast included in its bid, the excess will be shared evenly with the national lottery distributors fund. Pages 23 and 24 of the commission's annual report for 2000-01 includes a table listing other improvements, which covers issues ranging from advertising to intellectual property to software testing. The important point is that Camelot will have even more incentive than previously to increase sales. However, the licence to run the lottery does not set the terms of the relationship between Camelot and the network of retailers. That is essentially a commercial relationship for Camelot to manage. Approximately 24,750 retailers have an online lottery terminal and around 10,400 sell scratch cards only. Camelot estimated that 94 per cent. of the population live or work within a couple of miles of a lottery outlet. Retailers take about £250 million a year in commission on national lottery sales, which is approximately 5 per cent. of total turnover.

In its bid for the second licence, Camelot set out plans to review its network of retail outlets. As part of that process, it intends to introduce an improvement programme, which will take account of consultation with the commission and its own retail forum. It will introduce a minimum weekly sales target of £1,500 for online ticket retailers. The target is a weekly amount of sales, covering all national lottery games, which each retailer will be expected to meet or exceed. Each outlet's sales will be averaged over 13 weeks to determine whether it is performing under or over the minimum weekly sales target. That will ensure a reasonable spread of sales, levelling any unusually high or low performance.

Retailers performing below the expected level will be placed on a sales improvement programme lasting 24 weeks, during which time they will receive practical advice, assistance and support from Camelot staff. The hon. Member for Christchurch was derisory about that, but he then said that we should help retailers to sell more tickets.

Camelot is being responsible and allowing a fair spread of time in which sales can take place. If they are not sufficient, Camelot will try to help the retailers by sending its experts to assist, and there is nothing wrong with that. That is welcome because it covers issues such as shop layouts, staff training and increasing sales. After an initial period for retailers to implement their improvement plans, Camelot intends to monitor sales on a weekly basis for about 16 weeks. It has made its expectation clear: that sales should achieve the £1,500 a week target over that period, and that it will give notice of termination to retailers who fall short of that. The period of time and the consultation are both reasonable. One hopes that it will be a win-win situation, because if a retail outlet can be improved in terms not only of lottery ticket sales but of activity in the shop, the retailer will be in a better position.

**Mr. Page:** I thank the Minister for giving way. I agree with everything that he has said, and I understand that Camelot wants greater efficiency and through-put—amen to all that. However, in small villages with limited populations, retailers cannot generate sufficient sales to meet Camelot's criteria. If those outlets close, we shall be confronted by the post office argument.

**Mr. Caborn:** Camelot has said that it will take account of mitigating circumstances, such as those mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. Certain categories of retailers will be excluded from this exercise, and Camelot is committed to ensuring that the isolated communities to which he referred continue to have access to the national lottery. It has made provision to ring-fence up to 1,000 "community outlets", which will not be subject to the general sales target, and it has identified several other special cases.

Camelot has established arrangements under which retailers will have the opportunity to ask an appeals panel to review a decision to terminate their agreement, which means that there is a safety mechanism in the system. That will be an internal company procedure, but Camelot intends to make it fair and transparent. I have described the intended measures, but I must make two points about them. First, these are not matters for the Government to approve or disapprove. Secondly, the measures appear to be consistent with the commission's aim in setting the new licence terms of getting Camelot to focus on sales improvement. The new licence will be the basis for operation of the lottery over the next seven years.

The Government have decided that it is time to reconsider the licensing structure and system, because we want to ensure that when it comes to the third licence there is effective competition. There are several options for change, some of which would involve legislation, but I said at the outset that the lottery has been successful and we want to keep it that way.

**Mr. Chope:** The Minister has been generous in giving way. He seems to accept that it is reasonable for Camelot to impose a £1,500 minimum for sales. If the objective is to increase sales, Camelot should tell all its retailers that they must increase sales by 10 per cent., rather than expecting small shopkeepers to increase their sales by as much as 50 per cent., which is surely unreasonable.

**Mr. Caborn:** Ultimately, those are commercial judgments, and the Government do not interfere with them. The hon. Gentleman is being hypocritical: on the one hand, he is arguing that the Government should get out of the lottery; on the other, he is trying to get the Government into it. The Government are not involved and it is a commercial decision. We have imposed conditions on Camelot through the commission, and the system is fair and transparent. If difficulties arise, there are several safety valves in the system that his constituents can use.

The commission oversees the operation, and I hope that Camelot will increase sales because that will benefit everybody. An increase in sales of lottery tickets could mean an increase in activity for individual retailers.

**Miss McIntosh:** When the Government consider the national lottery review, will they bear in mind that the thrust of proceeds to good causes should be shifted from major national projects to smaller projects, especially those that will have an impact on local communities?

**Mr. Caborn:** Although we have been criticised this morning for our actions, the hon. Lady will know that, since we came into power, we have moved significantly from capital to revenue. One of the present difficulties is the major capital investments that were made in the past with lottery money. I am not criticising the Conservative Government; what they did at the beginning was fair, but we have now reviewed the matter and have moved to a position where capital is 49 per cent. and revenue is 51 per cent. We have moved from big projects, such as stadiums, domes and armouries, to local schemes that deal with the needs of the community.

I do not disagree with the hon. Lady. We shall continue to take such action, but such a transition takes time. There has been a significant change from capital to revenue, from large to small. Although the new opportunities fund has been criticised this morning, it takes account of what is happening at the grass roots and is responding to that, as did the coalfields community fund through the lottery.

As for changing the licence, we shall consider what has been said this morning and what will be said in other debates. It is in everyone's interests to ensure that the lottery is successful. We have been through the debacle of the licence, which did neither the lottery nor good causes any good. That can be in no one's interests, and we must get it right next time. We shall consult on such matters; we shall listen to what people say and incorporate those views into our decisions.

## Euro

12.26 pm

**Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Conway, in such an important debate. It seems that we have had the mantra about the euro—the referendum and the five tests—for ever. It has been necessary and important. I do not underestimate it. However, the introduction of the euro on mainland Europe and its creep into the United Kingdom must be taken into account.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer need to discuss the new situation and to agree a new way forward. Incidentally, I hope that they disagree. It is ludicrous for the media to pretend that Britain's two most powerful political personalities, when discussing the most important issue before the nation, will synchronise immediately. I hope that they have serious discussions, and as an adult, I expect them initially to disagree, but then to reconcile their views. I hope that we all play a mature part in those discussions and I appeal particularly to my friends in the media to allow a sensible debate to take place.

History offers the Government a chance to consider soberly a subtle addition to the black-and-white choice of joining the euro outright and abolishing the pound, or rejecting the euro and clinging to the pound. That has hitherto been on offer at the end of the barrel of a referendum. I propose instead that the euro be accepted in our economy as a parallel currency to the pound, to be used by businesses and customers—by choice—in the marketplace. That proposal would offer significant advantages to the nation, to businesses and to our economy. In addition, it would avoid major political and economic risks that are associated with joining the euro outright in one fell swoop.

The process of creating a parallel currency has already begun. A recent survey showed that 83 per cent. of retailers in tourist areas will accept euros. Remarkably, those retailers include such normally anti-European retailers as Dixons and JD Wetherspoon, as well as household names such as Marks and Spencer. At Sainsbury's, the euro coin will release a supermarket trolley.

I have tabled questions asking whether Parliament's bars and canteens will accept euros in the new year, and whether Members of Parliament or even Ministers could be paid in euros if they wish. The London Eye will accept euros, although Buckingham palace still requires convincing. In Northern Ireland, where businesses have been working with two currencies for many years, the Assembly takes it as read—a couple of weeks ago, there was a debate there not dissimilar to this one —that there will be a parallel currency. Businesses currently work with pounds and punts, but after 1 January, that will be pounds and euros. According to a recent survey in *Marketing*, two thirds of electors think that it would be useful and appropriate to have dual pricing so that the price of goods in our shops is shown in euros and pounds.

This time next year, everyone will have been on their continental holiday. Everyone will have bought their margaritas by the pool using euros, whether they went to Greece, Italy, Spain, or anywhere else in Europe.

That will turn this year's euro fear into next year's cool fashion accessory. I can imagine you, Mr. Conway, in the bars—not that you frequent the bars—paying proudly with your new, crisp and colourful euro notes and expecting, or even requesting, that your change be given in euros.

Of course, it is open to any business in the United Kingdom to accept any currency, be it dollars, yen or Guatemalan quetzals. Will our Government nimbly respond to the changing situation and encourage, or discourage, the process? Alternatively, will we sit tight and marooned as events change around us and we keep our euro mantras intact? Can we get our act together sufficiently to respond to the new situation?

Our Government should not sit and watch as the situation develops. We should go with the flow and encourage and support the changes. For example, for a small outlay, we could issue free pound to euro calculators to every household and school in the UK. The French chambers of commerce did that successfully. If hon. Members went to Calais to do Christmas shopping over the past two years, they would have found people proudly holding French chamber of commerce euro calculators.

**Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Allen:** I will, but I ask my hon. Friend to allow the Minister plenty of time to reply.

**Mr. Hopkins:** How would my hon. Friend's system work if there were significant fluctuations in the exchange rate between the euro and sterling? If he proposes a rigid, fixed exchange rate, will that put us back into the exchange rate mechanism and effectively inside the euro?

**Mr. Allen:** I will deal with that question later. Economic arguments are on my website, which I shall give details of later. The precise answer to my hon. Friend's question is that I would expect individuals to deal with the market rate on a per day basis. Indeed, it may be possible for entrepreneurs, be they landladies of a boarding house or arbitrageurs of the City of London, to make a turn on the exchange rate. That may be more encouragement for those who want a dual currency in the UK.

Last week, I introduced the Euro and Sterling Choice Bill. The Bill provides for the Government to make the euro legal tender alongside the pound for the settlement of debts above a certain value. It also provides for dual pricing in pounds and euros of goods and services above that value. The choice of the value is left to Parliament and the Government. Initially, I would envisage a level of £1,000 to exclude everyday transactions in shops and vending machines. However, the level would be sufficiently low to include financial purchases such as cars and consumer durables. Dual pricing would help us to discover the often cheaper prices that are available elsewhere in the European Union. When people travel next year and compare the euro price in a showroom in Athens or Madrid with the euro price in the UK, that will have a beneficial downward effect on consumer prices in the UK, which all too often are concealed behind the myriad exchange rates in Europe. Parliament would be free to lower the £1,000 figure if and when business and consumers—without being forced or pushed—welcomed and started to use the euro and wanted to extend its use. My Bill would also provide Government help for businesses and consumers who want to take advantage of the euro as an alternative means of payment.

Some hon. Members may find the idea of a parallel currency inconvenient or even outlandish. In fact, it is extremely commonplace. All over the world, businesses operate routinely with a parallel currency. Some of those businesses are tiny and their owners and employees have little formal education. If a street trader in India can switch effortlessly between currencies, it should not be impossible for British businesses to do likewise.

The motive for accepting another currency is simple and universal—to make more money. A parallel currency and a legal framework for using it are not an inconvenience to business but a resource. British businesses and British people are capable of using more than one currency if they wish. They should be allowed and encouraged to discover for themselves whether the benefits outweigh the costs.

Serious risks are attached to going cold into the euro and abolishing the pound without effective familiarisation beforehand. The political risks begin with the need to pass a referendum Bill. In that regard, I am happy no longer to be in the Government Whips Office. I may be wrong, but I suspect that the Leader of the House and the Home Secretary are not exactly gagging for the challenge of putting that Bill through Parliament. It will have a difficult passage through both Houses, delay more important and popular legislation, and expose the Government to endless argument and recrimination over the perceived fairness of the referendum question and procedures.

What is the rush? Our European colleagues need us in the euro more than we need to be in the euro. They need us to join, not least to legitimise the euro in the eyes of the United States and the global financial markets. Rather than falling for any euro tosh about missing the boat, train or whatever transport analogy comes to mind, we should consider whether the UK's price for what some have called unilateral economic disarmament is far too low. What about applying a quid pro quo—or a euro pro quo—such as reform of the common agricultural policy, the integration of capital markets in Europe or the acceptance of funded pension schemes, a time bomb of which many in the European Union are not aware? If we choose to join the euro, we should seek to maximise a unique bargaining opportunity.

Setting up a referendum will be difficult enough. Winning it from a cold start—many feel that little has been done to educate the public about the euro so far—will be even harder. Whenever it is held, there will be a risk of defeat. Opposition will come from all parts of the political spectrum, including the Labour movement, from all classes and age groups, from significant economic and business interests, and, above all, from a hostile and unscrupulous media. Turnout will be low, and even strong supporters of the Government will take

*[Mr. Allen]*

it as a free kick—a chance to have a go at the Government of the day to protest on any issue that comes to mind.

There are many economic risks associated with calling, then winning a referendum. Rather than detain my hon. Friend the Minister by reading them out for the record, my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) may wish to browse my website—www.grahamallen.labour.co.uk—on which I have listed them. Any euro-anoraks in the Chamber who feel the need to go through those arguments can do so, but I do not want to impose them all on you, Mr. Conway. We do not need to flagellate ourselves over the euro. We do not need to prove ourselves and our pain in order to make a sensible decision about it. There is a gentler, subtler way on offer.

There is no good economic scenario in which to hold a referendum. If the economy is doing well, why do we need to join the euro and give up the benefits of the Chancellor's excellent economic management? If the economy were doing badly, why would we expect people to trust our economic judgment? Joining the euro is like buying a dog: it is not just for Christmas, it is for ever. My proposal allows us to take the puppy home for a while to see whether it can be house-trained.

A parallel currency would allow British businesses and British people to choose, in their own time and at minimal cost, whether and how they wish to join the euro. That is what my proposal aims to achieve. It would develop competition between the pound and the euro. In the marketplace, people would choose to be paid in the better performing currency—the one that kept more of its value over time. We should experience Gresham's law in reverse: good money driving out bad.

A competitive process would offer significant benefits for our economy and would provide an additional defence against inflation. I am glad that there are some murmurs of support from Conservative Members. The previous Prime Minister, John Major, alluded to the possibility of what he termed a "hard ecu". That is similar to my proposal and would allow some choice.

**Mr. Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester): The hon. Gentleman is right to say that his proposal is strikingly similar to the hard ecu proposal or currency substitution ideas introduced in Major's Administration. My concern about the European monetary union project—I am not against it in principle—is that it is far from similar to buying a dog for life. We might be sold a pup.

**Mr. Allen:** I am pleased to be the straight man for my hon. Friend—I call him my hon. Friend for his lines. None the less, I do not believe that there was a serious point behind the joke.

The political benefits should appeal to my right hon. and hon. Friends. By keeping the pound, the Government would deprive the Conservative leadership of its only popular policy overnight. I am trying to be non-partisan. I would risk saying that it is not the Conservative party's only popular policy, but its only policy, but that would break the all-party consensus that I am trying to develop on the issue.

United Kingdom businesses and customers would conduct an informal rolling referendum, and would provide not a snapshot of one day in the distant future, but a constant series—almost a hidden hand—of market-oriented interventions in buying and selling. That would give a longer-term rolling picture of how the British public felt about the issue. Our European partners would also be relieved to avoid a premature British referendum, which would be likely to paralyse European decision making and provide an outlet for yet more British hostility towards the European Union.

On the economic front, a parallel currency would not need to meet the five economic tests. It would avoid the need to fix exchange rates irretrievably, and avoid the risk of Britain being trapped with the wrong interest rate, thereby being forced to raise taxes or cut public spending. A parallel currency would reinforce convergence with the other economies of Europe but would give time for that convergence to become permanent. Our European partners may also welcome that, as it may be preferable to having to accommodate within the euro zone a large economy that continues to follow a different, more transatlantic economic rhythm. It would spread the costs of conversion to the euro, giving businesses the chance to delay them until it becomes advantageous to use the euro, and it would allow the British people to adjust voluntarily to the euro, if it is successful—and to stick with the pound, if it is not.

My hon. Friend the Minister will have to stick closely to the approved script of the Treasury and No. 10 Downing street. I understand that. However, behind the scenes, I hope that the Government will take seriously the creative, imaginative but very practical idea of encouraging the euro as legal tender alongside the pound. That could provide a democratic and organic way for the British people to take themselves into the euro, if it works—and to walk away from it, if it does not.

12.45 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly):** I am delighted to speak under your chairmanship, Mr. Conway, for the first time in Westminster Hall.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the introduction of the euro in the 12 countries in the euro area, and to restate the Government's policy on membership of the single currency. In the course of so doing, I also hope to answer the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). His speech was thoughtful and well argued. I was delighted to learn that his economic arguments are presented on his website, and I look forward to browsing through them. He has a long-standing interest in these matters, and I hope to hear more from him about them.

The Government's policy on the single currency remains unchanged, as my hon. Friend is well aware. The policy was set out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in October 1997, and it has frequently been reiterated by the Chancellor and the Prime Minister. In principle, the Government are in favour of UK membership of EMU. In practice, the economic conditions must be right. The Government have set out five economic tests that must be met before any decision to join the euro can be made, and an assessment of those five tests will be made within two years of the start of this Parliament.

The Government believe that, if a clear and unambiguous case in favour of joining can be made, it would be right and proper to put that case to Parliament

and, subsequently, to the British people in a referendum. Government, Parliament and the people must all agree. It is clear that my hon. Friend would impose the euro on the British people before they had the opportunity to register their preference in a referendum; that is inherent in the proposal that he has put forward today.

I turn to the important subject of business preparations. The introduction of the euro marks the end of years of careful planning in the 12 countries in the euro area. Wim Duisenberg, president of the European central bank, has highlighted the challenge of the cash changeover. It must not be underestimated, but he is confident that careful and comprehensive preparations should ensure a smooth changeover. In the United Kingdom, we must be equally careful and equally comprehensive. Let us make no mistake: for firms operating in the United Kingdom, the introduction of the euro marks a major change in the business environment—not a threat to our tradition of free trade, but an opportunity to engage in a more efficient and competitive single market.

The changeover will have major implications for businesses with links with the European Union, including importers and exporters. Our fellow members of the EU are the recipients of the majority of the United Kingdom's overseas trade; over half of our exports go to other members of the EU. Individually, France, Germany or Italy may not be our largest trading partner, but I do not think many people are aware that we export more to the Netherlands than we do to Japan. The EU as a whole accounts for about 53 per cent. of our exports. That means that it is more important for our exporters than the United States of America or the far east.

**Mr. Tyrie:** That is visible trade.

**Ruth Kelly:** The hon. Gentleman makes a point from a sedentary position. I am sure that he is well qualified to speak on such matters, but he would not doubt that trade with the euro zone is important to companies in the UK. The euro zone is not as far away as one might think. The Republic of Ireland will, of course, also be dealing in euros. It is vital that companies in the UK are able to benefit from free trade with our European partners. From 1 January next year, that means having the choice to trade, quote, invoice and account in euros.

**Mr. Hopkins:** I am interested in our trade relations with the euro zone countries. Currently, a significant trade deficit arises from the overvaluation of our currency in relation to the euro, or the undervaluation of the euro in relation to sterling. If no reference is made to an appropriate parity during our entry discussions, there might be serious dangers. If there is overvaluation, it will leave us at a permanent competitive disadvantage. Alternatively, if we try to get down to a serious competitive parity, euro zone countries might find that unacceptable.

**Ruth Kelly:** The Chancellor has made his position clear. The economic case must be clear and unambiguous before the Government recommend to Parliament and the people, in a referendum, that we should enter the euro. The tests must have been met.

**Mr. Allen:** May I obliquely refer to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North? Clearly, the more we trade in sterling and the euro within the European Union, and the more we are dealing with the euro in the UK, the more accurate a market rate we will develop as we move, if we do, towards a European referendum. The most viable rate at which to go in will be a sustainable one, which will be closer to a market rate. The more market transactions, the more likely it will be that we will reach that rate by encouraging use of euros, rather than allowing things to move at their own steady pace.

**Ruth Kelly:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, but it is not one with which the Government agree. Our position is that the economic case must be clear and unambiguous before the recommendation to join the euro is made to Parliament and the British people, whereas he proposes that the euro should be adopted before that case is clear and unambiguous.

To return to the question of business preparations, we have been working with businesses in the UK for the past few years to ensure that they achieve the right level of preparation for the euro. Our euro website has received 230,000 visits. A guide, "Using the euro—competing in Europe" has been mailed to 1.5 million small and medium-sized enterprises, and a leaflet has been sent to 1.6 million businesses with autumn VAT returns. We are ratcheting up our efforts as the introduction of notes and coins draws near.

Of course we want as many businesses as possible to be prepared, and we have made every effort to assist them. However, we will not go down the road of compulsion. Why is that? Among other reasons, there would be potentially significant costs to business were we to do so. UK businesses already have the choice to use the euro. There is no need to legislate for that choice. Many retailers have already stated that they will accept euros in many of their outlets—for example, in hotel chains and major tourist areas. I recently visited the North West Euro Forum near my own constituency in Bolton. In the course of meeting businesses large and small, I was impressed by their engagement with the possibilities opened up by the introduction of the euro. They saw it as an opportunity to gain competitive advantage and break into new markets. Their attitude might be very different if, instead of having the choice of trading, pricing and invoicing in euros, they faced a compulsion to do so, whether or not they judged that it was in their best interests, before the economic case had been decided, and without the consent of the British people.

**Mr. Allen:** To pick up on my hon. Friend's point, it may therefore be sensible for the Government not to adopt the figure of £1,000. Let us start a lot higher—at £1 million, or whatever the Government or Parliament feel is appropriate as a way of testing the water.

To correct a possible misunderstanding, especially in the Treasury, I do not propose that we ditch the five economic tests; indeed, I agree that they must be passed if we go exclusively into the euro. My proposal is to dip a toe in the water before making that decision. I would not want it to be regarded as an alternative. It is in a sense the widest possible market testing ahead of the difficult decision that must be made on, I agree, the basis of the five tests.

**Ruth Kelly:** I thank my hon. Friend for making his position clear. I respect the fact that he does not believe

*[Ruth Kelly]*

that we should abandon the five economic tests. As he acknowledges, businesses already accept the euro. Even Northern Ireland would be directly affected by the euro. Many businesses in Northern Ireland may choose to accept the euro, just as Irish punts are accepted today. However, I do not believe that merely raising the threshold of the limit changes the principle involved. I therefore disagree with him in that respect.

**Mr. Tyrie:** Will the Economic Secretary give way?

**Ruth Kelly:** I must make some progress.

**Mr. Tyrie:** I promise to be brief.

I am sympathetic to the idea of currency substitution in principle, but a cost is involved to the Exchequer in the loss of seignorage. Will the Economic Secretary estimate what seignorage loss the Government expect without an element of compulsion? If she does not have the figures with her, perhaps she would send them to me and make them publicly available.

**Ruth Kelly:** I have the figures with me, and I shall give the hon. Gentleman an estimate. However, I shall finish the argument that I was advancing when I gave way.

The argument advanced in the Bill is that using the euro as a parallel currency would avoid the deadweight cost of converting Britain to the euro. However, in most cases the systems that would allow dual currency functions would be similar to those necessary for a complete changeover to a single currency. Legislation to make the euro legal tender alongside sterling would not avoid the deadweight cost. Indeed, it is hard to envisage how that would demonstrably help UK business. Businesses with both high and low-cost transactions would be placed in a particularly difficult position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North would effectively be asking shops and businesses to incur the costs of accepting two distinct currencies simultaneously and indefinitely, while denying them the benefits accruing from participation in the single currency area. They would face the additional expense of maintaining a daily calculation of exchange rates, running concurrent pricing system structures, training staff to work with euro cash and maintaining accounts in two currencies. In addition, UK businesses would still be adversely affected by the foreign currency and hedging issues arising from trade with euro-area businesses. Issues of complexity would be involved.

My hon. Friend says that two thirds of people believe that it would be helpful if shops showed euro prices alongside sterling prices. However, there are difficulties in doing that, and it may cause confusion, especially as euro and sterling would not, under his proposals, have a fixed exchange rate.

The value of debts would be affected by fluctuations between sterling and the euro. Those fluctuations in value would be more pronounced in the relatively high value transactions that my hon. Friend suggests would be subject to the dual pricing requirements. I have only a minute left, and I had better discuss seignorage if I have a chance.

Notes and coins in circulation generate seignorage income from the issuing authority. To put the figures into the public domain, for every £1 billion of sterling notes displaced, an estimated £39 million of seignorage would be lost each year. For every £1 billion of sterling coins displaced, an estimated £880 million would be lost. Granting parallel legal tender status to the euro without the UK's entering the single currency would therefore entail a transfer of seignorage away from the UK. It would have other implications, which I do not have time to go into today.

The proposal of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North has significant disadvantages, particularly the extra cost to business. Business could regard the euro as a threat—

**Mr. Derek Conway (in the Chair):** Order. Time is up.

## Police Funding (Dorset)

1 pm

**Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr. Conway. First, I should apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), who is otherwise engaged with his duties as shadow Home Secretary, but who offers his support for this debate. I have also contacted the Minister's office about my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) making a brief contribution to the debate, and I am sure that the Minister is happy with that. I am also pleased that my other Dorset colleagues, the hon. Members for South Dorset (Jim Knight) and for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke), are attending this important debate.

Dorset police are a good and efficient force, and Dorset's crime levels are low compared with the rest of the country. However, there is an on-going funding problem, which I am here to address. Neither I nor my colleagues feel that Dorset is being treated fairly. The Government's headline settlement figure for the increase in policing is 6.1 per cent., and 3.3 per cent. is maintained for central initiatives and priorities, including the crime fighting fund. The figure for centrally provided services such as the National Crime Squad, and for the general increase in respect of individual police authorities, is just 2.8 per cent. Although forces such as Dorset's receive a share of the crime fighting fund, rural moneys and Airwave funding, the settlement is not particularly good. Differences in funding resulting from the present formula cannot be explained by the different spending needs of police authorities. The matter is dealt with in part in the recent White Paper, which in general we welcome.

The level of policing in Dorset is good despite the low level of funding. The 2000-02 budget provided real opportunities to improve and increase operational effectiveness. Dorset police are grateful for Government support for its private finance initiative project, and for grant in support of party conference policing, which is particularly useful in Dorset. Continuation of the 2002-03 crime fighting fund, and of rural and Airwave grants, is also most welcome.

Our principal concern is that Dorset police receive the second lowest amount of central funding per head of population of any police authority in England. The difference between Dorset police and the rest of the service increased following the 2001-02 settlement, and matters have not been improved by the 2002-03 settlement. Dorset remains 3 per cent. below the third lowest funded authority, receiving only £85.40 per head, yet the weighted average is £110.39. If Dorset received the average, it would receive an extra £17 million in central funding.

Last year, Dorset police received the third lowest funding increase of any authority. For 2002-03, Dorset police will receive the standard spending assessment increase of 2.8 per cent., which is approximately the average. However, the settlement is not enough to cover even basic police pay increases of 3.5 per cent., and national estimate pension increases of 8 per cent. Dorset cannot continue to absorb a funding shortfall through reductions in expenditure and increases in precept beyond the level of other authorities. According to future funding figures in the comprehensive spending review, and to our prediction on police pensions, times will be hard for police authorities, particularly Dorset's. There is much concern that Dorset will suffer disproportionately, and that the poor overall settlement will exacerbate an already difficult funding situation.

The on-going low level of central funding has two direct results, the first of which affects resources available to fund policing in Dorset. I am pleased that the crime fighting fund has enabled an increase in officer numbers, but Dorset still has 95 more members of the public per police officer than the English average. It has a population of 511 per police officer, compared with the English average of 416.

Secondly, low central funding affects the level of council tax paid by the population of Dorset. Dorset police authority carefully balances the needs of policing with the cost to council tax payers, and expenditure per head of population that is 22 per cent. below the service average is testimony to that. Nevertheless, a low central contribution means that Dorset currently has the third highest council tax of any police authority, a situation unlikely to improve in 2002-03.

**Jim Knight** (South Dorset): I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, overall, Dorset does not get its fair share, but while he is on the subject of council tax, I remind him of one piece of good news that he has not so far mentioned. The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced in the local government White Paper last week the intention to remove the council tax benefit subsidy limitation. That is good news for us because it should result in a reduction in the precept.

**Mr. Syms:** It should do. It is good news, but we will still have a fairly high precept in Dorset.

The 2001-02 budget is £3 million below the total needed to provide the same level of service as in 1992-93. Since 1995-96, the budget has increased by 29 per cent., but central funding by only 17 per cent. Expenditure on pensions has increased by 83 per cent. in the same period. In 1995-96, Dorset police authority received 78 per cent. of its funding from the centre. By 2001-02 that had been reduced to 70 per cent. Although the budget requirement for 2002-03 has not yet been finalised, the discussions currently going on with the police authority are for a precept increase of between 10 and 14 per cent. That is likely to keep us somewhere at the top of the list of precepting authorities.

Issues of real concern to the authority include changes in grant allocation, the future of the crime fighting fund—the CFF—rural funding and the funding of pensions affecting Dorset in particular because of its low central funding. What help could be provided? It is important that floors and ceilings have been applied for 2002-03. That is welcome. It is important to continue to apply any funding changes that may arise from data or methodology changes, especially because of the proposals in the local government White Paper.

It would be helpful if there were more stability in the CFF and rural grant, which could continue outside the standard spending assessment and affect the time for which the grants were allocated. Assurances on the medium-term future of rural and CFF funding could be

*[Mr. Syms]*

made to assist planning and budget strategy. Pensions data should be updated, perhaps with assurances provided by external auditors. Increased predictability of general fund settlements for future years would be helpful. Spending review figures have not provided the detail that individual police authorities could use for financial planning. That must be improved.

The additional detailed settlement information that is available from the website of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for the first time this year has helped us to analyse the position, but further comparison tables would make the analysis more complete and straightforward. We are interested in seeing how the elements of the formula have changed to affect our settlement. Comparisons with other forces are helpful. The availability of capital grant information at the same level as information on revenue funding would assist us greatly.

Recent years have seen a trend in capital information being made available much later in December, or even in January. The two budgets are necessarily interlinked, and it is difficult for the authority to give firm budgetary direction when part of the settlement is not known. Dorset police support a formula-based method of fund allocation, but some issues relating to the formula must be taken into account in any future developments.

The first such issue is area cost adjustment, something that comes up again and again in the south-west. A report produced in 1996 at the Government's request acknowledged that the majority of police expenditure went on pay and pensions and that, apart from the housing allowance and London weighting, there was no variation of costs between authorities. The report recommended a recalculation of the ACA, which would have expanded recompense for higher rates and support staff costs to areas adjoining the current ACA area. That would have provided an additional £1 million funding to Dorset police. It is important for Dorset that proposed changes take that into account.

The second area of concern is SSA variations. Clearly, the White Paper on local authority finance seeks to reassure all authorities that SSA variations will be carefully managed to avoid significant changes in funding. However, to put SSA changes into context, their effect on relatively small authorities such as Dorset can be devastating. For example, if an authority received 0.99 per cent. of total police SSA rather than 1 per cent., its funding would be reduced by £1 million.

The third area of concern is the data used in the pension calculation, which were provided as long ago as 1995. It cannot be right that funding for such an important aspect of expenditure is based on potentially out-of-date information. To give an indication of the scale of the financial effect of police pensions, they accounted for 10 per cent. of overall expenditure in 1995-96. In 2001-02, they represent 15 per cent., and it is estimated that by 2005-06 they will represent 17 per cent. It is vital that authorities can be reassured that the data that is used to allocate funding is accurate, especially in the case of authorities such as Dorset that are at the bottom of the funding level.

**Mrs. Annette L. Brooke** (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there could be no better time to review the problems that he is describing, given the recent White Papers on police reform and local government settlement reform?

**Mr. Syms:** I agree with the hon. Lady, but it is always a matter of winners and losers when one is dealing with a formula. We Dorset Members are arguing the best case for our authority, which has not been treated fairly. It has struggled with settlements over a long time, including under the previous Government, and that has led to problems in terms of police funding.

Fourthly, the review of SSA methods of calculation that was announced in the White Paper should take full account of the unique funding position of police authorities. All police authorities have a lower proportion of their funding met through council tax than local councils, owing to direct police grants. That has meant that the impact on council tax payers of changes has been disproportionate when applied to police authorities.

**Jim Knight:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has said that when the formula is reviewed there will be winners and losers. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that we have to keep reminding the Government that we in Dorset have been losers for too long and it is about time we were winners. When the formula is reviewed, we must ensure that we are not on the losing side again.

**Mr. Syms:** That is absolutely right. As local Members of Parliament, we experience pressure from our constituents for more policing, we put pressure on the chief constable and the police authority, and the police authority faces the problems of juggling the budget. Difficult issues such as pensions are starting to have a big impact on Dorset's funding.

We have mounting problems in Dorset. We are second lowest in terms of funding, we have one of the highest council tax precepts and our low budget base will inevitably cause the chief constable difficulties in undertaking policing in the county. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response after my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch has, I hope, supported me in my arguments.

1.12 pm

**Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): I certainly support my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) and congratulate him on securing the debate.

This has been an issue for us in Dorset for many years. Last year, when Dorset Members took a deputation led by the chief constable to see the Minister's predecessor, he gave us to believe that we had a strong case and that the Government would respond to it. It is therefore particularly disappointing to find that this year's settlement is the same as before.

In essence, the Government say that Dorset police authority needs to spend only £75.5 million a year, yet the police authority says that it needs to spend £85.5 million a year. That extra £10 million has to be funded totally by the council tax payer. As the Minister knows, a disproportionately high number of council tax payers in Dorset are in pensioner households and on fixed incomes. If they are faced with a 10 per cent. to 14 per cent. increase in their police precept this year, they will have to cut other items of household expenditure.

We in Dorset have the third highest council tax of any police authority, but because of our high property values we make the highest per capita contribution towards the police of anywhere in the country. As my hon. Friend said, the fact that our spending is so much below the national average suggests that something unfair is happening in the system. I look to the Minister to sort it out for Dorset by bringing that to an end.

1.14 pm

**The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) on securing this debate on police funding in Dorset. I am pleased to see so many of his Dorset colleagues from different parties in the Chamber. This is a useful, albeit brief, opportunity to air some of the concerns and issues about crime and policing in Dorset and to discuss the resources that the Government provide to support policing in Dorset.

It is worth emphasising the point made by the hon. Member for Poole that the record on crime in Dorset—that is what people are primarily concerned about—is good relative to the remainder of the country. Crime recorded by police in Dorset fell by 3.8 per cent. during the 12 months to March 2001, which is better than the national picture—crime throughout England and Wales fell during the same period, but by 2.5 per cent. Throughout the south-west, recorded crime fell by 2.6 per cent. during the 12 months to March 2001 and since 1997 has fallen by 14.6 per cent. Those are important reductions in crime. During the past five years, recorded crime in Dorset has fallen by 22.1 per cent., compared with the national average for England and Wales of 11.75 per cent. Detection rates in Dorset are also slightly better than the national average in England and Wales. Some good results should be recorded about the level of crime in Dorset.

We are committed to raising police standards wherever necessary, and in our recent White Paper we set out more details of our proposals to set up a new standards unit. We have established in Dorset, as in other parts of the country, local crime and disorder reduction partnerships to ensure that the police can work effectively with other local agencies to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour at local level. We are backing that with the biggest ever investment in crime reduction. The crime reduction director for the south-west tells me that Dorset has received around £2.6 million from the crime reduction programme to help with crime reduction initiatives throughout the county, ranging from large-scale closed circuit television projects to burglary reduction projects in houses in multiple occupation. An additional £650,000 has been allocated from the community against drugs fund in the current financial year to tackle drug markets and reduce drug-related crime. We are making a significantly broader investment in fighting crime in Dorset, which will be welcomed by all hon. Members who are present this afternoon.

We have recently announced that the provisional police funding settlement for 2002-03 at national level will be just over £9 billion. That is a 6.1 per cent. increase and builds on the record 10 per cent. increase last year. The amount going directly to police authorities, including funding for specific initiatives—for example, the crime fighting fund, the rural policing fund and Airwave, all of which Dorset benefits from—will increase by 5 per cent. The settlement is just part of our commitment to crime reduction.

Through the settlement for next year, Dorset will receive an increase in total standing spending, excluding specific initiatives, of 2.9 per cent. over this year, which is higher than the average increase for forces in England and Wales. In addition, Dorset will receive £1.892 million through the crime fighting fund for the specific purpose of recruiting additional police officers to police the towns and villages of Dorset; that is over and above the amount of money that is received in the police grant.

Dorset continues to benefit from additional funding towards the cost of Airwave, which is the new radio communications system for police forces. It will receive around £200,000 towards that next year. That is a centrally provided budget, but it is for something that is an absolute operational necessity to the police service—decent communications are essential—as is the money for police officers. The fact that it does not appear in the grant should not lead us to believe that Dorset is not receiving a more substantial increase in resources, which will be of practical benefit to the police and communities.

We recognise the problems of policing rural areas, and that is why in the last spending settlement we announced that an extra £30 million will be invested for the next three years in those police authorities that contain substantial rural areas. Dorset receives £442,000 from the rural policing fund this year, and it will receive slightly more than that next year. This is additional funding for the force over and above the grant settlement that we discussed earlier. I am confident that the extra resources will help to sustain quality rural policing. It is for forces to decide how best to use the additional resources, and they must explain how that is done in their annual policing and best value performance plan.

Dorset has used the money to provide two mobile community support units with facilities to report crime and incidents online. The units regularly serve rural areas and market towns. Specially selected support personnel staff them. Visits to communities by those units are often arranged to coincide with a visit from the local community officer. Those facilities increase police presence and visibility, and will give added reassurance to those living in rural areas. I understand from the chief constable that the units have been well received and that the facilities are being used effectively. Indeed, I have an outstanding invitation from the chief constable to visit the units in Dorset, which I hope to be able to do next year. When the crime fighting fund and the rural policing fund are taken into account along with grant funding, Dorset police force will benefit from an overall increase in funding of 3.4 per cent.

*[Mr. John Denham]*

The hon. Members for Poole and for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) reasonably raised several issues about funding. I shall refer the matters relating to information available on the DTLR website to my ministerial colleagues to see whether they want to respond.

I turn to a substantive issue. Police pensions represent an increasing burden to many police authorities. That has been reflected in the increasing size of the pensions component within the funding formula, which has risen from 13.2 per cent. in 1998-99 to 14.5 per cent. in 1999-2000. Rising costs are a matter of concern to both the police service and to Ministers, and a review of the issue by the Home Office and Treasury officials is nearing completion. The options include establishing fully funded schemes and changing the way in which expenditure on police and fire pensions is presented in the accounts. The views of police authorities and other key stakeholders have been sought.

In the recent White Paper in which we examined future arrangements for police pensions, we acknowledged the importance of having a system of benefits that is appropriate to the 21st century and that gives greater certainty to police authorities in planning their pension budgets. I hope that I shall receive a report on the alternatives in the new year. Meanwhile, we intend to update the pensions data used in the police funding formula in time for the next settlement, which addresses a specific point raised by the hon. Member for Poole.

I turn to the formula, the SSA process and the area cost adjustment. In the White Paper on local government, which was published last week, the Government outlined a number of weaknesses in formula grant distribution, but stressed that formulae can continue as the basis for distributing the great majority of general grant. However, the systems must be fairer and more intelligible, although formulae cannot take into account every local circumstance in each police authority. The White Paper emphasised the Government's commitment to introduce new grant formulae to replace SSA from 2003. That will clearly have consequences for the formula for police authorities, which we will need to address.

The area cost adjustment is designed to reflect the higher costs of providing a policing service in London and the south-east. Some forces regard the ACA as inappropriate in a service in which pay is nationally determined. It is also true that the dates used are volatile and can swing significantly from one year to the next. The methodology for determining the ACA is a matter for the DTLR. A review is under way and we are taking a close interest in that.

**Jim Knight:** Last week, when the Secretary of State made a statement on the local government White Paper, he repeated his assertion that the formula was unfair. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the formula is unfair, particularly in relation to the police? My constituency has one of the lowest levels of funding in the country and one of the most efficient forces, yet we are paying the highest proportion of council tax. It will be of some comfort to council tax payers in Dorset if the Minister agrees that that is unfair and that he hopes that we will get something better.

**Mr. Denham:** I am sure that it would be of enormous benefit to the taxpayers of Dorset if I were to say what my hon. Friend invites me to, but it is more prudent to say that we recognise that worries exist about the way in which the area cost adjustment is calculated and operated. It is not inherently unfair and it should be possible to produce a system that is better and more widely understood, which will also mean that it is better supported.

Police numbers are of great concern to everybody. As we announced yesterday, we have had the largest intake of recruits into the police service of England and Wales since 1979, and we are well on our way to achieving a record number by April 2003. Dorset is already in the position of having record numbers of police officers—1,360 at the end of September, which is 76 more than in March 1997. The hon. Member for Poole talked about officers per head of population. Some 18 forces, most of which are predominantly rural like Dorset, have fewer officers per head of population than Dorset. Therefore, although I cannot say that Dorset is in the strongest position, many have worse ratios.

We have record numbers in Dorset, which is good news. In addition, civilian support staff numbers have risen to 721; that is 126 more staff than in 1997. Civilian staff play a crucial role in releasing police officers from paperwork and jobs that can be done as effectively, and sometimes better, by civilians. That allows the record number of police officers to devote more time to professional policing work.

We have achieved that through the introduction of the CFF. Dorset police have been allocated 85 recruits from that fund. They were so successful in their recruitment efforts that, in 2000-01, they were able to bring forward part of this year's allocation and recruited 46 recruits through the CFF, compared with the 29 that they had been allocated. The excellent record on recruitment continues: the force expects to use all remaining allocation for CFF recruits for this year, and we are considering a request to bring forward into this year six further recruits that were scheduled and budgeted to be recruited next year.

I am pleased to say that wastage—a terrible term—which means the loss of officers to the force through resignation, retirement or movement to other jobs, has fallen in Dorset during the past year. Therefore, its record on retention and recruitment looks to be good. Both additional recruitment and the reduction in wastage have helped to achieve the record police officer numbers that Dorset enjoys today.

This has been a useful opportunity to raise a number of important issues. We are committed to providing Dorset, and indeed all police forces, with the resources that they need to continue to provide a quality service to the public. The hon. Member for Poole and his colleagues have raised legitimate issues for discussion, but I hope that I have been able to put those in context by talking about the good performance in Dorset in bringing down crime, and the excellent record in increasing the number of police officers who are there to serve the public.

## Bedfordshire Health Services

1.30 pm

**Mr. Patrick Hall** (Bedford): I am very pleased to have secured this short debate on the funding of Bedfordshire health services, although I chose for the title, "Underfunding of Bedfordshire Health Services". I have sought this debate to draw attention to the long-term, underlying underfunding of national health services in Bedfordshire, and to ask that action be taken to put things right.

Bedfordshire has been at or below target since the funding formula based on population was introduced in the mid-1970s. Despite the real growth nationally in NHS funding that has thankfully occurred since the late 1990s, Bedfordshire health authority has continued to move further away from target: for example, from 3.61 per cent. below in 1998-99, to 4.4 per cent. below in the current financial year. That is contrary to the Government's general policy of moving health authorities closer to their capitation target.

The principal reason for that damaging trend is the scale of population growth in the area and the failure of NHS annual allocations to keep pace with it. Bedfordshire, in particular mid and north Bedfordshire, is located in the sub-region between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge, which is one of the fastest growing areas of England and is set to remain so for at least the next 20 years in the light of regional planning policies and housing allocations supported by the Government. Bedfordshire's difficult financial position was made even worse in the current financial year, when the pace-of-change policy on achieving target was suspended pending a major review of the national capitation formula, and replaced by an interim measure known as years of life lost.

I am in favour of these matters being reviewed to ensure that fair shares can be achieved more quickly than hitherto and that needs can be met, but I am not in favour of an allocation system whereby Bedfordshire loses out year after year. I welcome the improvements in revenue funding that have been made and sustained by this Government—they are real—but the point about Bedfordshire's weak position is that its budget base is too small. Therefore, the satisfactory and even very good percentage allocations that have been made in the annual budget rounds of late do not yield enough growth to strengthen that weak base sufficiently. Those things really matter in terms of delivering health services and making progress with modernisation.

The main issue at Bedford hospital is the lack of capacity—insufficient beds, inadequate operating theatre capacity, and insufficient out-patient facilities. Furthermore, there is long-term neglect of the local social services and home care infrastructure, poorly worked up intermediate care, excessive dependency on in-patient care and, of course, bed blocking. All those things chase each other around to create pressures on the budget, on staff and on patients.

Bedford hospital faces serious problems. It is not meeting its waiting list targets, waiting times are not reducing, and the number of cancelled operations is rising, forcing some people to go private at their own expense. That is offensive and unacceptable, not to mention all those people who are waiting longer at home, perhaps in pain but certainly anxious.

Admissions to Bedford hospital's accident and emergency department have increased substantially since early 1998. It is not limited to the winter months; admissions increase all year round. I understand that the annual rate of increase has been around 10 per cent. compared with the national average increase of 1.5 per cent. As I have recently seen for myself, pathology services at Bedford hospital are also considerably underfunded. I have raised the matter with the Under-Secretary of State for Health, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath. I hope that, within the next few weeks, the business case for improved facilities at Bedford hospital will be considered favourably. We shall wait and see.

Given those pressures, it is perhaps not surprising that Bedford Hospital NHS trust is heading for a projected £3 million overspend, £1 million of which is due to expenditure on elective surgery in the private sector and funding beds in private nursing homes. The key problem in community health services is its historically weak infrastructure—its inadequate capacity. That causes negative knock-on effects for the acute sector. The threshold at which someone receives the care that they need is higher than it should be; it is higher than in many other parts of the country. In other words, to receive that care in Bedfordshire, a person's health has to be worse than that of a person who lives elsewhere. That is the clear impression of some district nurses in Bedfordshire who have recently worked in other places.

The lack of capacity puts great pressure on the community funding required to meet the exceptional needs of some patients in the community. Because of the lack of local facilities, the community trust, primary care trusts and Bedfordshire social services have to fund expensive out-of-county placements. Services for children and adolescents may incur heavy costs that last for many years.

Mental health services are also under pressure. The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health undertook an external review and concluded that such services are 20 per cent. below their target level compared with similar health authorities. Historic underfunding has prevented the community trust from reproviding mental health services at the Weller wing at Bedford hospital and from meeting its obligations under the national health service framework for mental health. The closure some 10 years ago of Clapham hospital and John Bunyan ward at the Bedford hospital north wing site, which provided beds for the long-term sick elderly, was not followed by the reprovision of rehabilitation, intermediate and home care facilities.

**Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important for consultation between NHS trusts to be improved when there are closures? I refer to what is happening at Hemel Hempstead, where services for women and children are being closed. Does he agree that it is not right that the first senior management at Luton and Dunstable Hospital trust knew about the closure was when they heard it on the local radio? At such short notice, it is impossible for them to plan properly.

**Mr. Hall:** That is unsatisfactory. Co-operation and partnership working are a key goal of the NHS plan. The lack of it in the past has been a source of problems.

*[Mr. Hall]*

As I said, the closure of Clapham hospital and the John Bunyan ward at Bedford hospital's north wing site was not followed by reprovision of facilities in the community. If such facilities had been provided, elderly patients might have been able to leave hospital more quickly. It might also have prevented many of them from going into hospital in the first place. Again, there is a failure to invest. It contributes to the real problems facing the NHS in Bedfordshire. There are many other matters, including tackling health inequalities and drug addiction, but lack of time prevents me from pursuing such issues.

**Mr. Jonathan Sayeed** (Mid-Bedfordshire): I shall be brief, as I do not wish to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's excellent speech. The critical question—for not only this Government but previous Governments—is why Bedfordshire has not received the funding to which the Government acknowledge it is entitled.

**Mr. Hall:** That is the question that I am addressing today. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman supports the efforts to deal with what went wrong in the past; many things did go wrong.

In the light of limited time, I am concentrating on what I understand to be the key problems. They have been put to me by people who work in the NHS and my constituents; I have seen them, too. I acknowledge the efforts of, and the high standards that are often achieved by, those who work in the NHS. There is no doubt that morale is not that high. However, I am convinced that the staff believe in the NHS and want it to work. That reflects the views of the public.

Of course, some positive things have happened and are happening at all levels in Bedfordshire. Bedford hospital has a refurbished operating theatre and accident and emergency department. It has doubled the number of beds in the critical care unit. The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance and Paramedic Service NHS trust has attracted and trained 800 volunteers to assist qualified staff. NHS dentistry has returned to Bedford and Kempston. A community outreach programme for children and adolescents with mental health problems has received national recognition, and a project aimed at employers to enhance the awareness of adults with mental health problems has been acclaimed. In primary care, there are innovations of a 24-hour advanced care scheme and the use of electronic patient records to help general practitioners and hospitals to deal with patients more efficiently.

I have great hope in the sustained development of co-operation at different levels in the local NHS economy. In sharp contrast with the past, people are talking to each other. There is a culture change. People in the NHS at management and other levels are prepared to learn from each other and to put the patient and the community first. The primary care trusts have been instrumental in triggering that. It is a new way of working that belongs to all and includes social services.

Reform is important alongside funding. I do not deny that the long-term capacity weaknesses in Bedfordshire to which I referred are associated with a past lack of local leadership and partnership. Although the NHS plan generates cynicism and indifference from some quarters, it inspires others in the NHS who believe in the NHS and want it to succeed. The frustration for such people occurs when the lack of capacity and long-term underfunding impede the delivery of that plan.

I have a number of points to put to my hon. Friend the Minister. First, will she acknowledge the long-term underfunding and the lack of capacity that is associated with that in the area served by Bedfordshire health authority?

Secondly, I am delighted by the announcement of next year's allocation, which is the third most generous in England and, for the first time in years, begins to close the gap. None the less, Bedfordshire remains the second worst funded health authority in England in terms of distance from the fair shares target. Will the Minister acknowledge the case for above-average capitation increases year on year in Bedfordshire to close that gap as soon as possible?

My third point is also about capitation. Will the Minister acknowledge that population estimates and forecasts consistently indicate that the population of the northern and middle parts of the county taken together—broadly the catchment area of Bedford general hospital—will continue to grow quickly? Between 1991 and 2011, the growth in the total population will be 121 per cent.. However, more significantly for the NHS, the growth in the number of over-65s will be 120 per cent., in the number of over-75s 131 per cent. and in the number of over-85s 149 per cent.. The growth of 108 per cent. in the population of the under-fives reflects a growing younger population. Those demographic pressures are important because, as the Minister knows, roughly two thirds of NHS expenditure is on the over-65s and the very elderly. A further 10th of expenditure is on under-fives. Both categories are growing fast in Bedfordshire, and they are set to continue doing so.

Bedford hospital has experienced heavy increases in A and E admissions, which have added to cost pressures. I understand that no systematic research into that trend has taken place, despite the fact that it has been continuing for about three years. Will the Minister ensure that that research is conducted soon, so that action can be taken, resources can be effectively targeted and additional resources can be allocated, if necessary?

I turn to the insufficient bed capacity at Bedford hospital. There is a strongly held view within the trust that, although increased capacity and other changes are required throughout the local NHS, the situation is so severe in Bedford that, to break the cycle, a new, fully staffed, 25-bed modular ward is needed as soon as possible. I recently read that the national beds inquiry had suggested that, as a guide, an extra 55 general and acute in-patient beds, 45 intermediate care beds, and 23 day care beds should be provided by 2003-04 in the Bedfordshire health authority area, which includes the south of the county. I also learned that that issue did not necessarily revolve around increasing bed provision at acute hospitals, and that the development of intermediate care could lead to a substitution of acute beds by community provision.

I have spent much of my speech emphasising the importance of developing strong community provision, and thereby improving the range of services available to

people, while taking the pressure off the acute sector. However, I hope that that argument will not be used to weaken the case for the additional capacity that is desperately needed at Bedford hospital. I apologise for not mentioning Luton and Dunstable hospital. I am not speaking against that hospital, but Bedford hospital desperately needs that extra capacity, and it is needed sooner rather than later—certainly sooner than the unambitious goal of 2003-04 that was mentioned by the national beds inquiry.

**Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North): My hon. Friend mentioned Luton and Dunstable hospital. I support his excellent speech by pointing out that the problems in Bedfordshire are not caused by the inefficiency or the lack of dedication of the staff. On the contrary, they have done a tremendous job, as is demonstrated by the fact that Luton and Dunstable hospital obtained a three-star rating—it is, I understand, the 11th best hospital in the country. The problem is lack of resources.

**Mr. Hall:** The problem is lack of resources throughout the health economy, not just with regard to hospitals, which is what the media tend to concentrate on: the rest of the NHS matters very much, as my hon. Friend understands.

I am convinced that if a modernised NHS is to be achieved, which all of us want, it will need to include, in Bedfordshire, a strengthening of the acute sector at Bedford hospital, as well as at Luton and Dunstable hospital, and the creation of decent community services, so that a comprehensive and balanced service that puts the needs of patients first is created.

1.48 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) on securing this important debate on the funding of Bedfordshire health services. He has rightly been raising concerns about the matter for a long while.

I want to try to address my hon. Friend's concerns in turn. As he will be aware, the Government's plans for the NHS involve both extra money and reform. It must be reformed to deliver improved and more responsive services to match modern needs, and to ensure that patients have more power and greater choice over services. Reform is also necessary to empower communities to have greater involvement with local services. My hon. Friend mentioned many of those points. They are the reasons why we are shifting the balance of power in the NHS by getting money to the people who are on the front line, so that they can, in consultation with patients and local communities, decide on the services that they need to deliver.

The NHS needs more investment, in Bedfordshire and across the country. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Secretary of State for Health announced on 6 December that health authorities in England will receive total allocations of £41.5 billion in 2002-2003. That is an increase of £3.7 billion from this year and represents an average cash increase of 9.9 per cent., which is a real-terms rise of 7.2 per cent. Our key priorities for the money are to make an enhanced effort to build capacity and increase activity levels in the national health service. We want to reduce waiting times further, particularly for cardiac patients. We also want to ensure that, by the end of 2002, 90 per cent. of general practitioners see their patients within 48 hours, and we want to enable some patients to choose where and when they are treated for the first time.

Health services in the eastern region will receive an extra £373.4 million. Those extra resources will help us to cut waiting times for treatment and build local health services with more doctors and nurses. The extra funding will also help us to continue the fight against cancer and coronary heart disease—two of the country's biggest killers. Next year, Bedfordshire health authority will receive an increase of £39.1 million, or 10.5 per cent. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford said, that is the fourth largest increase provided to a health authority in England.

My hon. Friend is right to say that Bedfordshire's allocation will remain 4 per cent. below its fair share as calculated under the formula. However, he will recognise that the Government are making sustained additional investment in local health services. In Bedfordshire, that amounts to £100 million extra, or 33 per cent. extra, in the past three years.

The speed at which we move health authorities towards their targets, and the speed at which health authorities move primary care trusts and primary care groups towards their targets, depends on two objectives. First, we want to move health authorities towards equity as represented by weighted capitation targets. Secondly, we want to introduce increases across the board to maintain continuity and stability in the service and make progress nationally in priority areas. As my hon. Friend would agree, every area in the country is in need of additional investment. We are committed to helping health authorities and PCTs reach their target fair shares. We think that that is important. However, that obviously cannot be achieved overnight.

**Mr. Hopkins:** My hon. Friend the Minister says, understandably, that we cannot reach our targets overnight. Does she accept that we have an enormous distance to go, given that the difference between spending on health in France and spending on health in Britain is the equivalent of £40 million for each constituency every year?

**Yvette Cooper:** I agree that increased additional investment is needed in the NHS. In the past few years, we have invested substantial additional resources. However, we need national debate on our future direction and the need for additional investment. That debate is on-going, and is informed by the interim report by Derek Wanless.

One of the biggest issues for Bedfordshire is population growth in the county, which means that the target moves every year. We recognise the pressures that population growth creates for Bedfordshire. However, funding in Bedfordshire has increased faster than population growth. The population has grown by 2 per cent. in the past three years, but funding has increased by 33 per cent. As other health authorities have also received large increases, Bedfordshire has remained below its fair shares target.

**Mr. Sayeed:** Does the Minister acknowledge that Bedfordshire's chronic underfunding—not just by this

*[Mr. Sayeed]*

Government but by previous Governments—has resulted in an enormous deficit in its capabilities? I recognise that the underfunding will not be changed overnight. Can the Minister guarantee that during this Government's period in office Bedfordshire will at last get fair shares?

**Yvette Cooper:** We remain committed to moving areas towards their target fair shares. As I said, different factors need to be borne in mind, as we also need to maintain continuity and stability and to increase investment across the country. We are at present engaged in a review of the formula and how it works. It will have implications for Bedfordshire, and I shall say something about it later.

I agree that there are investment needs throughout the country and in Bedfordshire. However, they must be linked to reform. Investment is already increasing and making a substantial difference in Bedfordshire and elsewhere. More must be done, but it must be conditional on getting the right reforms in place so that the additional investment has the biggest impact.

A review of the existing funding formula used to distribute resources is under way. The NHS plan has made the direction of travel clear: we want reducing inequalities to be a key criterion for allocating additional NHS resources. The review is being carried out under the auspices of the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation, which has NHS management, GP and academic members.

We will adopt an incremental approach to the review of resource allocation and to its implementation. We shall move towards fairer resource allocation as improvements become possible. As we said in the NHS plan, by 2003, following the review, reducing inequalities will be a key criterion for allocating NHS resources to different parts of the country.

Allocations for the current year and for next year already include a health inequalities adjustment. In part, that replaces the targeted funding for those health authorities such as Bedfordshire with health action zones. Bedfordshire has benefited from the Luton health action zone, which receives £700,000 per year.

Bedfordshire has benefited in other ways from allocations in the current year. An additional £1.1 million was awarded in recognition of the high costs of living, providing a 2.5 per cent. pay rise on top of the review body allocations. For 2002-03, the cost of living supplement has increased to £1.56 million. In addition, £300 million is being invested across the country this year and next year to tackle bed blocking by 2004, with the purpose of freeing up 1,000 NHS beds this year alone. In Bedfordshire, that means just under £500,000 being made available in 2001 to free up 25 beds across Bedfordshire, 12 of which will be at Bedford hospital.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedford mentioned capacity at Bedford hospital. I can confirm that there have been discussions between the trust and the regional office about additional capacity at the hospital. That, as well as improved efficiency, will form part of the strategic and financial framework negotiations for next year. I understand that the trust is looking—

**Andrew Selous:** The Minister referred to £500,000. Her notes may show that that is the figure over two years. Does she agree that it is set against the £10 million for which Bedfordshire social services is looking to sort out the problem over the next two years?

**Yvette Cooper:** I can write to the hon. Gentleman with the details of the allocation. The investment plan to tackle bed blocking is planned over two years but it is also about freeing up capacity in the acute sector.

I understand that the trust plans to open two additional wards in the new financial year. Issues such as investment in services in the community, in primary care and in acute care need to be tackled.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedford mentioned increased accident and emergency admissions at Bedford hospitals. I can confirm that officials from eastern regional office visited the trust in the summer to discuss the issue. The region and the trust are working together to identify the action required to identify the possible causes of the increased activity in A and E and to improve the accuracy of the data collected on admissions and treatment.

As I said, the Government are determined to increase investment in the NHS but in that regard the NHS also needs to reform to deliver first-class care to patients. The Wanless report identified cumulative underinvestment over at least 30 years but also the need for reform, so that additional resources to Bedfordshire and elsewhere make the biggest possible impact. The biggest and most sustained growth in any four-year period in the history of the NHS was announced in the 2000 Budget. However, we need to look to the long term, so that investment and reform can provide my hon. Friend's constituents and those of other hon. Members with the national health services that they need.

*It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.*

# Westminster Hall

*Tuesday 8 January 2002*

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

## London Underground

*Motion made, and Question proposed*, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

9.30 am

**Harry Cohen** (Leyton and Wanstead): During my speech, I shall refer in a political context to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. At the outset, I want to express my deepest sympathy to him and his wife Sarah on the tragic loss of their baby. I am sure that all Members will want to express their condolences.

I thank Mr. Speaker for again granting me an adjournment debate on the important matter of London Underground. I initiated a debate on the subject on 17 October, and I shall try not to repeat what I said then despite the fact that several of my concerns remain. I have also corresponded with the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devon Port (Mr. Jamieson), and I thank him for his informative and helpful letter to me of 22 November, to which I shall refer in due course.

The public-private partnership proposal continues to develop, and I should like the Minister to explain the latest situation and tell us of London Underground's investment plans. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary rightly said on 17 October that

"London Underground is a vital national asset".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 17 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 278WH.]

It is also essential for those Londoners who use it regularly and who rely upon it. Sadly, it has been starved of sufficient investment for more than two decades, and it shows.

The Government have promised big money—£13 billion over the next 15 years—and that commitment is most welcome. However, it must be regarded as a one-off chance significantly to upgrade the tube. It is unlikely that such an investment will be repeated for several decades if it is done wrongly now. It must be got right. The investment could help to create a first-rate transport system in London; but it might not have the impact necessary to prevent the present deterioration continuing. That deterioration has a high cost for passengers, business and employment, and for London's environment as the roads become more overburdened, and for the nation's economy.

Several aspects of the Government's currently preferred method of investment remain of concern. The first is safety. In his letter to me, the Under-Secretary wrote:

"The Government has always made clear that safety is the first priority for the Underground, and that modernisation plans will only proceed when the independent Health and Safety Executive has accepted the necessary safety arrangements. Clearly that is something that must be got right."

My hon. Friend added that a decision on the current safety case was expected before Christmas, with a decision on the revised safety case, which reflects the role of the private sector infrastructure companies, being expected this financial year—that is by the beginning of April. Will the Minister give us more information about that? The question of safety is important, because the public are not yet convinced.

A report in *The Independent* on 7 December referred to the disclosure that safety chiefs are not expected to clear the project for its scheduled start date next year.

It stated:

"The Health & Safety Executive is 'highly unlikely' to accept the revised safety proposals for the PPP in time for the 1 April deadline set by Ministers".

The main reason for the delay is London Underground's failure to compile its final so-called safety case, which covers the full handover of the system to commercial firms. The article went on to say that

"the HSE is understood to have indicated that its own assessment of London Underground's safety case would not be governed by the 1 April date."

The paper also said:

"The independent safety watchdog accepted this week the latest version of safety plans for the shadow PPP structure set up for the Tube."

However, I have not seen such a report from the HSE or, indeed, the railways inspectorate, in the public domain. Will the Minister explain what those bodies have declared and arrange for their full reports to be published and placed in the public domain?

In his November letter, the Under-Secretary responded to my concerns about the Parsons Brinckerhoff report on safety management, which was prepared for the Transport Commissioner for London, Bob Kiley. The Minister said that the infrastructure companies could not

"simply change standards at will"

and that they

"must comply with the requirements of their safety case and other controls."

However, in a letter to me on 19 November, Bob Kiley stated that Parsons Brinckerhoff's

"findings made clear that the current standards are inadequate and inappropriate to serve as an effective management control mechanism in the context of privately owned infracos. With the Standards being incomplete, LU itself has acknowledged (and continues to acknowledge) that bringing them up to date could take approximately three years. This timeframe would obviously go well beyond the closing dates anticipated for the PPP contracts".

He emphasises the point, saying:

"There is no disguising the fact that the current state of the Standards do not form the safety net that PPP advocates claim them to be and whether one likes the PPP or not, they should be fixed before the contracts are finalised".

Ministers should take that serious point into account and should perhaps, even at this late stage, arrange for an urgent standards rewrite; otherwise, a potentially serious safety loophole could emerge.

In its written testimony to the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions, Parsons Brinckerhoff recommended, first, that the standards update process be accelerated and completed in about 18 months; secondly, that a top-level suite of standards be provided that was appropriate to London Underground Ltd's need to control standards of workmanship and associated safety under PPP

*[Harry Cohen]*

contracts; thirdly, that the issue of non-compliance be reviewed to ensure that the concessions process was not open to abuse; fourthly, that a single authority for all standards be set up and led by LUL, but include infracos and third parties, to maintain consistency of standards across the system; and fifthly, that PPP contracts contain owner-variation and directive rights to permit LUL to change standards when warranted by the public interest. Do the Government propose to respond to those recommendations?

I come to the question of what levels of investment should be implemented and by whom. At the Labour party conference, the Chancellor categorically said:

"we plan to invest an extra £13 billion of public funds".

That was in the context of public spending on public services. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has diluted that commitment. The Under-Secretary told me that 20 per cent. of that £13 billion would

"be provided by the private sector, with the remainder coming from London Underground fares and Government grant".

Is he saying that the Chancellor was incorrect at the Labour party conference? What does the reference to £13 billion of public funds mean? Does it mean that 20 per cent. will come from the private sector?

On fares, the Minister told me in a parliamentary answer that the value-for-money evaluation that London Underground is carrying out on PPP bids assumes that fares will do no more than keep pace with inflation, whether tube improvements are financed under PPPs or by direct government borrowing.

A value-for-money exercise is not the same as actuality. Will the Minister write to me indicating his Department's estimate of the maximum contribution of fares income to the investment programme without fares having to rise beyond inflation? The arrangements for paying the infracos from the public purse need to be clarified. Will London Underground or Transport for London have a role? Will either of them be an agent for handing over the capital to the infracos? Will they be able to hold back payments if they are dissatisfied with performance, or have any capital of their own that they can use independently for the tube?

It is known that the private sector often makes careful "accounting for profit" judgments before releasing investment money. What arrangements are proposed to avoid the investment hiccups and delays that that might cause?

I understand that, by now, the PPP contracts should have been completed and the final bids submitted, and that all these things should now be on the Minister's desk for assessment and decision. Is that so? If that is the case, can the Minister give us his first impressions of the bids and contracts? Will he explain what process the Government are adopting to ascertain whether they represent value for money or constitute an unacceptable risk? Will such an assessment consider the implications for the public sector of being committed to a specific contractor for 30 years, and what could happen at the reviews at the seven-and-a-half-year intervals? What information about the bids and contracts does the Minister think can be released into the public domain before the contracts are signed? How will the London Mayor get a look in on the process?

The Minister will know that Bob Kiley has complained about the complexity of the contracts, which involve 135 documents, many more than 2,800 pages, thousands of cross-references, close to 2 million words, and a web of hundreds of complex formulas. The performance regime, by which the Government set such great store, is not even in a single volume. It can be accessed only by extensive cross-referencing of lengthy and complex schedules, models, tables and codes. It seems to be a bureaucratic nightmare and a lawyer's dream. Worse still, it looks unworkable. Mr. Kiley has observed that the performance regime is riddled with loopholes and rife with opportunities for the infracos to play the system. They can delay being held accountable for any incident, go into protracted disputes over contracts and be paid bonuses despite service failures, as well as being tested using performance criteria that they have the ability to influence to their advantage. In some instances, those situations are worse than the current criteria.Will the Minister consider those points in his assessment of the contracts?

At Transport Questions in November 2001, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), the Opposition spokesman, talked of £90 million of bonuses being paid to contractors regardless of whether there are any tube improvements. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions told him to await the final outcome of the negotiations. If the contracts are now at the Department, a response on whether they include such gratuitous payments would be of interest.

In his letter, the Under-Secretary of State stated:

"The Government's position is not simply that the private sector takes the risk but that the approach is to achieve the optimum sharing of risk".

He added:

"The risk allocation is made quite clear in the contracts."

In that case, will the Minister please explain it? Risks arising from a discriminatory change of law, terrorism or the rising water table remain with London Underground. I remind the Minister that it was a major structural problem—the Austrian tunnel collapse—that contributed to the Jubilee line extension cost overrun, and that that led to the Government's policy of paying the private sector to take on risk. Who would be responsible for a similar unforeseen major structural problem? If London Underground and the public sector would be responsible, the raison dêtre for the policy would collapse. I hope that the Minister will set out clearly and specifically who takes what risk.

Management is a crucial issue. In the debate in October, the Under-Secretary said:

"The underground needs a new way to manage investment".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 17 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 280WH.]

He concluded his letter to me by stating:

"LU will transfer to the control of TfL once the competitions for the modernisation of the Underground have been completed. The detailed management arrangements would then be a matter for TfL, accountable to the Mayor and GLA".

Will the Minister provide his estimated time scale for the handover? Will the infracos remain autonomous or be integrated in the overall management? If the latter, how is that envisaged? When will London Underground come under the control of Transport for London? Once

the contracts were signed, what reason would there be to delay the transfer? Is there concern that because the Secretary of State sacked Bob Kiley from the London Underground board at the behest of its directors, he would sack them if he took over? Delay of a takeover would divide and damage the management of the tube. How do the Government propose to deal with the conundrum to which they have contributed? Have they discussed with the Mayor the subject of appointees running the service on behalf of the public sector?

The most important issue is that described by Bob Kiley as "management obfuscation". Is there to be an integrated system of democratic control, or a fractured one where no one has overall control and in which different, perhaps competing, policies are set by different groups of institutional managers? If the Government insist on the current form of PPP, with contracts and infracos beyond the reach or influence of the Mayor, they should address how the system can be coherently and accountably run, rather than saying that the matter is for a Mayor whom they have made powerless.

The concern is about the form of PPP, not the principle of PPP. In *The Observer* on 23 December, the Mayor pleaded with the Government to reinstate the rebuilding of Wembley Park station into London Underground's long-term business plan and the PPP contract, from which it was dropped. It is needed to accommodate the plans for a new national football stadium at Wembley, which he supports. A system that incorporates private sector involvement is reasonable, but it must be under full public sector control so that priorities are clearly set and achieved, there is no management division or obfuscation, and the money is properly invested and not wasted. The Government still have to provide evidence of strategic command of the problem, and to give answers to the many unresolved questions. Time is running out. In our second term in office, we must ensure that the Government deliver a first-class underground system for London.

**Dr. John Pugh** (Southport): The hon. Gentleman has made several astute technical points. His point about fares was especially pertinent, and would carry some weight with all users of the underground. Is he aware that the current level of fares exceeds projections of income from London Underground fares? The take-up of fares is declining, as are the sums that London Underground collects. Is it not critical that the Minister makes what will happen to fares clear when the PPP takes off, if it ever does so?

**Harry Cohen:** The Minister told me that the evaluation of PPP compared to direct Government borrowing was made on the basis that fares would not rise above inflation. Can the Minister confirm, as far as possible, that fares will not rise above inflation over the period of this investment? Our fares are among the highest for capital cities in Europe. Although the great demand for the tube persists, fares are too high.

**Mr. Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar): The hon. Gentleman has considerable expertise in these matters. Having considered fare revenue, does he agree that little or no leeway is given by fare revenues for significant improvements to be made to the tube network? The income would not be sufficient even if a decision were taken to increase the level of fares above inflation.

**Harry Cohen:** That is a reasonable point. Fares are already very high. There is no objection to the existing income being used for the ordinary operation of the system and investment purposes, when that is possible, but Londoners would look askance at the notion that fares might rise further.

It is important that in their second term of office the Government deliver a first-class underground system for London. We must ensure that Londoners get what they want, and it is in the national interest that we have a first-class London underground.

9.51 am

**Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): May I associate myself with the words of condolence to the Chancellor so movingly expressed by the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen)? I thank him, too, for his diligence in representing the interests of his constituents and Londoners in general on the question of the future of the London underground.

It is noticeable that the hon. Gentleman is yet again isolated, being the only Labour Member present apart from the Minister and the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary. It would seem that the Labour party has abandoned hope for the London underground and is, rightly, ashamed of the Government's performance. The Labour party's 1997 manifesto unequivocally supported the idea of a public-private partnership, modernising the London underground system and improving the service for Londoners. The manifesto commitments have still not been honoured and in the intervening years the service has steadily deteriorated in terms of fare increases, reliability and overall service to the public.

The situation is wholly shameful, and cannot be justified in any way. The Secretary of State should have returned from India to attend the debate, because he is ultimately responsible. Of course, it is nice to see the Minister of State here; he must regard his time at the Ministry of Defence as a happy experience when compared with the woeful responsibilities that he now has to face, not least over the London underground. Clearly, however, the buck stops with the Secretary of State.

Londoners expect manifesto commitments to be honoured and expect to have a system of public transport that lives up to the standards of other systems in the world. I have just returned from Chile; the underground system in Santiago is infinitely better than London's. It is clean and reliable and the standard fare costs about a fifth of that for central London. The perpetual increases in fares above inflation are hitting living standards in the capital but are also symptomatic of a failure to deliver the integrated transport strategy that would provide a cost-effective improvement in transport for Londoners. It was the Government's strategic promise to put in place an integrated strategy under the overall political command of the Mayor. To date, neither the Mayor nor the Government have been able to deliver, and London is very much the worse for it. Business is suffering—that is the constant refrain of

*[Mr. John Wilkinson]*

business organisations in London, including the London chamber of commerce. The tourist trade is also suffering. It is intolerable that visitors to our capital should have to endure the current standards of unreliability and squalor on the tube. In addition, the environmental damage to the capital is profound.

The Government's approach should have been to improve the public transport system first and then set in place road-user charges. Instead, the Mayor proposes that, from next year, Londoners will suffer the additional misery of road charges, which can only make a very unsatisfactory situation on the tube worse, as people who have previously used their cars take to the tube in ever greater numbers to exacerbate the problem of overcrowding. We have the worst of every possible world.

Today's *Metro* newspaper says:

"Tube commuters have been hit with inflation-busting fare rises of up to 11 per cent. The revised charges, which were introduced at the weekend, included an increase in the cost of a single fare outside Zone 1 from 90p to £1 and a 7 per cent. rise for single journeys in central London, from £1.50 to £1.60."

A cost of £1.60 to get from one tube station to another just down the line in central London is intolerable. From the outset of the mayoralty, there should have been a much more imaginative fare structure. The Mayor should have introduced early-bird and night-owl fares to encourage passengers to use the tube system outside peak hours. Such fares have not been introduced. There is a new all-day travelcard, which can be used before 9.30 am, but it costs £1.20 more than its off-peak rival.

In short, the Government's approach has been bedevilled by their blinkered adhesion to the public-private partnership. The evidence is clear that the public-private partnership approach is wrong. There must be a clear political and managerial chain of command, and that can be brought about only by maintaining the London underground in the public sector or by privatising it in its entirety. Either of those courses of action would be clear and logical and would lead to the single management control that is essential if the safety standards to which the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead referred are to be maintained, if confidence in the system is to be enhanced and if the advantages of modernisation—a more cost-effective and reliable system—are to be produced.

When will Transport for London take over London Underground? We asked that question during debates on the Greater London Authority Bill. We received no answers then and we seem to be further away from receiving any answers now. It is fair to ask why the expert brought in as Transport Commissioner for London—Mr. Kiley—has been treated so atrociously by Ministers. Mr. Kiley has spent the greater part of his career bringing into effect significant transport improvements in New York and has greatly enhanced the reliability of the underground system there. Yet all his criticisms and advice have been set aside by the Government in their petty spite and malice, which they continue to display towards the Mayor just because he happened to be directly elected by the people of London in a process that, unlike that used to select Labour's candidate for the mayoral election, was transparent and clear.

In short, the London underground is daily showing Londoners, and those who have the misfortune to visit our capital and use the system, all that is worst in new Labour. The Government are demonstrating an unwillingness to take political responsibility, an inability to fulfil manifesto promises and a tendency to put their own political interests first by trying to blame the Mayor because he has moved away politically from the Labour party. Last, but not least, the matter demonstrates the Government's inability to prove themselves trustworthy.

When manifestos are brought before the public at election time, the public have an entitlement to expect them to be carried through into action. When a Parliament elapses in which a key manifesto commitment is not met, and when we find ourselves almost a quarter of the way through the succeeding Parliament without any change on that commitment, its honouring being as remote as ever, Londoners have no alternative but to seek redress at the ballot box. It is my hope that they will do so, at least at the borough elections in May. They must do it in the mayoral elections thereafter.

In the meantime, the Government have an obligation to explain to the House, as I trust the Minister will shortly do, what on earth they are going to do to restore public confidence in their proposals. That confidence has evaporated. The Government seem to be more in thrall to the unions—if the dispute between the RMT union and South West Trains is anything to go by—and their own dogmatic ideas than to sensible policies such as those put forward by the Transport Commissioner for London, Mr. Kiley. Londoners deserve better.

**The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar):** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the unions in London do not support Government policy on the PPP. We think that they are wrong about that and I will explain why in my main response. On South West Trains, the dispute is a matter for the company and the RMT union. The hon. Gentleman will have seen the comments made by the Prime Minister's official spokesman yesterday, which indicate that the Government are not in thrall to the unions. He should get out of the old rhetoric and deal in contemporary arguments.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** I am grateful to the Minister for his intervention, because the arguments are all over the press and the boss of South West Trains has spelt them out in a full-page advertisement. We were led to believe that new Labour's relationship with the unions was one of amity and mutual trust—that the bad old days of the unions holding the public to ransom would be gone for good. That is clearly not the case, as the rail dispute shows.

In my constituency, as in many parts of London, it is impossible for people to commute to London by rail if there is a dispute on the tube. There are no rail stations at hand. In other parts of London, such as the south-west, the tube services are inadequate. It is crucial that there be a good relationship between London Underground and railways management and the trade unions and between the Government and the unions. That does not seem to be the case, We had thought that the bad old days had gone for good under new Labour,

but they have returned with a vengeance and I am sure that the public will seek redress at the ballot box at the earliest opportunity.

10.5 pm

**Mr. Mark Field** (Cities of London and Westminster): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on securing another debate on this important issue. I fill in my slips on a week-by-week basis and never seem to have any luck. I will have to get some advice on lottery numbers from the hon. Gentleman.

Often, people in politics are criticised for not using public transport. With that in mind, I display my moth-eaten annual zone 1 ticket. It is one of the disadvantages of representing my constituency that, unlike Members whose far-flung constituencies permit them large first-class allowances to go to all parts of the country, my constituency is entirely within zone 1 of the underground system.

There is little doubt that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) pointed out in his excellent speech, things have got worse since 1997, and I shall explore that in a moment.

If animals were herded into carriages on the underground as human passengers are, that would be considered a national disgrace. The way in which passengers are herded into carriages, not only at the height of rush hour but often in the middle of the day, is a disgrace. I do not say that to make a narrow point, because the underground has had substantial problems for many years. However, when it works, the tube, considering the confines and difficulties that it faces, works reasonably well. It simply has insufficient capacity to do the job well, particularly in central London.

London is the economic powerhouse of the United Kingdom. It is disgraceful that there has not been sufficient investment. I am sure that the Minister will point out that the picture was not entirely rosy before 1 May 1997, but only in the early 1990s was significant investment made, as we headed into recession. The last Conservative Government were brave not to slash the budgets immediately in the period 1991 to 1993, when it might have been easy to do so.

However, there is no doubt that the London underground requires substantial investment. It needs long-term vision. There are no short-term solutions. I have been concerned for the past five years that no strategy has been put in place. There was great talk in the 1997 Labour manifesto of an integrated transport policy. However, that soundbite was simply repeated endlessly, year on year.

In London we now face—I feel strongly about this, as I represent the centre of the city—the introduction of a congestion charge within the next 13 months. It is clear that there will not be a sufficient increase in capacity on the underground or the buses to absorb the notional increases that will occur in the use of those public services if people are taken out of private cars. The policy will work only if there is a prolonged economic downturn, which will cause demand in the transport system generally to fall. That does not seem a sensible way of developing a congestion charging system that will be seen as the vanguard for similar systems throughout the United Kingdom.

What is the way forward? The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead made a valid point about risk being the key issue. If too much risk is transferred back to the public sector, the very raison d'être of a PPP is undermined. Politically, it is not a saleable option. Given the events since 7 October, when Railtrack was put into administration, a PPP system would not be right. Conservative Members want to see the London underground succeed, and we want to play our part in supporting the long-term investment that is the key to a successful transport system.

It is blindingly obvious that if PPP were implemented in its current form and there were a Railtrack mark 2, not only Opposition Members but powerful, high-profile trade unions and a raft of consumer and passenger bodies would argue against it. If PPP were implemented in its current form it would not work, not least because of the risk issue. Given the continuing debacle in relation to Railtrack, City investors would be willing to take a punt only if a large premium were paid in relation to risk, which would not make sense for taxpayers in the medium to long term. We must build a structure for the next three decades, but it would be a disaster if we made that decision with our sight fixed only on what has happened in the past three months.

Like many Conservative Members, I am concerned about the elected London mayor. I did not want to see a London mayor, but the people of London have spoken by electing an individual who has a long-standing commitment to and involvement in London politics. As has been pointed out, he has brought in at great expense Bob Kiley, who has a track record of success in Boston and New York. It is now incumbent on all London politicians in the House of Commons, who have little authority in this matter except in relation to strategy, to exert whatever pressure we can on the Government to ensure that Mr. Livingstone and Mr. Kiley are given the tools to get on with the job. However, I recognise the point raised by both the Treasury and the Minister's Department that the Government must set parameters if we are to hand authority to Transport for London.

The current position is difficult. It would be no use giving the Mayor full authority and enormous amounts of cash because he would have an eye on his re-election in two and a half years' time. There would be short-term, high-profile fare cuts and other gimmicks, which would return us to the mid-1980s position when he was leader of the Greater London council. We must ensure that public money put into the underground system is invested for the long term. As five years have been wasted since mid-1997, things will get worse before they get better whatever investment decisions are made now—whether a PPP is implemented or power is passed to Transport for London, which must be a temptation for the Government. Mr. Kiley has made it clear that for at least the next three to four years the nature of the long-term infrastructure project will ensure longer delays, greater safety concerns and larger areas of the network out of commission.

Many hon. Members are concerned that London has had a raw deal, which is something that has become evident in recent years, but the roots of the problem go back many years. Decision making must be diversified if devolution in London is to mean anything. We must devolve financial powers to regional representatives such as the Mayor of London, the Greater London

*[Mr. Mark Field]*

Authority and local authorities. The Mayor of London is a high-profile figure—admittedly he has limited powers—and we have devolved government in London. If one compares devolved government in London with that in Scotland, which has its own Parliament, it is clear that Londoners are in a difficult position. Although they have a high-profile figurehead, he has one hand—if not both hands—tied behind his back. The financial wherewithal is lacking with which to make necessary long-term investment decisions.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood pointed out, London is, and must remain, the economic powerhouse of this country. There is a real fear that we will lose some of the international investment that has helped to ensure London's pre-eminence in the past decade and a half, particularly in respect of financial services. Our city is of global importance, but it has a third-world infrastructure, and that cannot be right.

I encourage the Minister to tell his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and all those in central London who are playing a part in the matter that we must get people round the table and put in place a sensible, long-term solution. Such a solution must also be politically saleable, and for that reason alone I fear that the PPP proposal simply will not wash, because it will be seen as no more than Railtrack mark 2. Every day's delay in committing ourselves to the major investment that the London underground requires is a kick in the teeth for those unsung heroes of the economy, many of whom work in central London and depend on the tube system to travel to and from work.

10.16 am

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on securing another debate on this subject, and I echo his words of condolence to the Chancellor. The hon. Gentleman is doing an excellent job in single-handedly representing Londoners in the debate on PPP and the tube. I wish that his colleagues would offer such support, although I suspect that he offers his at the expense of a future ministerial career.

I welcome these debates because they allow us to question Ministers. I shall not dwell on the history of the underground—30 years of under-investment by Conservative and Labour Administrations—which is set out in Lord Birt's report. There is no point wasting time discussing a subject that we know well, and given that the purpose of Adjournment debates is to allow hon. Members to put questions to the Minister, I hope that he will use his time to focus on those that have been asked this morning.

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) made what I think was a plea for first-class carriages on the London underground. However, he also had some interesting things to say about the need to devolve financial responsibilities, and in that respect I support him entirely. Given that we have set up a Greater London Authority, with a Mayor and elected Assembly Members, it should surely take much greater financial responsibility. That is what devolved government is supposed to be about.

I am one Member who, for his sins, travels almost daily not just on the tube but by train, and I am afraid to say that the transport system is absolutely and totally pathetic. There is no other way to describe it. This morning, the trains were in complete chaos. The train that I intended to catch was supposed to arrive at 8.22, but it was running 12 minutes late. The earlier service—the 7.38—had also yet to materialise, having been delayed who knows where along the line. When I arrived at Victoria, the tube station gates were closed because of overcrowding, so no one could get on to the platforms. That, I am afraid, is the commuter's daily experience.

Belatedly, the Government are waking up to this crisis. In his new year message, the Prime Minister said:

"We are also determined in our plans to modernise the Tube, again a large and sustained increased investment to be taken forward by public-private partnership that would ensure the money is spent properly."

I am concerned that the Prime Minister seems to have prejudged the outcome of the Ernst and Young report into value for money. Is he saying that the Government are committed to the PPP whatever the conclusions in that report? Perhaps the Minister will explain how there can be a full examination of the PPP's value for money when the report was started before contracts had been finalised. We know that a lot of work was still being done on the detail of the contracts in December.

Will the report take account of the changed financial climate for private investment in transport? According to Lord Birt, the decision to put Railtrack into administration has had an impact on the financial attraction of transport for private investment. If the Ernst and Young report has not taken that into account, its validity must be questioned. The Secretary of State promised the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions that the report would be delivered between 10 and 14 January. Can the Minister confirm that that is so?

The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead spoke at length, rightly, on safety, which is a matter that I took up with the Minister. I wrote to him on 7 August and received a reply dated 28 December, which may suggest how much thought he had to give to my original question. During those five months he had a long time in which to consider the issues. The letters referred to the impact of Lord Cullen's inquiry on the PPP contracts. The inquiry made a number of recommendations on maintenance contracts and changes to them. Have those recommendations been taken into account in relation to the PPP contracts? Lord Cullen's report also made a number of recommendations on accident investigations. Have those issues been taken up and worked into the PPP contracts?

Hon. Members will have read in the newspapers during the past few days that the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines may be given to Ken Livingstone to run because Tubelines' bid is too expensive. That was reported in *The Independent* on 4 January and *The Times* suggested yesterday that all the network could be handed over to Mr. Kiley. Can the Minister confirm whether that is so? It would be the best late Christmas present that Londoners have ever received. If the Government intend to give responsibility for part or all of the tube to Transport for London, will it be bound in the same way as private consortiums to specific targets? Will it be fined if it fails to reach its targets? Will it be

allowed to issue bonds to finance the chunk of lines that it may be given? Will it be allowed to use congestion charges to put money into the contracts?

If the Government can already say that Tubelines' contract does not provide value for money even before contracts are signed—that is the message that is leaking into the newspapers—hon. Members may wonder how Londoners can be certain that the other contracts, if they are signed, will represent value for money in practice. The Deputy Prime Minister has promised that huge savings will arise as a result of PPP, and I have tried to get the Government to confirm that. Will the Minister do so today? Will he also confirm whether those savings will be increased or decreased if part or all of the contract to run the system is handed over to Bob Kiley and Transport for London?

A further matter that the Government have been unwilling to discuss is how much cost will have been incurred if PPP does not proceed. We know how much has been spent on consultants, but how much has been spent through the involvement of other Departments and outside bodies such as Transport for London? The figure for consultants is around £100 million. Can that figure be, say, doubled if one takes into account the time that the Government have devoted to PPP? Londoners and hon. Members are entitled to know how much has been spent on the project and how much will have to be written off if the Government pull the plug on it. If Ministers do not know, why not?

I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to inform hon. Members about the current timetable for PPP. Many deadlines have gone past. I was told in a meeting that the Tubelines contract was due to be signed on 4 January, but that clearly has not happened. When will the contracts be signed? When will the Ernst and Young report be handed over? When will the decision on whether PPP contracts provide value for money be taken?

Does the Minister agree with Lord Birt, who said in his leaked report that a more realistic funding regime for London Underground required an adequate and predictable contribution from the public purse? I have attempted to extract from the Government exactly how much public money they are committing to London Underground over future years, but I am afraid that the figure is not forthcoming. When I approached Ernst and Young, I was told that that information was for the Government's eyes only. Will the Minister reveal the figure?

There has been so much in the newspapers recently that it is hard to know what to believe.

**Dr. Pugh:** As my hon. Friend said, in a recent quote the Prime Minister appeared to prejudge the matter in favour of PPP, yet when the Secretary of State appeared before the Select Committee he seemed to display a genuine open mind. Is it not important that the Minister should clarify precisely who is determining transport policy—the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State or Lord Birt?

**Tom Brake:** I thank my hon. Friend. I was about to come to that.

Is the Chief Secretary to the Treasury—who, when in opposition, was well known for saying, "Our air is not for sale"—lined up to take over the Secretary of State's job? Are the Government trying to bring in someone who supports PPP, as, coming from the Treasury, the Chief Secretary presumably does? Neither the Secretary of State nor the Deputy Prime Minister is terribly keen on PPP, so are the Government trying to firm up support for it in the Department?

There have been numerous debates on the subject and unfortunately many questions have, all too often, been left unanswered. As the deadline approaches, stonewalling seems to be more, rather than less, pronounced. I hope that the Minister will give some specific responses, rather than tell us how many people travel on the London underground daily. Otherwise, we will leave the debate knowing full well that Labour has let Londoners down, and that will not be forgotten.

10.30 am

**Mr. Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on his remarkable luck in securing yet another one and a half hour debate on the London underground system. I associate the Opposition with the hon. Gentleman's kind words about the sad plight of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his wife.

Against that background, it might seem churlish to disagree straight away with something that the hon. Gentleman said, which was that there had been under-investment in the rail for 30 years. That is not correct. As you recall, Mr. Olner, you and I served on the Select Committee that examined the tube system, and it was clear that there had been under-investment for 50 years. The only time when there was significant investment was during Mr. John Major's Administration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) is right to point out that we are having yet another debate about the London underground system and yet again, with the honourable exception of the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead, there are no Labour Members present—the Minister is here because we called him. They have no concern about the tube. Their constituents are crying out for a solution and complaining daily about the inadequacies of the system, yet none of those hon. Members can be bothered to turn up. It is left to the Conservative party and Liberal Democrats to try to make sense of the matter.

My hon. Friend referred to travelling on the Santiago underground. I had the opportunity to travel on it a couple of years ago and can confirm that it is an efficient system. To take another extreme, the Moscow metro is run considerably better than is the London underground system. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood is right to talk about the petty slights directed against Mr. Kiley, a distinguished public servant, and Mayor Livingston. My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), brandishing what he described as his tatty underground pass, is also right repeatedly to talk of the transfer of risk in the public-private partnership and to refer to the large premium that will have to be raised. It may be possible to raise £13 billion, but a considerable amount will be spent on premiums and interest payments. He was right to say that the situation of the London underground is a kick in the teeth for those trying to earn their living in London.

*[Mr. Eric Pickles]*

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) said we should not talk too much about how many people travel on the underground. However, it needs to be emphasised that the number of people travelling on it per day is about 3 million. That is the number of those on the rest of the railways combined, so we are talking about a significant part of our country's infrastructure. We know that 80 per cent. of people coming to work in London travel by public transport and that that figure increases to well over 90 per cent. within the City. Those good folk are travelling not because they think that the underground or other public transport is wonderful, but because no other forms of transportation are viable. In effect, they are trapped into using public transport.

I cannot think of a better way to describe the situation than what was set out in the editorial of yesterday's *Evening Standard*. It refers to the underground and railways, and is headed, "Blame Labour for the railways". The story is easy to spot on the page, as it is next to an article by Professor Anthony King entitled, "Why there are so many duds in Cabinet?". Despite the fact that the Minister is at the centre of the accompanying picture, I am sure that Professor King did not mean to refer to him directly. The editorial refers to the condition in which passengers travel by rail and asks:

"Is this the image New Labour wishes to be remembered for: its ministers reclining in the back of limousines while ordinary men and women travel in cattle trucks?"

That seems a most reasonable way to express the dilemma that faces the tube.

While the unseemly argument between the Government, London Transport and the Mayor continues, delays on the underground have risen sharply during the past year after an upsurge in track and signal failures. The failure rates on some lines have almost doubled. A good example is the District line, on which I frequently travel. It has roughly 600,000 users a day. Compared to the 1999 figures, track defects rose by 116 per cent. Delays of 15 minutes or more increased by 35 per cent., while investment levels have been heavily cut. The average annual investment in the tube since 1997-98 has been less than during John Major's years in office.

Transport for London, which was set up as part of the Government's commitment to devolution, has found that Labour's control freakery stifles its efforts to improve the tube. The Government even went to the High Court to suppress the Deloitte and Touche report that said that the PPP gave poor value for money.

According to the annual report of London Underground, which was published in August, seven clear performance targets were set. It is sad to say that every one was not met, including those on safety and security. Investment is not the only area in which there has been a decrease, and nor is performance. Industrial disputes have increased, and absenteeism is worse than it has been for five years. That is the backdrop against which we are considering the PPP. To be blunt, the PPP is nothing more than a glorified leasing deal that offers little or no help to passengers.

Various Members have referred to speculation in the press about whether the Mayor will be offered the Jubilee line, the Northern line or the entire network, and whether there is value for money. I shall put my neck on the line: I suspect that the stories have no truth. If they do, the Government are acting in bad faith. From other press reports, we know that intense negotiations are taking place between the various bidders, and that the Government are considering different conditions to protect them from the Mayor and Mr. Kiley. I cannot believe that we have arrived at a position in which the Government would be able to act. I suspect that the stories are about the fact that the Government said, before the election, that no one should worry and that the PPP deal would not take place. They said that they would consider ways to involve the relevant people in a much greater way and that the matter would be put off until after the borough elections, when the PPP deal would be put through.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington raised an important point about Ernst and Young. He talked about the time scale. I think that the time specified was the middle of January, but that is what the dates he gave amount to. He said that the Ernst and Young review would be made available for a period of wide-ranging consultation, after which a final decision on value for money would be taken. If that is so, we had better be given the Ernst and Young report now. If it is to be anything like the contracts, which are 2,000 pages long, it will take a little time to read it and to put something together. Is the report on the Secretary of State's desk, and when does he intend to publish it?

I was slightly confused by the remarks of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington about Lord Birt's position. While the hon. Gentleman was struggling to get to this debate, I heard the Secretary of State say, on the "Today" programme, that Lord Birt was studying not the matters that the hon. Gentleman was considering, but problems of railways and transportation 15 years from now. Perhaps the Minister will tell us why Lord Birt has strayed from his mandate to examine the present contract.

I shall try to leave the Minister time to answer in full the questions that he has been asked. I have counted 27, so the first of mine, which has been asked before, is number 28. When do the Government intend to transfer London Underground to Transport for London? What rate of return do they think would be acceptable for the private infracos? That is relevant to the earlier points about value for money. What steps were advocated by Mr. Kiley to ensure that safety under the PPP has been incorporated in the proposed contracts?

We would like to know what general advice the Government have received from the Health and Safety Executive and the National Audit Office with regard to the PPP. More important, however, in the context of the question of fares raised by the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead, is the level of Government support through the PPP. What level of Government grant or revenue support would be invested during the period of the PPP?

It would be useful to know what efforts London Underground is making to improve its performance. It failed its operating targets. Given the fate of the Jubilee line, it would be good to know the average number of trains operating on the Jubilee line between Green Park and Stratford from January 2000 to date. What is the average number of speed restrictions that apply for longer than seven days, for the whole of the

underground, for each of the past five years? I should happily accept that information in writing if the Minister does not have it now.

What Government targets were set for London Underground in 2000-01? How widely were those published, and were they met? Where is the money to pay for the current London Underground "Your Tube" advertising campaign coming from? When did London Underground last conduct an audit of its assets? When are we going to see the merger between London Underground and Transport for London?

If we had suspicions last year about a lack of direction on the part of London Underground, the troubles over the Christmas period and the new year confirmed them. The problems of the underground are many and varied. Our capital city is sinking under its core transport difficulties; and the Government seem transfixed, like a rabbit caught in a car's headlights, and unable to make a decision.

10.45 am

**The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar):** First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on securing a further debate on London Underground. Secondly, like all other hon. Members, I echo his condolences to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer at this sad time.

It is self-evident that the future of transport in London, and of London Underground in particular, is of great interest to the people of London and to the many people who visit the capital or work in it. That is especially so because, as the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) said, London has a significant role as a world city. It is also a topic of considerable interest to hon. Members, which is demonstrated by the number of times that it is debated.

Today's debate threw up some interesting points. For example, Opposition Members expressed the wish to dissociate themselves from Railtrack and said that they did not want Railtrack mark 2—an appropriate comment on a system set up by a Conservative Government. They also dissociated themselves from public-private partnerships, but that underestimates the success of the PPP on the Northern line, where reliability and other improvements should be noted. Opposition Members have found previously undiscovered merits in the Mayor of London, which were not noticed in his previous incarnations. I am sure that he will appreciate the irony, if not the conversion.

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), apologises for not being able to add today to the considerable number of adjournment debates to which he has replied. In response to the previous adjournment debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead in October last year, my hon. Friend noted that far from being required to offer his commiseration, he was pleased to have an opportunity to explain the Government's plans.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary reminded hon. Members that the Government have invested almost £1 billion more in the tube than was planned by the last Tory Government. He explained that a new approach was needed to improve the tube's infrastructure, and to avoid the cost and time overruns of the Jubilee line extension. Hon. Members should remember that when examining the need for a new approach. My hon. Friend made it clear that our approach was not driven by dogma, but was the result of a careful examination of all the options for modernising the tube.

London Underground has been working to ensure a better service for today's passengers, but we must recognise the pressures under which it operates. It now carries 1 billion passengers a year. That is the most ever, and it represents an increase of more than 25 per cent. over the past four years. The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster alluded to that when he said that we could relieve the tube of some of that pressure if we had an economic downturn. Indeed, much of that pressure, particularly at rush hour, is associated with a considerable increase in economic activity. One has only to look at London's skyline, and the number of cranes, to see that. As the Mayor of London consistently points out, London has seen a sizeable increase in its population over the last decade, which is a reversal of previous trends. And, as the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) said, as many travel on the underground as on the whole of remainder of the rail network.

We recognise that the quality of service declined noticeably last winter. However, London Underground has actively been tackling the key issues that affect service quality and reliability. Measures taken by London Underground—for example, on the availability of train operators—have resulted in some improvements, but more needs to be done. The Government are keen that those achievements should be built on and that further initiatives to improve performance and customer service should be introduced.

I mentioned the considerable improvements on the Northern line. When I last checked, the figure for reliability was 98.5 per cent. under the PPP. Furthermore, peak-time train cancellations this year are the lowest on the network and, at just 1.1 per cent., the rate is half that for last year. I do not want to be complacent, but we should offer the management of London Underground some congratulation on that, although we look to it to do better.

Across the network, the problems that emerged with escalators last year have been vigorously tackled. Unplanned station closures have been reduced, and extra station staff have been brought in to help customers. There have also been considerable improvements in targeting by the British Transport police, which will make for a safer underground. Further improvements are under way, and hon. Members will have seen publicity for the modernisation of ticketing and revenue-collection systems on the underground and, incidentally, on London Transport buses, under the Prestige PFI project. Measures will include the introduction of new automatic ticketing machines to reduce queuing.

*[Mr. John Spellar]*

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster referred to integrated transport. There has been a considerable improvement in the bus service in London, a substantial increase in the use of buses and considerable investment. We should also bear in mind the light rail systems, and I pay tribute to the previous Administration for starting the Croydon tram link system, which is extremely successful. There have been several improvements in integrated transport, and we are considering how it can be developed further. Many other initiatives are in hand, and the overriding aim is improving service to customers.

We are all aware that many of the current problems with the underground are the result of three to five decades of under-investment, although there is some argument among Opposition Members about that period. However, we all recognise that decades of under-investment have led to a deterioration in the quality of the infrastructure. Equally, we all recognise that London Underground needs a massive investment programme to bring it up to scratch and a new way to manage the work.

**Mr. Pickles:** When did the Minister last travel on the underground during peak hours? Did he enjoy the journey?

**Mr. Spellar:** I cannot remember when I last travelled during peak hours, although I travelled off-peak about three or four weeks ago. I used to travel on the underground and on Southern region services; indeed, I used to go to school on Southern region services. We have heard about the halcyon days of uncrowded transport in London, but there have always been difficulties with travel in London at peak hours. If anything in the system goes wrong, the problem quickly snowballs. We have identified that issue, and the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) referred to the need to close the gates at Victoria for a short period when there are pressures there.

I think that we all agree on the need for additional investment, and we are considering the most efficient and effective way of managing it. As I said, the Jubilee line demonstrates that London Underground can be well focused on running trains, which is its core competence. However, it has demonstrated serious deficiencies when it comes to enhancing the infrastructure and, in particular, managing all the infrastructure contracts. That is precisely why we considered the possible mechanisms to harness the skills and abilities of the private sector and introduce private capital into the London underground system.

Contrary to allegations made by Opposition Members and by some in the media, the various consortia have managed to secure the necessary finance for their proposals. That is the best way to enhance the infrastructure of London Underground. We want to ensure that the improvement works are completed on time and to budget. We want to ensure also that essential maintenance work is not overlooked and that the resources required to provide the public service are not diverted to pay for more massive cost overruns, such as those that were incurred in connection with the Jubilee line extension.

That is why London Underground has developed modernisation plans whereby three companies will be dedicated to fixing and improving the infrastructure. Those companies will work for the public sector.

**Tom Brake:** The Minister has been speaking for 10 minutes. He has only five minutes in which to complete his speech, yet he has not answered any of the questions raised by hon. Members.

**Mr. Spellar:** I thought that I was dealing with many of the questions that have been posed, not least why we believe that there is a need for increased infrastructure for the tube. There are several transport priorities throughout the country relating to rail and other modes of transport. Even in London, there is considerable pressure from the Mayor for additional investment in buses and pressure from elsewhere for investment in light rail. However, we believe that substantial investment in infrastructure, including investment for maintenance of the current tube infrastructure, is required. Having decided that such investment was necessary, we adopted the mechanisms to which I have referred to ensure that we achieve the most cost-effective and timely method of delivery. Those points relate to important questions raised by hon. Members, who have questioned the basis of the PPP, as well as the timing.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** On the question of timing, will the Minister say whether the Government will honour their manifesto pledge of 1997 to transfer London Underground to Transport for London? Will they do so before or after the fifth anniversary of their election in 1997, especially as that anniversary more or less coincides with the May elections?

**Mr. Spellar:** Yes, I am looking forward to commercial close on the project before the end of the financial year, although I had hoped that it would happen slightly sooner. The Department is putting in a great deal of work, and is putting pressure on all concerned to sort out the details, which it is important to get right. Equally, we want to secure close on the arrangements, following consultation and publication of the Ernst and Young report on value for money. That information will be put in the public domain before a final decision is taken. Then, under the Greater London Authority Act 1999, the intention is to transfer the running of London Underground to the Mayor and Transport for London. Like the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood, we hope that that will happen as soon as possible.

I shall move back to my main theme of London Underground and the development of modernisation plans whereby three companies will be dedicated to fixing and improving the infrastructure. These companies will work for the public sector. The operation and management of the system will be in the hands of London Underground. The public sector will monitor that work and payment will be linked to results. The companies will be required to deliver the improvements demanded by the public sector. Many commentators overlook the fact that several private sector companies already work for London Underground. We believe that this scheme will ensure a more efficient method of managing those contracts, ensure a better connection between the installation and

maintenance of services, and, therefore, ensure the ultimate delivery of a successful scheme. At present, there is a considerable gap between the companies that put in the service and the final output.

The reality is that about 80 per cent. of the investment work already undertaken—

**Mr. Bill Olner (in the Chair):** Order. We must move to the next business.



## Rural and Island Transport

11 am

**Andrew George** (St. Ives): I am sure that I speak for all right hon. and hon. Members today when I pass, via the Minister and others, our thoughts and support to the Chancellor and his wife following their tragic news. As well as offering our private support to them at this difficult time, we hope that they will not suffer public or media intrusion.

I am delighted to have secured this debate on island and rural transport. It is an opportunity to raise several issues, and I have informed the Minister's office about the line of questions that I shall pursue. The first matter is island transport, which is a particular issue in my constituency. No doubt others will wish to express their concerns about islands in their constituencies. With regard to the Isles of Scilly, I am not asking for special or favourable treatment; I ask merely for parity with other areas, particularly Scottish offshore islands, with which the Isles of Scilly can most closely and appropriately be compared.

The Isles of Scilly are five inhabited islands out of 200 islands and rocks—the nearest, St. Mary's, being 30 miles off Land's End and 42 nautical miles from Penzance in my constituency. The population of the Scillies is 2,000. The islands enjoy ferry transport from Penzance provided by the Isles of Scilly Steamship company, which also offers a freight service. Helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft fly there from a number of airports.

I shall deal first with sea transport. The Isles of Scilly Steamship company provides a ferry, Scillonian III, which carries 600 passengers. It was purpose-built in 1977, with some support from the then Labour Government, who supplied a £1 million loan towards its purchase and construction. It can take limited freight and, for seven months of the year, operates one return trip per day for six days a week. From early November until late March there is no passenger ferry service to and from the islands. The ferry is laid up during that time partly because of low demand, and also because it must, of necessity, have a flat bottom, and the prevailing inclement south-westerly winds in the winter months make for an unpleasant journey for people travelling in a flat-bottomed ferry. The freight service, on the Gry Maritha, takes freight to and from the islands three times a week. That loads and unloads by crane; unlike many Scottish ports, it has no roll on/roll off service.

With regard to air transport, British International has two Sikorski helicopters that provide services for between 26 and 30 passengers, depending on the amount of freight being carried, and costing about £96 for a period return. Two services out and back are run during the winter months when the ferry does not operate, which are clearly lifeline services to the islands. I am told that the company cross-subsidises what would otherwise be a loss-making service during these winter months with its other operations.

A fixed-wing aircraft is operated by Skybus for several destinations, including Land's End, Newquay, Exeter, Bristol and Plymouth. There is an eight-seater service from Land's End and a 16-seater service from other areas. All those services together provide 250,000 passenger journeys per year for people travelling from

*[Andrew George]*

and to these small islands. The helicopter service provides 47 per cent. of those journeys and the ferry provides 35 per cent.

Hon. Members may wonder why I am describing the situation in such detail, but it is important that they understand the services that are provided to the Isles of Scilly, as I shall go on to compare them with those provided in Scotland. I do not begrudge my Scottish friends and colleagues those services, but the comparison should be made.

In Scotland, the Government have been empowered through the Highlands and Islands (Shipping Services) Act 1960 to provide a deficit grant subsidy for transport links to offshore islands. That is now the responsibility of the Scottish Executive. The subsidies have been given to Caledonian MacBrayne, which has been wholly owned by the Secretary of State for Scotland since the 1970s. The company has to fulfil demand for specific services, including 23 lifeline routes, with a public subsidy of £21.4 million. A subsidy of £11 million is given to the Orkney and Shetland group, which is currently operated by P&O. The subsidies are EU-approved as state aid, subject to the services' being put to tender. The Treasury has always calculated funding for those services as part of the Scottish funding bloc. Air services are also supported with subsidies, which have been given to Highlands and Islands Airport Ltd. since the 1980s.

I have already given the Minister some comparisons in terms of cost subsidy per nautical mile and air mile between the services provided to the Isles of Scilly and those for Scotland. For example, the 42-mile ferry service from Penzance to St. Mary's costs the passenger 86p per nautical mile, whereas the 30-mile ferry service to Islay costs the passenger 23p per mile. The helicopter service for passengers in my constituency is £1.45 per air mile, compared with the cost of the Glasgow-Campbeltown service, which is 98p. Similarly, freight costs to the Isles of Scilly are more expensive, as well as being restricted.

I am aware that the subsidies for Scotland are put through the public service obligation test, which asks whether the market would operate the service on its own, without a subsidy. However, the Isles of Scilly face major dilemmas and opportunities, and decisions must be taken soon about whether the services that they currently enjoy can be sustained and extended. I would argue for extension, especially during the winter months.

As far as the PSO test is concerned, there is no question but that the island economy would almost totally collapse without existing services. However, the Isles of Scilly Steamship company cannot afford a new boat and cannot invest in ro-ro facilities. Last year, the company lost more than £100,000 merely on inter-island services, for which the Council of the Isles of Scilly provided a subsidy of £19,000. The company told me this week that it makes marginal profits in a good year and loses heavily in poor years. As a consequence, it does not have the capability to replace its ageing assets without support. Objective 1 money needs to be matched by support from the United Kingdom Government to replace the Scillonian III, and the loss-making inter-island freight operation needs revenue support and grant aid for future vessel replacement if it is to continue at all.

What assessment has the Minister made of the comparison between the costs and quality of services provided to the Isles of Scilly and those in Scotland, which I am sure are richly deserved? What discussions has she had with the Treasury or the Scottish Executive on parity of public support for such services? What advice would she give me, and therefore the island communities, on meeting future needs? I do not expect the Minister to have come to the Chamber with a cheque book as well as a speech, so I do not expect her to answer my questions in financial terms. However, I hope that she at least agrees to follow up the questions that I raise with further meetings, so as to help, advise and support the fragile island community on the Isles of Scilly as it deals with the issues.

I also want to raise issues about rail, but I understand that several hon. Members want to speak, so I shall try to be brief. I am especially interested in the mainline service between Paddington and Penzance. My constituency experiences the same problem as any community at the end of a main line. If there is a problem anywhere along such a line, the people at the end of it always get the worst deal.

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): Is my hon. Friend aware that Railtrack threatens to make the whole of Cornwall an island during the Easter weekend, as it proposes to close the Brunel bridge over the River Tamar? Does he agree that that shows ludicrous contempt for the Cornish holiday industry, and more generally displays a lack of awareness of the importance of encouraging rail transport for holiday purposes to rural areas throughout the country? Will he join me in making representations—I have made some already—to the Secretary of State and Railtrack to reverse the decision?

**Andrew George:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the issue. Not only have he, other colleagues and I raised the issue, but *The Western Morning News* has galvanised support locally to raise concern about the closure on that weekend, which was announced only recently. I had intended to raise the matter with the Minister. There will be other closures on the line in the coming months.

The closure is due to welcome investment in services, which has been long overdue. It is good that money is to be spent on the bridge. Brunel's generation recognised that it needed genuine investment and regular maintenance, but generations of recent Governments have not, hence the delay. The investment is welcome, and disruption is inevitable, but why choose to close the bridge on the most symbolic weekend of the year for the future of the summer tourist season? Many in Cornwall worry when England finds itself shut off. We worry about how it will manage without us, but we hope that it will cope for the few days that the bridge is to be closed. However, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that another time should be chosen.

On the broader strategic issues affecting Penzance commuters and passengers, I know that the Minister has experience of the rail journey to Newlyn, as she accompanied me on a Select Committee visit there to examine the fishing industry. On that day, the service ran on time—I do not know about the journey back—but that is not always the experience of those who travel to the far end of my constituency. In 1906 the scheduled journey time between Penzance and Paddington was six hours 35 minutes. It now takes approximately five hours, which is an improvement, but the journey from Exeter to Penzance takes as long—about three hours—as it did in 1906.

In 1997, Railtrack produced a trans-European networks study, funded by European TENs money, entitled "A Vision for a World Class Rail Transportation Network for the South West". It states:

"Railtrack is investing in 'core enabling' works to facilitate performance improvements and remove bottlenecks in the Great Western Main Line...over the next five years."

Railtrack claimed that it could cut journey times by up to 30 minutes, but five years on, as a result of disruptions and delays, some 30 minutes has been added, on average. In the past two years, services have gone from bad to worse. In the case of Cornwall, a vision for world class has turned into the nightmare of a third-world service.

As I sent her the relevant quote, the Minister will be aware that on 24 October, Sir Alastair Morton—former chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, and a Government appointee who presumably spoke for the Government—told a business gathering in Plymouth that the

"South West Rail network falls way behind other parts of the country in the Government's schedule for change. You are not near the top of the pecking order when seen from the centre. The region does not meet any of the Government's measurable criteria for priority funding."

Is that still the position? What must Cornwall and Devon do to improve their chances of securing vital investment and support? Lack of investment in rail infrastructure in Cornwall is a cause for concern. It is having a visible effect on levels of service, on customer confidence and patronage, and on Cornwall's credibility as a location for new and continuing business investment. Passengers are unhappy with the caretaker franchises that the SRA promotes through two-year extensions.

Disruption has been caused by many factors, including Virgin's withdrawal of services in Cornwall while driver retraining is undertaken. The introduction of 1960s rolling stock has added discomfort to a generally unpunctual service. What comfort can the Minister give to rail passengers at the end of the line in my constituency, and to passengers throughout the region? What will be done to get our services up the pecking order, to increase investment, and to improve the punctuality and comfort of those services?

In view of time, I shall not detain the Chamber much longer, but I want to raise one or two other matters. I should point out to the Minister that, although there are problems, the prospect of objective 1 funding for a further five years presents a major opportunity. I realise that, with our support, the Government have taken Railtrack into administration, but a great deal of uncertainty has none the less been created. Urgent decisions are required to bring forward projects that make the necessary infrastructure investments and improvements and take advantage of objective 1 funding, which is available for a limited time only.

What comfort, support and advice can the Minister give me so that I can tell the project operators and managers in Cornwall how to achieve the essential project progress that is required? Investment is needed in the branch line to the new university in Falmouth, for redoubling the track throughout most of Cornwall, and in signalling. Journey times must be improved. It takes two hours just to get from Penzance to Plymouth, let alone to get out of Cornwall and on to the track to London.

I do not want my speech to be simply a list of whinges. I congratulate the Government on what they have achieved through the rural bus services grant, which is significantly improving bus services in Cornwall, and I welcome many of the aspirations in their 10-year plan. It is important for rural communities in my constituency and throughout Cornwall that the fuel duty rebate should be extended to more informal community transport services such as voluntary car services and community bus services. The Government said that they would free up opportunities for community transport services to step in where bus services are not available. What progress is being made in achieving the targets in the 10-year plan?

I welcome this opportunity to raise matters of great importance to my constituents. We must ensure not only that there is parity between Scottish islands and the Isles of Scilly, but that rail services to the far west of Cornwall are at least brought up to national standards—even though those are not acceptable—before they go beyond them to achieve the levels of service that people in rural areas richly deserve.

11.22 am

**Mr. David Drew** (Stroud): I am grateful to be called to speak in this important debate and associate myself with the comments made by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George). I remind him that the last time that we were both in this Chamber we were talking about the south-west, defending initial moves towards regional government, although we approached the subject from slightly different areas and perspectives. I cannot comment on the second part of the title of the debate because we have not yet found an island in Stroud, but we are a rural area and I can comment on that basis.

I shall mention a few local issues in the hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take them up on my behalf, but I also want to consider the wider terrain in terms of what needs to be done about transport in rural areas. Although I have some criticisms of the Government's approach to the issue, they clearly recognise its importance and have addressed some of the underlying factors.

Five aspects are worthy of mention. First, rural transport grants have helped the bus industry. They have made a difference in my area, where we have a bus service that works on an interactive basis, which means that people may telephone for a bus. We must do more in that regard because there is pleasing evidence that that scheme allows people in the most rural parts of my

*[Mr. David Drew]*

constituency to have access to a bus for the first time. We must convert more people to wanting to use the bus and we must run the system more effectively because communications can make the difference. Not everyone in rural areas has a telephone, and if a bus does not arrive we must have a way in which we can tell people at what time it is likely to arrive. Sometimes buses do not arrive at all, although it is not a common occurrence.

The second aspect is the increase in rail investment, which is still insufficient. My constituency is linked to that of the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) by a railway line on which I am pleased to say that the rail operating companies are trying to run more trains. However, they have made promises that I am not sure that they can keep because we are now looking forward to more trains by next Easter, which means a delay. The existing services, which are well used, have improved when they run on time and when there are no problems further down the line—there have been such problems on several occasions.

The third area concerns transport in rural areas, which often depends on volunteers. Investment in voluntary bus services, and especially in voluntary minibus services, has increased, and it has made a difference. However, a great deal more needs to be done to build on that progress.

Fourthly, some parish councils have taken the £15,000 challenge. I am proud to say that I am still a town councillor, but I wish that more parish and town councils would take up that challenge because they are slow to come forward. If they did more work in that area they would make a difference to their communities, which would be preferable to the current diminution in that layer of local government. Parish councillors would be appreciated by their communities if they sorted out transport.

Fifthly, initiatives such as jumpstart, which also applies to the Cotswold constituency, have been implemented. We have identified that transport makes a difference because it allows people to attend work and training, which can make a difference to their lifestyle. The jumpstart initiative involves the provision by the Employment Service of free mopeds and training to help people to learn to drive. I believe that we must get people off the road, but there are situations in which, if one does not have a car, one does not work.

Transport has created various running sores in my constituency, such as the long-term problem with unacceptable traffic noise in Upton St. Leonards near the M5. Like my predecessor, I felt that I was banging my head against a brick wall on that issue, but the Government have listened. I should like to claim responsibility for that achievement, but it was not down to me; it was down to community effort. If one puts a good case to the Government they tend to listen; they deserve to be congratulated on that.

We must address the main factors. Transport is important to people who live in rural areas because it relates to their ability to work, to access shops and to send their children to the school of their choice. If transport is not available it bears down on people's ability to choose, which relates to their quality of life. We must recognise that we differ from urban Britain in the scale and nature of our problems.

We need greater resources, but we must deal with those resources in a sensitive way that is determined by individual demand. I stress the word "individual" because we are collecting together groups of individuals to make such services viable, and it is that process that allows services to run. That point relates to anti-poverty strategies, and I am pleased that the Government have highlighted their recognition that we must deal with the transport issue if we are to get to grips with the reasons why some people in rural areas have no quality of life and live in poverty. That will give greater opportunity to people, which has been borne out by the many reports, countryside agencies and organisations that examine poverty in rural and urban Britain.

I wish that it were just a question of introducing more buses and trains and better roads, but it is not. We must consider ways to improve quality. If we want people to use public transport, it must be reliable. The age of vehicles matters, as do bus shelters, particularly those in the more urbanised parts of rural areas, because no one wants to stand for a quarter of an hour waiting for a bus in the pouring rain if they do not have to. I do not suggest bus shelters for every village bus stop, but sensible use of small amounts of investment will make a significant difference to people's willingness to use public transport.

I fervently believe that we do not need more roads. We have had arguments on the subject recently, as the hon. Member for Cotswold knows; incidentally, I support the idea of the missing link just outside his neck of the woods. We need to improve by ensuring that the road network is completed. In the main, people in rural areas want not more roads but improvement of the quality of existing roads by proper surfacing—they want horrible potholes filled in before someone is knocked off their bike or worse. More money is coming through, but we have such a legacy of disrepair that more must be done.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): I am grateful to my neighbour for giving way. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need more flexible rural bus services? People tend to run bus services because they have always been run, but routes, services and, above all, the size of bus used must be reviewed. If it is uneconomic to run a full-sized bus, a smaller community bus should be used.

**Mr. Drew:** I totally agree with my neighbour. I thought I knew a bit about rural Britain, but only after I was elected as MP did I understand why, in the most isolated of places, one sees bus stops at which buses never stop. It is because we have the wonderful system whereby, when a bus goes past such a bus stop, the company can claim subsidy or some form of support. That system dates from the dark ages and no one has changed it or can explain it. It is time that we considered sensible approaches and had flexible responses.

**Andrew George:** Would the hon. Gentleman like to expand on that point? In the past, bus subsidies have applied to a particular route although, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, they should apply to an area so

that the system responds to the needs of that area over time and does not serve to perpetuate one route with a rigid scheduled timetable.

**Mr. Drew:** I entirely agree with that. The hon. Gentleman may also want to comment on the system of the traffic commissioners. It is not good enough that money is available to save rural buses if those buses cannot be saved; a new route can be created, but money cannot be put into an existing route because of the current subsidy regime and regulations. That needs consideration because it might lead to ludicrous situations in which a route is lost and, later, an improved variation of it introduced. That is not sensible.

I am satisfied that the 10-year transport plan is right, but we need to consider the action that follows. I will pose some difficult questions not just to the public sector but to the private sector. I am not satisfied that the private sector has played fair or is aware of its responsibility to rail and road, especially with regard to buses that use the roads.

We must accept that we shall not go backwards. It would be nice to re-regulate some of the bus services in rural areas because that made a significant difference to the number of buses and routes that were used during the past 10 years or so. We do not necessarily want what happened to Railtrack to happen to the rest of the industry, but we need rationalisation so that we may talk to fewer people. As MPs, we become frustrated with the number of different companies that we must deal with, which make promises but do not always deliver on them.

There is a problem and it is shared between the public and private sectors. If the private sector cannot do the job, we must look for alternatives—the public sector or even greater use of the voluntary sector. The shame is that the voluntary sector is often looking for such work, but must not do it on the cheap, must not be ripped off and must do it as part of a proper strategy. We could have a fast minibus link between the hospitals in our county—I am looking at the hon. Member for Cotswold—to ensure that people without transport can get to the towns and hospitals where their nearest and dearest are. That may be idealistic, but we should be looking for such ideas and I am sure that the voluntary sector would be pleased to participate in such provision.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I am grateful to my neighbour for giving way again. I do not know whether he is aware of the community bus service that was founded by the late Trevor Baxter near Stow-on-the-Wold. It was one of the first community bus services in the country and does exactly what the hon. Gentleman described. It is staffed by volunteer drivers and links local hospitals and doctors' surgeries. If enough notice is given, the route can often be varied to accommodate people who want to go to the doctor, post office, hospital and so on. A little public pump priming would help the volunteers to buy the buses, which they could then run. That would be an excellent community service.

**Mr. Drew:** I am aware of the late Mr. Baxter, who did excellent work. It can be done, but the problem is often that the initiative runs out of steam because the voluntary sector is taken for granted and resources are not forthcoming in the long term. I shall move on quickly because other hon. Members want to speak and it would be wrong for me to take more time than is due to me.

I shall give an example from my constituency of the need for proper planning. The Minister's predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), met us three years ago and agreed to allow Gloucestershire county council to borrow money for a rail-bus interchange at Stroud. I could bore the Chamber for the next half hour on why that did not happen and I point the finger at public authorities and the private sector, including Railtrack, for their inability to reach agreement not on the service but on land swaps and arrangements for building facilities. The Government must be cuter when considering how to push things along more quickly and sometimes use direct intervention. It is our money that is being forwarded for such projects, but they take too long and there are too many frustrations. I am sure that the Minister will take note and look into the matter urgently to ensure that different authorities do what they are asked to do.

Safety is sometimes underestimated. In urban Britain the number of casualties has declined, pleasingly, because of the action taken by the Government and their predecessor, but sadly the number of accidents in rural Britain has increased. Unfortunately, speed reflects people's frustration when they are held up, and they drive more quickly on rural roads.

We must also consider greater coherence in traffic calming, which was the subject of a debate in Westminster Hall some months ago. I am referring not just to road humps but to the way in which people who do not use a car get about. I am a keen cyclist and it used to be a pleasure to ride my bike around the rural parts of my constituency. That is still usually so, but if someone drives up behind at 60 mph in a narrow lane it makes one think carefully about cycling there. The Government should address that problem with an education programme, if nothing else, to persuade people to drive more considerately in rural areas.

I turn to some specific issues; I make no apology for doing so because I said that I would. One thing that the Government can do to make a significant difference to people living in rural areas is to ensure that the train system is improved in such a way that people want to use it, and—by providing more trains—that they can use it. We are talking about a £50 million investment that would dramatically improve the way in which people travel from Gloucestershire to London, for instance from the constituency of the hon. Member for Cotswold, where there is currently only a single line between Kemble and Swindon. It will not just be an improvement for ordinary passengers, but will make a significant difference for business. I have spoken about that subject before and make no apology for raising it again.

There is also a strategy in the south-west known as SWARMMS—the south-west area multi-modal study. I shall not dwell on the acronym. It is very important, but it tends to leave out the county of Gloucestershire. My hon. Friend the Minister might like to consider that. In a number of cases we are not looking for great expenditure in the county, but are asking for things like the doubling of the track between Kemble and Swindon. That issue should be addressed.

*[Mr. Drew]*

In conclusion, much has been done. The issue is micro-management, not big expenditure. We need to get on with doing things at ground level and to ensure that we continue to do things on a scale that is sensitive, takes account of what rural people want and attends to their demands. Our actions should follow that strategy.

11.41 am

**Mr. Alan Reid** (Argyll and Bute): I begin by joining other hon. Members in expressing my condolences to the Chancellor and Mrs. Brown on the tragic loss of their baby daughter.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on securing this important debate. In rural and island areas, transport is vital; it impinges on all services.

I should like to refer to the efforts to re-establish the ferry service between Campbeltown and Ballycastle in Northern Ireland. It is important both to the economy of the remote Kintyre peninsula and to the Moyle area of Northern Ireland. The efforts to get the service up and running are in danger of floundering in a bureaucratic muddle. When I wrote to the Prime Minister, his written answer was that the ferry service was the responsibility of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, because it runs between two different countries in the United Kingdom. However, letters to the Secretary of State in that Department are transferred to the Scotland Office, on the grounds that that office acts as the Department's agent. The Scotland Office, of course, says that it does not have a budget for such a service; that is because the budget rests with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

The Scottish and Northern Ireland Executives have indicated that they are willing to pay to meet the cost of the service. What is required is for this Parliament to make an order to transfer to the Scottish and Northern Ireland Executives the power to pay the subsidy. That, apparently, will take time. It is important for the tender documents to be issued now, so that the service can start in the summer. Many of the people who will use the service will be tourists, and there is no point in starting a service in the autumn. It is vital for it to be up and running by 1 July at the latest.

I suggest to the Minister that tender documents be issued urgently by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, because that Department does have a budget. In parallel, an order can be passed that transfers to the Scottish and Northern Ireland Executives the power to pay the subsidy, so that the order has been passed by the time that the tender documents are returned, enabling those Executives to accept the best tender and enabling the service to be in place by the summer. It is vital, and I hope that that course of action will be taken.

Islanders suffer tremendously high fuel costs compared with those paid by people living in the rest of the country. On Mull and Islay, in my constituency, the cost of fuel is 20p a litre higher than it is on the mainland. My constituents deserve parity with the rest of the country, not least because the taxation that is being paid to the Treasury, particularly on the island of Islay, far exceeds any money that comes back in the form of services. The people there are paying more in VAT on petrol because of the higher cost. Also, a tremendous contribution is made to the Treasury because of the number of distilleries and the large tax on whisky.

I want to make two suggestions. First, variable rates of duty should be charged on petrol on islands. That would require a derogation from a European Union directive, but I would encourage the Government to apply for such a derogation and levy different rates of fuel duty on islands to bring the price down to that on the mainland.

**Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that I agree with that proposal. However, does he accept that it might also be fair to apply it to certain remote rural areas that are far from the motorway and the principal road network, on which most of the money is spent?

**Mr. Reid:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, although the price difference between the islands and the mainland is more than 20p a litre, there is also a difference of a good few pence a litre between normal mainland prices and those in remote areas. Although my suggestion would be of more importance to the islands, it should also be applied to parts of the mainland.

Another reason for the high cost of petrol is the small turnover. My second suggestion is that the Government give transport agencies the power to buy petrol in bulk, thus obtaining a lower unit cost, and to sell it on at that cost to island and rural filling stations.

11.46 am

**Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on securing it. I was interested that he introduced his remarks by mentioning constituencies with islands in them. My constituency is an island, as the Minister well knows, so I feel particularly well qualified to speak.

I begin by admitting to some ignorance. I am glad that the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) spoke about the position that has been reached on the Campbeltown to Ballycastle service. I read, back in 1999, that his predecessor was making the case for the subsidy to that service to continue. The lifeline ferry services are of particular importance to island residents. Tourism services are very important, but lifeline services are even more so.

My second obligation is to put on the record the information that has been given to me by those who operate the ferry services to the Isle of Wight. They complained to me, perhaps rightly, that I had presented the island as having ferry services among the most expensive in the country. The operators have kindly supplied me with some figures. The cost per kilometre of Wightlink—hon. Members will forgive me if the figures do not compare with those presented by the hon. Member for St. Ives—is £1.55 for the car ferry service, and 54p for the passenger service. Red Funnel costs £1.05 per kilometre. The Cowes chain ferry, which is operated by Isle of Wight council, costs £9.29 per

kilometre. The Red Funnel high-speed service costs 29p per kilometre and the Hovertravel hovercraft service 57p per kilometre.

I have put those figures on the record partly to show how successful the private sector has sometimes been, without any subsidy from the Government, in providing cross-Solent services. I emphasise that those are the lowest fares available, some of which require a person to buy a book of 24 tickets, which must be used in six or 12 months. Not everyone can afford that. The other day I had to bring a car across—fortunately, from my point of view, at public expense—and it cost £50 for a return trip involving travelling on one day and coming back on another. That illustrates the concern felt by many of my constituents that we should not simply compare the lowest costs, because few people—perhaps only one fifth of the island's population—make frequent and regular journeys to the mainland. However, they must occasionally make urgent journeys, and they feel that the cost of those is unfair.

The island is taking the initiative in three areas as a result of an invitation given by the Minister's predecessor to my predecessor to consider the cost of travel for the purposes of health, education and seeking jobs.

**Andrew George:** I was fumbling through my notes to find the comparable costs for the Isles of Scilly. During the height of the season, the return ferry journey between Penzance and St. Mary's for a foot passenger—one cannot take one's car—is £78. It would be useful, perhaps after the debate, for the hon. Gentleman and I to compare the costs of ferry services to the mainland in our constituencies.

**Mr. Turner:** I will gladly share with the hon. Gentleman the figures that Wightlink gave me. Its list includes Caledonian MacBrayne and the Scottish islands routes, the Irish sea crossings and the services to the Isle of Man but, for reasons best known to Wightlink, it does not mention the Isles of Scilly.

It appears from the hon. Gentleman's earlier comments that the Isles of Scilly benefit from at least a fairly regular air service, unlike the Isle of Wight. To some extent, that reflects the fact that we already have relatively swift communications with London. For the benefit of anyone who wants to visit the island for a holiday or for other purposes, I should emphasise that it takes me only two hours to get from my front door in Cowes to Waterloo station on the scheduled service, all things being equal. For the most part, the service has operated reasonably well, given the obstacles that the Government and others have put in its way recently. However, we would benefit enormously from assistance with air services because people from parts of the United Kingdom outside London and the south-east also want to come to the island.

I revert to the issues of most concern, the first of which is health. As in the Isles of Scilly and other remote rural areas and islands, our hospital cannot provide every necessary service. I compliment the bodies that support people who have treatment on the mainland, including the Wessex Cancer Trust and Heartcare, which assist people who travel to Southampton or the King Edward VII hospital at Midhurst for the services that they need. June Ring, in particular, has worked tirelessly for the trust over many years to assist people who visit the Southampton hospitals for treatment. She has accompanied many of them and has arranged taxis and minibuses at the other end. The King Edward VII hospital does the same for those with coronary care needs.

Residents are concerned that coronary services may be transferred to Brighton, which is a long way away, without the advantages of transport being in place. I put on record my thanks to David Crawley for his work for the Isle of Wight primary care trust to ensure that proper transport links are in place when the service is transferred. People do not always need accompanied transport, but they do need simple transport. We are taking the initiative on that, but we may need the Government to make a little contribution towards the cost.

Secondly, there are education services. We are fortunate to have a further education college on the island, but it clearly cannot provide every service, and many people must travel to the mainland. Thirdly, there are people who are seeking work. On the island, we have commissioned a survey into reducing the cost of cross-Solent travel for those particularly needy groups. I hope—in fact, I am sure—that in due course we shall make proposals for the Government to assist us, through the Isle of Wight partnership and the Isle of Wight council, in reducing those costs.

It is easy to criticise the Government and the relevant companies, and then to present a wish list to which even the Minister, with her customary generosity, would be unable to respond instantly. However, I want to mention how pleased I am about the level of subsidy and support provided by the ferry companies for island people—particularly the ice hockey team, the Isle of Wight Raiders, which has been subsidised until recently by Wightlink. I appreciate the support given to sports people, bands wanting to play on the mainland and a range of other people.

The ferry companies are part of the community. They are not simply leaching it. However, there are problems with the oligopoly. We have only two major ferry companies. Of course, Hovertravel also provides the hovercraft service from Southsea to Ryde. Will the Minister examine, in particular, the open port regulations? During the previous Parliament, I wrote to her predecessor, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), asking her to do so.

The regulations rightly require those who operate an open port to make space available to anyone, but do not ensure that the same space is always made available to operators wanting to provide regular services. At the time in question, Red Funnel was owned by Associated British Ports, which also owned the entire waterfront in Southampton. It had an interest in maintaining the Red Funnel monopoly on the route to Cowes, and one way of doing that was to deny other companies a regular landing slot on the waterfront at Southampton. I hope that the Minister will attend to the matter.

I emphasise the need for flexibility in other respects. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute referred to fuel costs. Until recently there were three suppliers of fuel on the island but, thanks to various takeovers, we now have

*[Mr. Turner]*

a monopoly supplier. The effect has been to push up the cost of agricultural fuels—that is the example that I have been given—and perhaps other fuels, in comparison with the mainland.

We also need flexibility with respect to taking animals to slaughter. We do not have a slaughterhouse on the island. We consider that that is largely the result of legislation derived from Europe, which was gold-plated by the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. With the National Farmers Union and other agencies, we are looking towards the creation of a slaughterhouse on the island, perhaps associated with an outlet for island produce. It would be helpful if the Government would suggest some support for more slaughterhouses, particularly in rural areas, because there are animal welfare benefits in providing them.

Finally, I shall say a word or two about assisted area status.

**Mr. Bill Olner (in the Chair):** A word would be better.

**Mr. Turner:** I apologise for taking too much time.

We need assisted area status. Perhaps that is the simplest way to put it. The Isle of Wight is one of the poorest areas in the south-east—certainly among the 10 poorest constituencies. It has high unemployment and the lowest gross domestic product in the south-east—less than 75 per cent. of the national average—yet we are unfairly associated with wealthier areas such as Hampshire for the purpose of assisted area status. We need to be considered independently of the mainland so that we can qualify, if not for objective 1, at least for objective 2 status. If the Minister can promise nothing else, I hope that she can promise that.

11.59 am

**Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. In the interests of brevity, I merely associate myself with many of the remarks that have been made, particularly those made by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George). I congratulate him on securing the debate, because the chance to discuss island issues in the House is rare.

I associate myself also with the remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) on the cost of petrol and diesel in island and rural communities, and I agree with much that was said by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), particularly about the need for rural slaughterhouses. We in Shetland are familiar with that problem. The hon. Gentleman and I are two of only three Members who have entirely island constituencies, so we have a particular contribution to make to a debate such as this—although I envy the hon. Gentleman for having a constituency with only one island.

Naturally, much of the debate on island transport has centred on ferry services. In the brief time available to me, I ask the Minister to turn her attention to air services to island communities. They are particularly important to my constituents. Journeys from Orkney involve a two-hour ferry trip to the mainland followed by at least a four-hour journey by road to reach any sizeable town, and it is a 14-hour ferry journey from Shetland to Aberdeen.

Air travel is immensely important to people requiring hospital treatment in Aberdeen, and to those who need to travel for educational or job-seeking purposes. When I checked this morning, I was told that the standard full fare from Sumburgh in Shetland to Aberdeen was £294, and that the cost from Kirkwall in Orkney to Aberdeen was £277. That is a significant burden on local people who have one-day hospital appointments and those who need to travel with them, on those who serve on the local health board, and on local businesses. Apex fares are available, but extra conditions always require to be fulfilled, including staying away on the Saturday, which is not suitable for many island businesses.

Our particular problem is that the air services to the northern isles operate on a marginal profit. I suspect that any route could be operated profitably if one was prepared to tolerate a low standard of service and high fares. It is therefore important to establish what sort of benchmark service should be provided. To that extent, I should be interested to hear the Minister's views on the application of public service obligation orders to services such as those to Orkney and Shetland.

A few days ago, a travel agent in my constituency told me something about the Saab planes that are used on the northern isles routes. They are often smaller than needed and are clearly unsuitable in many ways, but they are being used because of the marginal nature of the routes. Those planes do not have the necessary capacity; technical difficulties and breakdowns often result. Another plane that would be much more suitable for the northern isles routes would be the Dash 7, but that is not open to us because of the small margins available to those operating on those routes. I suggest to the Minister that the imposition of public service obligation orders would allow improvements in the quality of the service.

We all accept that subsidy should be given to transport in the rest of the country, in the form of roads and railways. Why should those island communities who have to rely on ferries and air services be treated any differently? When one lives on an island, Mr. Amess, transport becomes something of an obsession. I could bore those in the Chamber for the rest of the day with this subject, but I see that I have had my five minutes.

12.4 pm

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) that one need not live on an island to become obsessed with transport. It can become an obsession even for a Member who represents Carshalton and Wallington, which is in suburbia.

I shall confine my remarks to a few points, as the Liberal Democrats have made a heavyweight contribution to the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on securing the debate and raising his concerns in a constructive way. The general tone of the debate has been constructive and I now feel much better informed about services to the Isles of Scilly. My hon. Friend spoke eloquently about the problems with those services and I shall listen carefully to the Minister's response to see whether she can assist him and his constituents.

I echo my hon. Friend's concerns about Railtrack's plans to shut England off from Cornwall over the peak Easter holiday period and I hope that the Minister will give a commitment to talk to Railtrack, which is in administration, about those plans to see whether those important works could be undertaken sooner or rescheduled for a time that would be more convenient to the tourist trade. I also hope that the Minister will have time to respond specifically to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) regarding an urgent request for tender documents to be issued to enable the ferry service to which he referred to proceed.

There is no doubt that rural areas—where up to one in five people do not have access to a car—suffer disproportionately from poor access to transport. It is clear that the way to solve the problem is through bus and community transport services, as there are no rail services at all in many rural areas.

Although the number of passengers using buses has declined, we should not accept that that decline is inevitable. In London, where bus regulation was retained, the number of bus users has increased by 8 per cent., whereas outside London, where bus services were deregulated, the number of bus users decreased by 9 per cent.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right about rural areas, but does he accept that the same does not apply to some urban areas outside London?

**Tom Brake:** I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. I am simply saying that we should not assume that bus use will decline, because there are measures that can halt such a decline. For example, bus regulation or reform of quality partnerships and quality contracts could allow for changes in fares and frequency of services and ensure the greater flexibility that some hon. Members have requested. In that way, bus services could change according to demand, rather than relying on a top-heavy or contractual process that puts the brakes on new bus services. It should be possible for new services to be provided almost immediately in a way that cannot be achieved with other services, such as rail and light rail.

On rural transport regeneration, we support the fact that the Government have provided additional funds for bus services, but we would like them to go further. We put forward proposals in our costed manifesto for a total of £200 million to be spent each year on a rural transport regeneration fund. We estimate that that would allow about 2,000 new or improved bus services to be provided each year. In considering the introduction of such services, one may also take into account the savings to the national health service that would result from a consequent reduction in road accidents. The average cost of an accident is £140,000; if one reduces road accidents, additional savings can be made elsewhere.

The Government could introduce other measures. They could extend fuel duty rebate to community transport, as other hon. Members have suggested. They could cut car tax to make people pay little or nothing on the least polluting cars. The price of public transport is a problem, and something must be done to assist bus customers, even when such services are available. I suggest free off-peak travel on local buses and reductions for students.

I can see that the Minister wants me to draw my remarks to a conclusion. Before I do, I want to ask what progress has been made on increasing access to bus services, a measure used as an indicator in the Transport 2010 plan. Of the 500 or so rural transport projects due within three years of the plan's launch, how many have been delivered? Are the Government on track to deliver all 500?

12.10 pm

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): I extend the compliments of the season to you, Mr. Amess, and to all hon. Members present, including the Minister. I also express my party's commiserations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his wife on their sad news today. We wish them well in future.

I shall keep my remarks brief, because I want the Minister to have a chance to reply fully. I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on obtaining the debate, which has thrown up much interesting information, not least from some of the remote parts of the United Kingdom, which are often forgotten. He has done the House a service by raising the matter, which especially interests me because his constituency and mine belong to the south-west region. It is a huge region, extending from the Isles of Scilly to the constituency of my neighbour in the north, my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson). If ever there was an example to show why regional government does not work, this is it. In many respects the requirements of our areas are as different as chalk and cheese.

The hon. Member for St. Ives did not draw hon. Members' attention to a matter to which I shall refer. In a letter dated 21 December 2001, Louisa Britten, the deputy policy adviser for the south-west region, stated:

"Following the announcement, on Wednesday 5th December 2001, a meeting of all local authorities in the South West was held to discuss the implications of the provisional announcement."

The implications were that the settlement for the south-west region, as announced that day in the House, was pretty poor. Further meetings are being arranged with the relevant Ministers in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to discuss the settlement. If we do not have a reasonable settlement, the transport services in my constituency and that of the hon. Member for St. Ives will suffer, compared with those in the rest of the country. The issue is not only more money but equity of distribution in the formula. That is why we look forward to the Government's redistributing the formula. We want that to be done as soon as possible; we do not want to wait two or three years.

The hon. Member for St. Ives raised some interesting points, which I have time only to skate over. As he is aware, there has been significant investment in road networks in his region during the past two decades. The motorway network extends from Exeter, with two trunk roads—the A30 via the Okehampton bypass and the A38 via Plymouth—into Cornwall. My area has had no similar investment in road infrastructure, and urgently

*[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]*

needs it. The A417 and A419, which is now a national network road—a vital short-cut road—that extends from the M4 to the M5, needs a so-called missing link. One can travel from the island of Sicily in Italy to Glasgow on dual carriageway, with a little missing link in the middle of my constituency. My constituency suffers serious accidents and fatalities because of that missing link. The DTLR has put in place a study under the Babtie Group. I urge the Department to act quickly on its findings.

In the short time left to me, I want to mention trains, as have many hon. Members. Train infrastructure is important in all rural areas. I have a huge rural constituency which extends to 1,000 square miles and contains 110 villages and 10 market towns. Trains are a vital form of transport there, as they are for the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), who made an excellent speech. Will the Minister consider those rural services, which could be improved for relatively small sums?

My neighbour, the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), referred to the upgrade of the single-track line from Swindon to Kemble and Cheltenham. That would be a huge infrastructure boost for his constituency and mine. Another rail infrastructure improvement would be the upgrading of the Hereford line via Moreton-in-Marsh. The hon. Gentleman did not refer to the possibility of reopening some rural stations, but I have been involved in a campaign to reopen the Chipping Campden station on that line, for example.

The industrial action that is affecting South West Trains will mean that falls in service will continue to be experienced by those in the south-west, who have already experienced falls since 2000 from 84.3 per cent. to 73.6 per cent. That is bound to get worse as a result of the industrial action. We want proper, forward-looking decisions to be taken on investment in our railways. As a result of Railtrack's being put into administration, such forward planning does not exist. I have asked many detailed questions about the Virgin Cross Country franchise route, which might help the south-west, but have not received any satisfactory replies. Will the Minister address that issue, as it is an important national infrastructure project?

I am fully in favour of beefing up bus services in rural areas, which was another issue referred to by the hon. Member for Stroud. We received a briefing from the Disability Rights Commission on the matter. Bus and rail services should be fully accessible to disabled people. It is curious that the Government have a 10-year target for increasing bus services by only 10 per cent., whereas the target for increasing rail travel over the same period is 50 per cent. Will the Minister address that problem?

I must leave the Minister time to reply, as she has been asked a range of questions about ferries, rail and roads in our more remote areas, which are wonderful places to travel and have some excellent facilities. I can tell the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) that I enjoyed a very acceptable dram of Highland Park whisky over the recess. I encourage all hon. Members to boost tourism in rural areas by paying such visits, as that is one way in which we can help those areas.

12.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) for securing the debate and to all hon. Members who have taken part. The debate has been helpful, positive and constructive. If I do not answer all the questions, it will be only because of time constraints, but I will deal with as many as I can.

First, I join with all other hon. Members in expressing my sincere condolences to the Browns for the loss of their daughter, which was a dreadful tragedy for them.

I shall consider what we are doing to improve rural transport while addressing specific local issues, including strategic issues for Cornwall and the south-west connected with that area's location, which has done much to cause transport problems. I shall also refer to ferry services.

The Government are determined to improve transport as much in rural areas such as Cornwall as in big cities. We want rural communities to be thriving and prosperous, and we recognise the importance of transport's role in that. We want, too, to boost tourism, as the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said. Our vision of how transport can contribute to a rejuvenated rural England was set out more than a year ago in the White Paper entitled "Our countryside: the future". It emphasised the need for locally provided services in rural areas to reduce long-distance travelling and, in particular, for better quality public transport provision that is flexible enough to be truly responsive to the needs of rural communities. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and the hon. Member for Cotswold emphasised the importance of bus services in achieving that.

Much has been done over the past year to implement the White Paper's vision for rural transport. More than £40 million will be spent during this financial year alone on the rural bus subsidy grant to provide extra local bus services to rural communities, and we are providing more flexibility within that grant scheme so that 20 per cent. can go to existing services. Nowhere can our drive to improve rural public transport across England be better seen than in Cornwall. Last year the county was acknowledged by my Department as a centre of excellence for rural transport.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud mentioned the need for more demand-responsive services, especially in relation to buses. I want to highlight the role of the rural bus challenge in stimulating innovation in the provision and promotion of rural public transport, including new services of that type. In last year's challenge competition we gave £21 million of funding for 51 innovative rural bus projects, from novel bus infrastructure improvements to flexible, demand-responsive minibus and taxibus schemes. We shall announce the results of the latest challenge competition shortly. That will be another big boost for the more innovative types of rural bus service.

Earlier in the current financial year, the Government established through the Countryside Agency two important rural transport programmes—an enhanced rural transport partnership scheme and the new parish transport fund—to enable rural communities to develop transport solutions to meet local needs. Over the next

three years those two programmes will together spend £47 million on a range of projects. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) asked whether the Government were on target in respect of the 500 new schemes that were proposed in the policy statement, and the answer is yes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud referred to community transport. We recognise that that sector plays a vital role in catering for needs that cannot be met by scheduled commercial public transport services. Above all, it provides flexible solutions that are tailored to meet the needs of local people. We made it clear in the rural White Paper that we wanted an expansion of the community transport sector, and we will shortly publish a consultation paper on the changes that might be made to reduce barriers to its expansion. We are also committed to extending the bus fuel duty rebate scheme to a wide range of community transport services, and we shall introduce regulations shortly. I hope that that reassures hon. Members who are interested in such services.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on his remarkable diligence in always pressing the concerns of his constituency. He has raised the profile of the Isle of Wight as never before. He is an island in himself. I shall deal with his points about ferry services later. On port regulations, I shall give him a considered written response. I shall look at the statistics on disadvantage in his area. I am aware, partly due to his pressing of the matter, that there are problems in his constituency arising from the number of prisons, but I was not aware of the other factors, and I shall send him the details that we have.

The hon. Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) and for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) raised some important points about ferry services and illustrated extremely well the disadvantages that people in rural and island communities can face. I shall take the matter up with the Scottish Executive, who are responsible for the bulk of such issues. On public service obligations, I shall give the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland a considered written response.

I want to deal with some of the south-west issues, but as I have only a few minutes left , I must go through them at a canter. I shall send a written response to the helpful note that the hon. Member for St. Ives sent to my office.

**Andrew George:** I appreciate the Minister's response to the issues that she has raised, but there were three specific questions that I outlined both beforehand and in the debate: the Easter bridge closure, the ferries and improvements to rail services in east Cornwall.

**Ms Keeble:** The hon. Gentleman raised issues concerning regional transport links. Each English region is required to develop a regional transport strategy that sets out key regional transport priorities. These will be informed by multi-modal studies, which will provide integrated solutions to major transport problems around the country. As I am sure the hon.Gentleman is aware, the south-west area is subject to a multi-modal study and the report is due in April. It will recommend improvements to reduce journey times to Cornwall and to increase the reliability of such journeys. I am sure that it will address the strategic regional issues that underlie his remarks this morning.

Many hon. Members have raised issues relating to railways, and I should point out that a statement from the Strategic Rail Authority is due next week in which it will set out its investment plans. Sir Alastair Morton is no longer the chairman of the SRA, and we shall be examining the way in which that investment plan addresses the issues raised this morning.

On the reports about the closure of the bridge over the Easter weekend, Railtrack has consulted the train operating companies, as it is required to do. It has made arrangements to ensure that the closures will not affect the Friday and Monday of the bank holiday weekend, which are the peak travelling times. The train operating companies were satisfied that these closures were the best solution to the difficult choice that occurs when one must make improvements to infrastructure that require possession of the railways. I shall write to the train operating companies involved to establish whether there was consultation and whether mechanisms exist for consulting passengers and other stakeholders such as tourist agencies about the timing of such closures. It is in everybody's interests to work together to ensure that the commuter services keep operating to make the most of that peak tourist period. It is a question of all stakeholders working together to find the best possible solutions.

Finally, I want to turn—I recognise that this will be brief—to island transport. Ferry services in the United Kingdom are expected to operate on a commercial basis unless there is a compelling reason why they cannot do so. As a general rule, my Department does not directly subsidise ferry services in England, but English local authorities have the power to subsidise local ferry services if they wish, and several do. I understand the point about the replacement of the passenger vessel to the Isles of Scilly. The Council of the Isles of Scilly is hoping to seek a European objective 1 grant for a replacement passenger vessel. It would be premature to discuss its proposal in detail, but I am sure that the Cornwall objective one partnership will look sympathetically at any grant application.

There will, however, be issues to address involving eligibility and value for money. I know that officials in the Government office for the south-west are looking forward to seeing shortly the report on the consultancy study commissioned by the Council of the Isles of Scilly, which we hope will make clearer the extent to which there is a case for supporting a replacement vessel. I say to the hon. Member for St. Ives that it is important that we receive that consultancy report at an early date so that we can assess it properly.

In conclusion, I hope that I have addressed the main concerns that were expressed by Members of all political persuasions, and shown that we understand the difficulties in rural areas. We have put in place the planning, some of the money, and innovative small schemes—micro-management, as it was described—that can indeed make a difference to the quality of life of people in rural areas.

## Barry Donnan

12.30 pm

**Mr. Brian H. Donohoe** (Cunninghame, South): I raise the sad case of Barry Donnan, who joined the Royal Highland Fusiliers in 1987 as a 16-year-old. As a young soldier, he was sent to Lockerbie in 1988 to pick up pieces of bodies that had fallen from the sky. After that he was sent to the Belize jungle, where he was accused of murdering an Army cook—a foreigner—who in fact died of a heart attack. The case was dealt with not by the Army, but in a civil court. After an eight-week trial, he was eventually found not guilty. On his return home in 1991, he was sent immediately to the Gulf. One of the many events he witnessed there was the burial of hundreds of Iraqi soldiers in a mass grave. Such events traumatised him, but he argues that inoculations and tablets supplied to the troops also contributed to his suffering post-traumatic stress disorder, among other disorders.

As a former trade union official, I had to represent social workers in the aftermath of Lockerbie. Six months after the disaster, not a single social worker was still in employment. All of them had to be pensioned off because of the stress that they experienced. Nor does a single policeman or fireman who served during the events of Lockerbie remain in service. As a 16 or 17-year-old boy, Barry Donnan was sent into the very middle of that disaster, but the Army gave no counselling. Nor did the Army offer the necessary support during his time in Belize and in the Gulf. As he says in his book, "Fighting Back"—a copy of which I have given to the Minister—he just lost it. After a break, he went absent without leave for some six months. On being captured, he was court-martialled and sentenced to 112 days in Colchester. No counselling was offered, and no attempt was made to look at the mental state of this youngster.

On his release from Colchester, he was immediately sent into the trauma of Northern Ireland. By his own admission, he had no clue where he was or what he was doing. Before being allowed on to the streets of Northern Ireland, every trooper normally completes an intelligence threat analysis course, but Barry did not have that certificate. I find that rather surprising, and it illustrates the events that surrounded the fusilier at that time.

Barry first came to my surgery on 14 March 1997. On 24 March, I wrote to the then Minister for an immediate review of his case. I have made subsequent representations to the present Minister and to his predecessor, but to no avail. Aspects of the case greatly concern me. When Barry applied for legal aid, his solicitors were informed that because the War Pensions Agency had given information to suggest that he was time-barred he would get no form of support from the Legal Aid Board. I have established that that was misinformation, but young Barry's situation still gives cause for concern.

In 1999, after three years of dealing with other matters, he came to tell me that his disability living allowance had been withdrawn. After a protracted fight with the then Minister with responsibility for social security, I established that that should not have happened and ensured that the disability living allowance was put back in place; however, it was at a lower rate. Barry's most recent argument is that he believes that his war pension is under threat. He says so on the basis that while he was in the ex-services mental welfare place in Hollybush, Ayrshire, he discovered that statements were being sent to the War Pensions Agency about how he was doing. He is of the opinion that that was threatening his war pension and is concerned that reports are being sent from the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society to the War Pensions Agency. I have been told by the commodore in charge that that is normal because the armed forces are paying for his time in the Hollybush centre.

I am looking for two possible solutions. There is no doubt that the Ministry of Defence must change the way in which troops are dealt with and fully recognise that although their physical state is looked after well by the Army, their mental state is equally important to them. During developments in the deployment of armed forces around the world—the latest of which has been in Afghanistan, and before that they were in Kosovo—there does not seem to be the commitment that there should be to the mind of the individual and the traumas seen. One could argue that the lad was immature from the outset, but there is no difference between someone who joins the armed forces and someone who becomes a policeman or joins a local authority as a social worker. The experience of Lockerbie was so traumatic for the police and social workers that not one of them was still in that employment six months after the event. It surprises and appals me that the armed forces do not treat that mental element as they should; they must do so, and settle the case of Barry Donnan. I appeal to the Minister on that point.

Arguments that have been presented in correspondence suggest that another option is open to young Barry. He could join a group of some 30 ex-service men who are in some form of joint application to the Ministry of Defence and through that to the courts for a settlement. However, in his letter dated 27 August 2001, Barry states:

"The group action issue is nonsense, the time scale is too long, only 30 ex-servicemen are being heard in the first instance, of which I don't belong, then, what ever the judge says is binding. So, maybe I won't ever get a fair hearing. My solicitors have made and struck many deals with the MOD lawyers, I am sure they will know the outcome before it even gets to the High Court. Perhaps, that is why the MOD are so keen to railroad me down that line."

He now has no confidence in the system, which is what led me to apply for this Adjournment debate. I want the Minister and the civil service to wake up to the mental health issue in the armed forces and, particularly in Barry's case, to make some form of compensation. I look forward to the Minister's response.

12.39 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie):** I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) for initiating this debate about his constituent, Mr. Donnan, and the important issues surrounding his claim for compensation against the Ministry. My hon. Friend will understand that because Mr. Donnan's case is due to be heard as part of a wider post-traumatic stress disorder group action in the High Court in early March, it would be inappropriate for me

to discuss the details or to re-examine Mr. Donnan's case ahead of the judgment. The group action, of which Mr. Donnan's claim is a part, is significant litigation. The trial is likely to last up to five months with written judgment to be handed down in the autumn. I understand that Mr. Donnan will give evidence at the trial.

While recognising the emotive and sensitive nature of the issues raised by group actions, it is important that they are set within a factual context. I have corresponded with my hon. Friend about the case on several occasions, as have my predecessors. The way in which he approaches the debate is constructive and far removed from the lurid headlines favoured by some when dealing with similar cases.

I have read Mr. Donnan's book, "Fighting Back: One Man's Struggle for Justice against the British Army". He has endured a series of terrible personal tragedies that have contributed to his present suffering and I have considerable sympathy for his current plight. Stress-related medical disorders are recognised by the armed forces as potentially serious and disabling conditions. Post-traumatic stress disorder—PTSD—was not recognised internationally as a medical condition until the 1980s, but methods of treatment have subsequently developed in the medical world and the armed forces. The measures now in place to combat PTSD in the armed forces have evolved and been enhanced over a number of years to reflect our improving knowledge of the condition, its effects and the best methods of remediation. Each service runs active programmes aimed at prevention and treatment. Measures include pre-deployment and post-deployment briefing and, when practicable, availability of counselling in theatre.

The strategic defence review recommended that psychiatric services be enhanced and a review of the defence community psychiatry service has been completed. That resulted in proposals to enhance existing defence community psychiatric centres and the formation of two new centres: one in Scotland and one in England. Additionally, the armed forces are exploring ways of detecting PTSD at an early stage and of managing the condition according to the best clinical practice. That involves training service line managers so that they are better able to detect symptoms of stress-related conditions in their units and to act positively with individuals to resolve problems before seeking outside professional assistance from the defence community psychiatry service. A pilot programme was set up by the Royal Marines and has provided positive results.

Turning to litigation, the Ministry has received about 1,500 claims for post-traumatic stress disorder from former members of the armed forces, mainly relating to service during the Falkland and Gulf conflicts, and in Bosnia and Northern Ireland. Many of the claims contain similar allegations, so the Lord Chief Justice set up a group action in 2000. The allegations, in general terms, are that the Ministry was negligent in that it failed properly to recognise, diagnose and treat those said to be suffering from PTSD. The action consists of two groups. In group one the Ministry's alleged failure occurred before 15 May 1987 and in group two the earliest alleged failure took place after 15 May 1987. The reason for the two groups, as I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, is that prior to 15 May 1987 service personnel were prevented from pursuing claims against the Ministry of Defence under section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947. That section was repealed on 15 May 1987 and it was logical to separate the claims into those arising from incidents occurring before and those occurring after the repeal. Mr. Donnan's case forms part of the second group.

Compensation claims received by the Ministry of Defence are considered on the basis of whether the Ministry has a legal liability to pay compensation. Where there is a proven legal liability, compensation is paid. The amount of compensation is determined by common law principles which, broadly speaking, take account, as appropriate, of the individual's pain and suffering, the degree of injury, past and future financial losses, the level of care required and so on. The level of compensation can vary according to the individual's circumstances.

That Mr. Donnan suffers from PTSD is not questioned. I acknowledge that he receives a 100 per cent. war disablement pension and a service pension under the armed forces pension scheme. The nature of Mr. Donnan's disability is, therefore, not the issue to be determined by the court. It is important to emphasise that this litigation is not about the validity of PTSD as a psychiatric disorder—the Ministry accepts its validity—or about soldiers unjustifiably suing in respect of the natural and probable risks incidental to their calling. The claimants' case is that PTSD can be detected and prevented, and that proper systems would or should have achieved those objectives in the vast majority of cases.

The parties have agreed that the judge be invited to adjudicate on a range of generic issues that form the basis of the allegations. Those issues include: screening to exclude those vulnerable to PTSD from combat in the first place; briefing to prepare soldiers psychologically for combat; detection to enable the early identification by properly educated commanders and medical officers of those who are either at high risk of a PTSD or who suffer from one; debriefing to allow for the deployment of psychological intervention post trauma to ventilate or defuse its adverse effects, to educate the individual about those effects and enable him to seek help if necessary and to enable the employer to detect early or incipient morbidity; cumulative exposure, or the deployment of troops beyond their expected breaking point; our duty at discharge and the failure to carry out a thorough medical examination at discharge from the armed forces, and, therefore, to detect and treat psychiatric morbidity at that stage; the failure to deploy effective treatment modalities; Crown immunity and the question of whether section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947, which is relevant to breaches of duty that arose before May 1987, is appropriate in the light of the human rights that are now enshrined in British law; and causation, or the extent—if any—to which alleged breaches of duty caused or materially contributed to the claimants' psychiatric condition. The claimants' case highlights alleged failures in the Army, although their solicitors recently confirmed that the Royal Navy and the RAF were equally targets of criticism.

The Ministry acknowledges that some members of the armed forces may be subjected to traumatic experiences during their careers and may suffer stress as a result, but

*[Dr. Lewis Moonie]*

that does not necessarily mean that it has been negligent. However, it has a duty to ensure that service personnel receive proper treatment. If we fail in that respect, and the individual suffers loss or damage as a result, he or she may be entitled to compensation.

If I may, I shall leave PTSD to one side, and turn to matters that arise from Mr Donnan's service in the Gulf. The Government accept that some Gulf veterans have become ill and that many believe that their ill health is unusual and is related to their Gulf experience. There is now scientific evidence that Gulf veterans report more illnesses than other comparable groups, but there is no medical or scientific consensus about the causes of those illnesses. We remain open minded about the causes, and important research is under way.

**Mr. Donohoe:** What are the time scales for that exercise? When will we have the final reports?

**Dr. Moonie:** It might be helpful if I point out to my hon. Friend, since the matter is one of my responsibilities, that some 12 research studies are still proceeding. Most of them will report during the coming year. Some of them are very detailed, others much more general. The various problems should be resolved within the next 12 months or so. However, we are afraid that we will again find that there is nothing specific involved after having expended a great deal of time, effort and money—resources have not been stinted in our attempts to identify the cause of the conditions that are complained of. We may be left with an inconclusive result and have to recognise that we will never get to the bottom of the matter. However, I assure my hon. Friend that any suggested causes will be actively followed up and that we will do our very best to find the cause, if there is one to be found.

As my hon. Friend is aware, we encourage all Gulf veterans who are concerned about their health to attend the Gulf veterans' medical assessment programme. That programme was set up in 1993 to provide as full a diagnosis as possible to veterans who were concerned about their health. Following consultation with the medical assessment programme, the examining physician writes to the doctor who referred the patient to provide diagnostic information and recommend any appropriate treatment. It is then that doctor's responsibility to take forward and monitor the treatment as he or she would for any other patient. Veterans who have left the armed forces will normally have a GP as their doctor and any recommended treatment will therefore be carried out within the NHS. Veterans can be referred to the medical assessment programme more than once.

Last year we re-issued our Gulf veterans' illnesses information pack. Copies of the pack have been sent to all GPs in the United Kingdom, service medical officers, prison medical centres and other interested parties. I understand that two appointments were made for Mr. Donnan at the medical assessment programme on 18 October 1999 and 16 November 1999, but that for reasons that are unknown to me he declined to attend both of them, or was unable to do so. He was referred by his GP because he was suffering from depression. The medical assessment programme provided advice in writing to the GP and offered to help in any way they could. I would take this opportunity to urge Mr. Donnan to make use of this facility, because it might still be of some benefit to him. The people have a great deal of experience in handling those who have had similar experiences to him.

Gulf veterans' illness issues remain a high priority for the Government, as evidenced by the Gulf veterans' medical assessment programme, the continuing support for research and the publication of new information whenever it becomes available. The Government have demonstrated their commitment to addressing Gulf veterans' concerns openly, honestly, and seriously and I assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to do so.

The Ministry's Gulf veterans' illnesses unit is drawing together a document for publication later this year which will identify the key health lessons arising from the aftermath of Operation Granby and the subsequent investigation of Gulf health issues. It will set out developments that have contributed to improved performance since 1991. Planned publication of this paper further underlines our commitment to address the concerns of veterans' groups who have expressed the worry that the shortcomings in the Gulf may be repeated in future. We are determined that that will not happen and that the lessons must be applied to future deployments.

As my hon. Friend knows, early in 2001 I was appointed Minister with responsibility for veterans' affairs. I have spent most of the intervening months improving my contacts with all the veterans' organisations in the UK, so far as I am able, and setting up a proper structure for the handling of veterans' matters. As a physician, qualified in psychiatry and public health, I can assure him that medical matters such as Mr. Donnan's case are high on my list of priorities. I shall be taking a personal interest in the development of the community psychiatry programme and in the development of means to identify some of the factors that I have outlined; that may prove part of the case that the judge will review in the action later in the year.

**Mr. Donohoe:** The Ministry of Defence could use other approaches to the matter, besides going to court. It seems to want to hide from its obligations. While the Minister's remarks have been encouraging in a general way, they will do nothing to help Barry Donnan. On past experience of dealing with the Ministry of Defence, most cases are settled before they reach court. I wonder whether the Ministry would want to move from a reactive approach—of driving matters towards the courts—to a proactive approach of solving problems.

**Dr. Moonie:** I have to say three things in reply to my hon. Friend. First, Mr. Donnan has chosen to have his case included in the group action. I am therefore constrained in what I can say, because of the legal proceedings. Secondly, treatments are available for Mr. Donnan's condition. The Gulf veterans' medical assessment programme might be able to direct him towards further help. It is not true that we are doing nothing for Mr. Donnan. As I have suggested, we have provided a reasonable pension. I am conscious of the adjectives used to describe pensions, but the general procedures have been followed.

We operate a generous scheme in the armed forces of both attributable and non-attributable benefits, through the War Pensions Agency, which is now, of course, part of my rapidly increasing area of responsibility. Mr. Donnan can rest assured that his pension is not subject to the reports on him supplied by the facility that has been treating him. Rather, the procedure was used by the association to justify his continued treatment and costs at the facility. Obviously it is necessary to show whether he would derive further benefit from treatment.

I cannot comment in detail on the case, but, to summarise, I have great sympathy for Mr. Donnan's predicament. I do not like our soldiers to suffer as he has done. Unfortunately, when the Ministry is accused of negligence and I consider that unjustified, it is necessary to take a robust stance. In the present instance, that is my general view, which is why the actions are proceeding. Generally, I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am conscious that people can be mentally as well as physically damaged by their service to the Crown, and I shall ensure that the services that we provide to them in turn are as good as they can be to deal with any future problems that they experience.

## Cirencester Hospital

1 pm

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): I am grateful to have been able to secure this debate, and am pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), here to answer the debate. I have always regarded her as one of the more able Ministers in her Department and it is a pleasure to be here with her. She may know that I shall see her colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), for a private meeting about this matter next week. I hope that the debate will be a useful preliminary discussion of some of the issues and that we shall perhaps be able to go into more detail next week.

I am sure that the Minister is well aware of the context, but it might help if I set that out. Cirencester is the largest town in my highly rural constituency, but the hospital is not typical. It is not as small as a typical rural community hospital nor as large as a normal district general hospital; it is in between. There are not many models for a hospital of that size in this country. That is why we begin to encounter the problems that we have. It is a delightful hospital, very well run by a matron who knows the name and medical condition of every single patient. It is spotlessly clean and people are treated with the highest possible care.

Nothing that I say implies any criticism whatsoever of the staff or administrators at the hospital, which provides 22 medical beds on Stratton ward, 50 assessment and rehabilitation beds on Colm and Windrush wards, 18 surgical beds on Beeches ward, 19 beds for mental health patients on Bourton ward, six endoscopy beds, a comprehensive range of out-patient services, 24-hour accident and emergency cover, an assessment and rehabilitation unit, a radiology unit and a phlebotomy department.

Our problem is that the range of accident and emergency services could be curtailed by the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of General Practitioners, which have recommended that the senior house officer posts at Cirencester hospital be withdrawn in the next few months because they do not offer adequate training. Although that recommendation has not been received formally, it is expected imminently. The problem, as I shall demonstrate, is with the ability to maintain full 24-hour accident and emergency cover when the senior house officers are withdrawn, because no surgery can take place unless there is proper medical cover.

While activity at the hospital has fallen by just under 1,000 cases—from 5,204 to 4,312—in the last three years, in the similar hospital at nearby Stroud it has increased by 25 per cent. Indeed activity at the maternity unit in Stroud has increased by 30 per cent. as the result of very diligent activity by the authorities in that area. When Cheltenham district general hospital and the Gloucester infirmary district general hospital are at breaking point, it makes eminent good sense—in fact it is a win-win situation—to increase activity at Cirencester and reduce the stress, strain and overstretch at those two district general hospitals.

*[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]*

Cirencester has a catchment area of some 25,000 to 30,000 people. The task is to persuade all the GPs when referring people to a consultant with the possibility of medical procedures to follow, and everybody who lives in that area when being referred, to consider Cirencester seriously. The theatre in Cirencester hospital is capable of some 2,000 operations, yet it is achieving only 1,000, or 50 per cent. of capacity. The answer is not to curtail and close facilities at Cirencester hospital; it is to use them better. The same applies to the cottage hospitals in my constituency—there are excellent, small cottage hospitals at Fairford, Bourton-on-the-Water and Moreton-in-Marsh. They should not be closed, but used better.

The funding formula does not fully reflect the circumstances of a highly rural area. As my neighbour, the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) knows, it costs more per head on the capitation formula to provide services in a rural area precisely because of the distances and the sizes of units involved. I ask the Minister seriously to consider that factor. I also ask her to look at whether the capitation formula adequately reflects the costs of treating elderly patients. My constituency has the third highest number of over-85-year-olds of any in the country. Cirencester has to deliver services that are particularly geared towards elderly people. It is a truism—the Minister will correct me if it is not—that half the cost of providing health care for any individual is incurred in the first year and the last year of his life. Clearly, a hospital like Cirencester can provide a very valuable service in that respect.

The reason for this debate is the threat of curtailment of the accident and emergency department at Cirencester. The local press has run a very high-profile campaign on the matter. Before Christmas, 3,000 people came to a demonstration in Cirencester town centre. Only a few times in its ancient history—Cirencester was the second largest town outside London in Roman Britain—has the town centre been closed to through traffic, but it was on that occasion. That suggests the severe concern of local people on the subject.

Whatever the future holds for Cirencester hospital—I hope that the Minister will assure me that it is rosy and that services are moving forward and increasing rather than decreasing—the annual worrying of my constituents must stop. Every time changes occur, the local press finds out, huge campaigns are whipped up, and elderly people in particular become worried. With the advent of the running of the primary care trust on a more local basis from 1 April, I hope that we can have a proper public relations explanation of what goes on in the local hospital in language that those people can understand, so that they are reassured.

I would like to refer to the sad case of the treatment of a Mrs. Clark at Cheltenham general hospital. On the whole, the east Gloucestershire NHS health trust, which will soon be merged with the Gloucestershire royal NHS trust, has run a superb ship. Cheltenham general hospital gives good treatment to my constituents in the main, but Mrs. Clark's letter to me of 19 July suggests what can go wrong. She says that she is an elderly patient, and was to have fairly invasive surgery. She was asked to walk to the theatre, to which she objected strongly. I agree. No elderly patient should be asked to walk to the theatre. She details inadvertent circumstances that I shall not describe, but states that her purse was not available to her for five days. She was not fed properly for six days, and was not looked after adequately in her bed, stating:

"I had on several occasions requested that I be helped to sit up in bed as my legs have been paralyzed and each time I was told to do it myself as they were busy".

The letter points out what happens in our larger district general hospitals. People do not have time to treat patients with the necessary care and attention. I make no special criticism of Cheltenham general hospital, as all our district general hospitals are under the same stress. However, the case for Cirencester hospital is strengthened by the argument. If we can reduce the number of patients who go to Cheltenham through increased use of Cirencester, it is a win-win situation.

I return to the subject of the loss of junior doctors at Cirencester. As I said, there are two options as to how the cover can be maintained. A rota of general practitioners could provide resident on-site medical cover, or resident on-site medical cover for up to four nights of the week could be provided by staff grades or other medical grades, with non-resident GP on-call cover.

The first option is preferable, as it would enable the range of services currently provided at Cirencester to continue unchanged, with the exception of a small number of emergency cases. It would provide a more experienced level of cover, compared to that which would be provided by the relatively inexperienced senior house officers. I shall come back to the subject of experience. The second option would require a reduction in elective surgical activity, as it would not be possible to have in-patient cases when there was no resident medical cover, as is self-evident. A cessation of emergency admissions would also be required, as in the first option. In addition, it would be necessary to review the clinical protocols governing accident and emergency admissions, and it is likely that a few conditions would be excluded from admission during the night and at weekends. However, attendances during those hours are few. We all understand that accident and emergency services must be governed by protocols. Of course, the more serious and life-threatening cases will go to the district general hospitals, even during the day but especially at night, because those hospitals have intensive care beds and full consultant cover, but my constituents want 24-hour accident and emergency cover to be maintained at Cirencester.

The matter was due to be concluded last night, but unfortunately was not. This is what happened. The project director of the Cotswold and Vale primary care trust, Richard James, said:

"We remain extremely optimistic following yesterday evening's meeting but it is clear that a number of detailed tasks need to be completed in order for this agreed approach to be implemented successfully. Everyone left the meeting feeling positive that we could conclude the detailed work successfully and that the necessary medical cover could be put in place."

That has been the situation for two months. We still have no agreement and we know that cover is likely to be withdrawn on 1 May, if not sooner. Furthermore, I was told this morning that it takes at least a year to train doctors for the residential qualification necessary to

provide hospital cover. If it takes a year to train doctors and there is no agreement in place about whether they will provide that cover, it is difficult to see how the gap will be filled. I seek an assurance from the Minister this morning that she will do her best to ensure that SHOs are retained at Cirencester hospital until properly qualified doctors are available to continue that cover so that there is no break in the service, because I fear that if there is a break in the service, it will never be restored.

This is a question of allocations, and I have already alluded to the fact that the Cotswold and Vale primary care trust is perceived to have spent more than it should have done. However, the reason why it has spent more than it should have done is because it is in a rural area and has a higher percentage of elderly patients. That means that the number of patients per GP is higher than the national average. Another relevant factor is that, in the health service, the requirements of elderly people are often overlooked. When elderly people go to see their doctor or consultant or go into hospital for a medical procedure, they are often confused and not as articulate as younger people. They are not as quick at explaining their problems or understanding what their GP or consultant tells them. We sometimes do not give elderly people the respect that they deserve in the health service.

The people of Cirencester love their hospital. They want all services there, especially the accident and emergency cover, to be maintained. They are looking to the Minister for reassurance today, especially about the need for trained doctors to take over from SHOs. I hope that that reassurance will be forthcoming and I look forward to continuing this discussion with the Minister's colleague at next week's meeting.

1.13 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on securing a debate on the future of Cirencester hospital, which is held in high regard by his constituents. I welcome the tribute that he paid to the staff at Cirencester hospital. I wish to respond as far as I can to the points that he raised, but I shall also ensure that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), is aware of the issues raised in the debate so that she can follow them up in more detail.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, responsibility for deciding what services are provided at the hospital and how they are delivered rests with the local NHS bodies in Gloucestershire, in particular with the East Gloucestershire NHS trust and the Cotswold and Vale primary care trust. The key decisions about Cirencester hospital must be taken locally and where appropriate with proper public consultation. Ministers become involved only when a matter is referred to them by the local community health council—or, in future, by the scrutiny committees of local authorities. Nevertheless, I am aware of the concerns that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I shall respond, as far as I can, about the local position; and I will place it in the context of the national approach to the provision of acute care.

The provision of acute services, in hospitals large and small, is one of the central pillars of the NHS. We must clearly ensure that those services are the very best possible, and that they provide modern patterns of care fit for the 21st century. When we talk of modernising medical care, it is easy to think of sophisticated, high-tech treatments being provided in large, specialist hospitals. It is certainly true that many complex services and high-risk conditions require a critical mass that can be found only in larger centres. However, that is only part of the story.

In determining care for the new century, it is critical that we place at the centre of our thinking the views of the people and patients that the NHS is here to serve—including the hon. Gentleman's constituents. The public place a high value on locally available acute care, which means providing treatment as close as practicable to where they live, given the constraints of quality and safety. They want hospitals to serve local communities and to be focused on their needs.

We need to strike an appropriate balance between the convenience of having local services and the requirement to concentrate expertise for reasons of safety and quality. We should not fool ourselves into thinking that the best that the NHS can offer can always be provided on our doorstep. However, many needs can and should be met locally—close to home—by delivering care through networks of skilled providers working together and not in isolation. It is a strategy that is based on local solutions in a national framework. It is a strategy that recognises that small units such as Cirencester hospital have a vital role—not only today but in future—in delivering high-quality care.

I turn to the specific issues that the hon. Gentleman raises. Current public concerns about the hospital focus on the probable removal, later this year, of the junior doctors who provide overnight and weekend medical cover. I know that that is perceived to be a threat to the services at the hospital, particularly to the accident and emergency department. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I have been assured today that the East Gloucestershire NHS trust and the Cotswold and Vale primary care group are fully committed to maintaining the current level of services at the hospital.

I understand that a meeting yesterday between the trusts and local general practitioners may have gone a long way towards meeting local concerns, enabling Cirencester hospital broadly to maintain its current level of services despite changes to the way in which junior doctors work within the trust. I am concerned by the points made by the hon. Gentleman, because they do not entirely fit with the briefing that I received of that meeting. The matter may need to be discussed in further detail with my hon. Friend the Member for Salford, but I will say more about that shortly.

I am advised that the current pressure for change at Cirencester has arisen as a result of medical staffing and clinical governance obligations. At issue are questions about the increasing specialisation of clinical staff, rising standards, minimising clinical risks—and, perhaps most important, changes to the training regimes and hours of work of junior medical staff. Four senior house officers are based at Cirencester; they provide the resident medical staff overnight and at weekends, supported by on-call GPs.

The Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of General Practitioners have recommended to the Specialist Training Authority, which recognises the

*[Yvette Cooper]*

senior house officer posts at Cirencester hospital, that the experience offered at Cirencester is not adequate for training purposes. The Specialist Training Authority has not yet made a decision on whether to continue to recognise the posts for training purposes, but it is expected to be received later this month. However, I understand that the post graduate dean for the south and west region is concerned that middle and senior medical cover and support for those junior trainee doctors is not adequate, and that the associated clinical governance risks do not need to be taken.

The outcome, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, is likely to be the withdrawal of senior house officers from Cirencester and their relocation to Cheltenham in February 2002. That will enable their basic training and support from senior doctors to be enhanced, so that they can gain a wider range of clinical experience. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that it is important that junior doctors should be properly trained, have the necessary experience and be able to provide the high-quality care that is expected by not only his constituents but patients across the country. Under those circumstances, the key issue is to secure alternative medical staffing arrangements overnight and during the weekend period for Cirencester hospital. Daytime cover is adequately provided through a combination of consultant presence, GP clinical assistance and staff grades.

East Gloucestershire NHS trust and the Cotswold and Vale primary care group are in discussions with medical staff to ensure that alternative arrangements are in place to provide medical cover. As the hon. Gentleman says, the preferred option is for the rota of GPs to provide resident on-site medical cover. That option would provide a more experienced level of cover compared to the relatively inexperienced senior house officers. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that the reports that I received from the meeting that took place yesterday said that broad agreement on the proposed new arrangements was reached with local GPs by the trust and primary care trust. Although some contractual details remain to be worked through, it is anticipated that the new arrangements will start on 1 May. To ensure continuity prior to the establishment of the new arrangements, the trust has advertised for four locums to provide cover from February. However, in the light of his comments, I shall discuss the matter again with the regional office and the local people who advised us to ensure that the situation is as I understand it. My hon. Friend the Member for Salford will be able to discuss it in more detail with him and provide him with the reassurances that he seeks.

The proposed new arrangements will mean that services at the hospital remain substantially unchanged, with a doctor-led accident and emergency department open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the continuation of the in-patient medical and surgical services. As a result, patients attending accident and emergency are likely to see more experienced doctors than they do at present. I am told that there will be a small reduction in emergency admissions as a result of changes to clinical protocols on admittance, but that the reduction would have occurred because of the demands of clinical governance even were junior doctors to remain at the hospital.

The trust is working to maximise nurse-led services and to use telemedicine links effectively to maximise the scope of services. All beds will continue to be provided, and beds released by the changes will be used to provide increased elderly care rehabilitation and intermediate care services. The post-graduate dean for the south and west region is currently considering the creation of GP registrar posts in intermediate care. If that is agreed and posts are allocated locally, it would provide an additional level of medical cover to the hospital.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** There is one other aspect of medical cover that I did not mention, but would be grateful if the Minister could address. Some consultants are resistant to maintaining lists in Cirencester hospital, because it is more convenient for them administratively to have people travelling to the district general hospital in Cheltenham. That is unacceptable to my constituents. If there are the required number of people in need of treatment in Cirencester, the consultant should be prepared to travel. It should not be the case that the list at Cirencester hospital is cancelled at the first opportunity.

**Yvette Cooper:** I shall ensure that that issue is examined by the time the hon. Gentleman meets my hon. Friend. When it is clinically safe and high-quality care can be provided, we want to provide as much care as possible in local areas for the convenience of patients.

The presence of doctors in training is not essential for the provision of strong and vibrant local hospital services. I believe that the local NHS community is committed to ensuring that Cirencester hospital continues to provide a wide range of acute services for the people of the Cotswolds. The Government's view is that smaller units such as Cirencester have a vital role to play as part of the national health service.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the increasing focus on local decision making through the primary care trusts. He is right that the shift of power and resources towards the primary care trusts means that decisions about local hospitals can increasingly be taken with the interests of the local population in mind. We must also move away from the idea of hospitals as stand-alone institutions, each providing a specialist set of services. Instead we should ensure that the comprehensive range of services is provided across a diverse mix of institutions, be that primary care, care in the community, or care in a local hospital such as Cirencester and in the larger district general hospitals. Cancer networks have been developed to improve linkages across hospitals and between acute and primary care. That needs to take place in many other areas. It provides many opportunities for small hospitals across the country, many of which are working hard to develop their role and to embrace new ways of working. The challenge is to deliver the right care, in the right place at the right time. That means making maximum use of those local resources, but also of the primary care centres, to deliver and co-ordinate a local population's care.

As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, the care of older people requires close working between hospitals, primary care and social care. He also expressed concern about the funding formula. As he will be aware, the funding formula is under review and the NHS plan

committed us to introduce a new and fairer funding formula for the NHS and to get resources to areas of greatest need. He will also be aware that we have representations from every part of the country, all raising their local concerns and pressures. In my own area, the concern is that there are fewer elderly people than in other parts of the country because life expectancy is considerably lower. Ensuring that those factors are included as part of the funding formula is clearly a complex matter, which is why such a major review is taking place.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me to confirm whether the most expensive care was provided in the last year of someone's life. That is true. The beginning and end of life are the most expensive times in terms of health care provision, and when the NHS understandably invests most in providing support. He also asked about the case of a constituent in Cheltenham hospital. He should refer his constituent to the NHS complaints procedure, as there may well be issues that should be taken up properly by Cheltenham hospital.

The Government are committed to having a mix of levels of care provision, not simply in the Cirencester area, but across the country. That care will be provided at the specialist level but also at the local level. We clearly do not simply want giant hospitals as isolated centres of excellence. We are entering a new era of health care provision where new technologies offer clinicians the opportunity to work together, to share expertise and to give clinical opinions to their peers, not necessarily through face to face contact but perhaps via phone, video conference or telemedicine links. The increasing use of modern technology to improve communications between consultants and medical professionals should provide even greater opportunities for smaller hospitals and local centres of care to provide all kinds of care that they could not provide in the past.

In conclusion, there are huge opportunities for the people of Cirencester and the local NHS to look at new and different ways of providing care. Clearly they have already been doing so by considering ways in which they can respond to the challenges posed by changes in junior doctors' hours and their training needs. I hope that we will be able to resolve the issue of last night's meeting and ensure that a satisfactory decision is taken rapidly to reassure the hon. Gentleman's constituents about the kind of care that will continue at Cirencester, and to ensure a viable and healthy future for that hospital.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I thank the Minister for her sympathetic and comprehensive reply. The debate has been useful and I look forward to continuing the discussion with her colleague next week.

## Methane Drilling (North Staffordshire)

1.30 pm

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Thank you, Mr. Amess, for presiding over the debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for attending on this first day of the parliamentary Session in the new year. I am deeply sad, as are we all, that the day is overshadowed by the tragic news received by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. My constituents and I offer him and Sarah our sincere condolences at this painful time.

I have requested the debate because of massive opposition in north Staffordshire and Shropshire to plans by StrataGas plc to crack into virgin coal seams in precious greenbelt and special landscape areas in order to drill for coal-bed methane. StrataGas's planning application for four test wells, to be followed by up to 1,000 production wells—barbed wire, rig and concrete blots on our landscape—has been opposed by Labour-controlled Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire councils. Local parishes are against the plans and more than 1,000 letters of protest have been written. The planning issues involved will be heard at an appeal at the end of this month.

The Department of Trade and Industry, as the arbiter of national energy policy, is one of many interested parties. Coal-bed methane plans are, of course, nothing new. Licences envisaging CBM exploitation have been issued by the DTI since the start of the 1990s. One of my hon. Friend's predecessors, Tim Eggar, the Conservative Energy Minister, was effusive about CBM as long ago as 1992. StrataGas's plans could create a huge conflict between pressing local environmental and national policy issues, which needs to be resolved during this debate.

I would appreciate the Minister's advice on several issues relevant to StrataGas's controversial scheme. What is the DTI's current stance on CBM schemes in general and how does that fit into the current energy review? To what extent, in what time scale and under what conditions is CBM seen by the DTI as "needed"? What stance will the DTI take on StrataGas' plans in Staffordshire and Shropshire, and on what grounds? Will it take into account local environmental issues and public opinion in deciding whether to support the scheme, and will its decision be influenced by this debate? Given the many reservations local people have about the suitability of StrataGas, how does the Department vet licensees on an on-going basis?

Before I address those points, perhaps I could just briefly set the scene. Newcastle-under-Lyme has always been a coal-mining town, until recently when all our pits shut down. It is, however, surrounded by wonderful, unspoilt rolling Staffordshire and Shropshire countryside to the south and west and by the Staffordshire moorlands to the north. If the Minister were to visit, I am sure that he would appreciate that for himself, as did a planning inspector last year who ruled against a gas extraction scheme near Biddulph in the Staffordshire moorlands. I hope that the DTI will consider his findings carefully for their relevance to the StrataGas plans. The Minister would also find much to admire about the great efforts that Newcastle and Staffordshire councils have made to regenerate vast areas of brownfield pit and opencast sites to attract thousands of new jobs.

*[Paul Farrelly]*

StrataGas is a spin-off from Midlands Mining, the company that brutally shut down our last colliery, at Silverdale, in 1998. It also made a hash of its other pit, Annersley Bentinck in Derbyshire. More than 800 jobs were lost owing to the failings of directors and shareholders of StrataGas.

It is deeply offensive that people who failed to invest in mining coal underground now seek to get rich quick by cracking into coal seams above the ground, while creating very few jobs. It is equally offensive that, given all the possible drill sites, they are seeking to do so by spoiling precious greenbelt. The Minister may be interested to know that at a public meeting over a year ago, StrataGas managing director, Mr. Andrew Purcell, told local people, in his trademark listening style:

"The Government has given us the right to drill whether you like it or not."

I am sure that the Minister will find it as galling as local people that StrataGas was implying DTI support, long before all the issues even started to be aired.

I should like to digress, but with a purpose. Mr. Purcell also told me:

"We made no money out of Silverdale."

I have been through the accounts. The company made pre-tax profits of £5.9 million from 1996-98—the period of its ownership. It also took out £4 million—more than was needed to invest in opening up new seams—in dividends by stripping the assets of the mine. What we hear from the company's management is not what we get. The mines and StrataGas investors learned that, and it is what local people fear if that small, financially weak company is given the go-ahead with its CBM plans.

In its prospectus, StrataGas admits that there are significant environmental considerations, such as adverse visual impact, water and methane discharge and land restoration. Locally, we have identified many more, including traffic, children's safety at the nearby Edenhurst school, effects on local wildlife, housing blight and general harm to local business and tourism in a quasi-rural area. Therefore, much of the planning inquiry will focus on whether there is a national or local need for the CBM scheme. We would like to hear the Minister's views on that, and the current position on national policy guidance.

I must admit that we are fumbling in the dark. We have not yet seen the performance and innovation unit's energy project report. However, we are aware that the report says that new energy capacity could best be delivered through energy efficiency, combined heat and power systems and renewable energy. I would be grateful if the Minister confirmed that that is the current thinking.

It is important to distinguish between coal-bed methane and coal-mine methane. The latter is tapped off to prevent its escape from mineshafts—rightly so, as it is a greenhouse gas—but coal-bed methane is present naturally in stasis in virgin, uncracked coal seams. The geologists' report and the StrataGas prospectus make it clear that the seams in the north Staffordshire coalfield lie beneath clay—the Etruria formation—which is an effective seal and stops CBM escaping. Therefore, there is no environmental argument for StrataGas tapping CBM in our area in order to stop it escaping as a greenhouse gas.

As for local gas needs, StrataGas, as the former owner of Silverdale, already has a coal-mine methane operation at the mine; indeed, it is its only source of revenue. The gas is supplied to local business. Over the past year, StrataGas performance—surprise, surprise—has not been up to its directors' publicly expressed expectations. Results have suffered because take-up of the company's gas supplies has fallen. That is hardly surprising in a country awash with gas in which there is fierce gas competition. In short, we feel that there is no national need for the CBM scheme, which would override local environmental, planning and public concerns. Furthermore, as the company's performance shows, there is no overriding local need for the gas.

I would also be grateful to the Minister for information about the conditions that attach to the granting of exploration licences and how the DTI monitors adherence to them. The DTI granted licences to Midlands Mining, the parent company of StrataGas, in 1998. They have since been passed on to StrataGas. The company itself made it clear that the conditions laid down by the DTI for the transfer of the licences included raising a minimum of £4 million on its flotation and admission to the City's OFEX market, which happened in December 2000. StrataGas in fact raised £4.9 million but fell well short of its target of £5.6 million. It has since been consistently over-optimistic to its investors about the timetable for the CBM project, which is now a year behind because of huge local opposition.

The company has not revealed its current cash position but, from the most recent accounts and likely cash burn, we estimate that it is likely to be down to its last £2 million. That is about half the amount it originally said was needed to develop all the test wells. Therefore, the Minister will appreciate local fears that the company is too weak financially, not only to carry through its pilot scheme but to satisfy us that it could withstand any accidents caused by the new, largely untried technology and restore sites properly. Given the company's performance to date and lack of assets, there are concerns about its ability to raise further money in order to do so. Therefore, we would be grateful if the Minister would investigate whether StrataGas is still complying with its licence conditions, including any timetables set for initial well drilling.

A year ago, I raised concerns about disclosure in the StrataGas prospectus with the Financial Services Authority, which subsequently contacted StrataGas advisers, Matrix Securities. Yesterday, I wrote again to the FSA asking it to investigate statements made since by the company's chairman, Mr. Francis Gugen, about its performance, which appear to be at odds with its prospectus.

What you see and hear from StrataGas is not what you get. The public in Staffordshire and Shropshire are concerned because there is no overriding need for the CBM scheme and StrataGas is a wholly unsuitable company to pursue it.

1.39 pm

**Mr. William Cash** (Stone): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly), who is my constituency neighbour, on securing the

debate. I support him in his opposition to the coal-bed methane proposals. As Member of Parliament for Stone, I have been actively involved in the issue for an extended period, and I am deeply opposed to the proposals. They raise the most serious problems for the environment in my constituency, especially in and around Whitmore, and, as the hon. Gentleman said, they are vitiated by the grave uncertainties of the status of StrataGas.

I should like the Minister to explain how the Secretary of State for the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, having granted the licences in his former capacity as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, can now call in the application? How can he reconcile his quasi-judicial functions in his present capacity in respect of granting the licences with his previous granting of those licences? It creates a very difficult situation, which is made worse by the fact that the former Minister of State for Energy, the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), has already stated on the Floor of the House that the Government regard coal methane projects as in the national interest. Those inconsistencies raise serious doubts about the efficacy of the process, even before the inquiry has begun.

The pilot proposals for four wells are clearly intended to extend to 200 and would cause the gravest damage to the communities and the environment in my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme.

**Ms Joan Walley** (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is widespread fear throughout north Staffordshire about the implications of the incremental planning applications?

**Mr. Cash:** I most certainly endorse what the hon. Lady says. The matter is also of concern to my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson), because the proposal extends to Woore, which is in his constituency. It affects a wide swathe of our constituencies and it is important that the Minister accepts that our constituents are gravely concerned about the issue and will fight hard to prevent implementation.

1.42 pm

**The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) on securing the debate and on the manner in which he presented his case. Judging from what he said and from the interventions of hon. Members representing constituencies in the same part of the country, I acknowledge that the issue gives rise to strong local feelings and is therefore a suitable subject for debate.

The debate provides an opportunity to discuss some of the issues involved as they relate to energy policy, the possible role of coal-bed methane energy generation and local issues. My hon. Friend is active and successful in seeking the regeneration of industrial sites in the Staffordshire area with a view to ensuring an inflow of investment. His anxieties about the proposal for investment and coal-bed methane drilling in and around his constituency stem from genuine feelings on the matter and reflect the views of many of his constituents.

As my hon. Friend said, a planning appeal is under way. I am sure that he and others present recognise that that significantly constrains what I can say about some aspects of the application. I can, however, describe the regulatory framework that underpins the United Kingdom's petroleum licensing system and the activities that take place under it, and it would be helpful to do so. I hope to show that a robust regulatory framework controls those activities and to set my hon. Friend's mind at rest on some of the points he made.

Companies that want to search and bore for and get petroleum in Great Britain or on the United Kingdom continental shelf need under the Petroleum Act 1998 to hold an appropriate licence, which is issued by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. For the purposes of the Act, petroleum includes coal-bed methane and mines vent gas.

The principal licence under which companies may explore for and exploit those coal-mine gases in Great Britain is the petroleum exploration and development licence, which grants the holder exclusive rights over an area specified in the licence. The Secretary of State invites applications for such licences in regular licensing rounds. To allay the concerns that have been expressed, I stress that those licences confer no right of access to land, save with the landowner's permission, and do not remove the need to comply with the requirements of the local planning authority, the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency.

Applications for petroleum exploration and development licences are made by companies, on their own or in partnership, and are assessed against two key criteria: the financial and technical capabilities of the applicants in relation to any proposed work under the licence, and the way in which any exploration or development of petroleum is to be carried forward. Unless companies can pass the financial and technical thresholds, they will not be considered eligible for a licence award. StrataGas, the company that holds the licence for the area that my hon. Friend mentioned, holds a number of those licences, having been thoroughly assessed against the criteria. Currently, we have no grounds on which to revisit the criteria, but I assure my hon. Friend that we shall consider carefully what he said.

The award of a licence is the beginning of the process. Once a licence is granted, any activities carried out under it are subject to a range of measures to safeguard particular interests. Before any exploration or development drilling can take place, the Secretary of State must grant consent. Our objective in considering applications for consent is to ensure that all economic petroleum in Great Britain and on the UK continental shelf is produced in an efficient, responsible and timely manner.

The team of geologists and engineers in the oil and gas directorate of the Department of Trade and Industry will seek to ensure that the proposed project is sufficient to maximise the recovery of the target gas, but is not gold-plated as regards the number of wells drilled or processing plant provided. I am now speaking generally about applications rather than in any way prejudging the one under discussion.

In addition, the licence holder must obtain the relevant consent from the appropriate planning authority. The authority will consider the proposed

*[Mr. Brian Wilson]*

project's impact on a variety of issues, including the environment, on which it takes advice from the Environment Agency and the relevant statutory nature conservation bodies. If approved, the activity will be subject to normal environmental controls.

**Mr. Cash:** The Minister has said that when a licence is granted, account will have been taken of environmental questions, following discussions with the Environment Agency. I return to a point that I made in my short speech. Given that the functions of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions—the former Trade and Industry Secretary—are indivisible constitutionally, how will it be possible to achieve fairness and justice on such questions? The licensing arrangements made by him in his former post must be dealt with in the making of decisions regarding the environment—by the Secretary of State at the DTLR.

**Mr. Wilson:** I did not say that licensing was subject to environmental consultation; I said that licensing was then subject to normal planning procedures, and that the planning authority was obliged to consult the Environment Agency and other relevant environmental bodies.

To return to the hon. Gentleman's point about the former Secretary of State at the DTI now being Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the office is charged with such responsibilities, not the individual. It is pretty naive to suggest that individuals move around making decisions in their own name and that those decisions are thereby invalidated, and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would want to advance that as a substantial part of his case.

The final stage that a licence holder has to surmount is that the Health and Safety Executive must be satisfied that licensees have assessed risks to persons and have demonstrated that adequate measures have been taken to ensure the health and safety of people who could be affected by the proposed project.

Taken together, the measures mean that the UK's long-established onshore oil and gas industry is tightly regulated at a number of different levels, all of which aim to ensure that operations are carried out efficiently and safely and with minimum disruption to interested parties and the environment. The licensing process, the planning process, environmental safeguards and the health and safety check must all be gone through before matters can proceed.

The system has a track record of ensuring that hydrocarbon extraction co-exists harmoniously in the countryside without damage to the community. Significant oil production in Nottinghamshire, Sussex, Hampshire and Dorset has been under way for many decades with very little disruption to any of the local stakeholders. It is not widely recognised that one of the largest oilfields in the UK—the Wytch Farm development—has successfully and unobtrusively produced from under Poole bay near Bournemouth for more than 20 years. I am in no way prejudging issues that are subject to planning appeal, but the system has safeguards to deal with any project that is environmentally irresponsible or is not undertaken by a company with a strong financial and technical base.

I turn to the questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme about our general approach to energy supply and the potential place of coal-bed methane within it. The overall aim of our energy policy is to work to ensure competitive energy markets while achieving safe, secure and sustainable energy supplies. In support of that, our objectives are to maintain the security and diversity of the UK's energy sources and to contribute to meeting the UK's environmental emissions targets. Potentially, coal-bed methane has a part to play in achieving both those objectives.

Local environmental issues for landward projects are taken into account during the planning process, but we need to consider the impact that projects, especially those in the energy sector, are likely to have on the national or international scene. The Government are committed to taking action to tackle climate change—indeed, the UK is one of the few countries to have published a strategy for doing so. Our current energy review is aimed specifically at determining how we can best meet the twin obligations of securing supply from diverse sources and meeting our Kyoto targets.

In that context, the development of coal-bed methane as a fuel, albeit on a small scale, will supplant the use of more carbon dioxide-aggressive resources such as oil and coal. Coal-bed methane is a very pure form of natural gas which burns more efficiently than other hydrocarbon resources with low $CO_2$ emissions. Moreover, it is essentially a local fuel, so the $CO_2$ transportation burden is much lower than that of oil or, in most cases, coal.

The Government's policy is to encourage the development of cleaner coal technologies for application in both home and overseas markets. In 1999, a review of energy sources was carried out, and during the consultation phase coal-bed methane was identified as one of the alternative ways of obtaining energy from coal without mining. As I keep emphasising, I am talking in general terms, rather than dealing with a specific application. I shall not accept the invitation to rule out coal-bed methane as an energy source in general, for the reasons that I have stated.

In the context of the UK's overall energy supply, the potential importance of coal-bed methane production has not been tested. My hon. Friend asked about its significance in the energy mix, and the simple fact is that its current significance is small, but that does not prejudge its potential significance. There is only one coal-bed methane field in production in the United Kingdom, which is at Airth in Stirlingshire. Estimates of the national coal-bed methane resource vary widely, and it is too early to put a figure on the level of production that could be expected. The UK's coal seams could, however, provide a considerable amount of methane and it is important to test that resource. It is worth noting that coal-bed methane has been successfully developed in the United States where it provides a small but significant input to that country's energy needs.

In the absence of a clear estimate of the size of the coal-bed methane resource, one can look to another area of coal-gas exploitation that has been

demonstrated to work in Great Britain: the capture of the methane that is continually released from abandoned mineshafts. There are already several such projects up and running, including one in north Staffordshire at the Silverdale pit to which my hon. Friend referred, and there are many more proposals to take such activity forward. In some cases, the projects combine gas exploitation with on-site electricity generation or direct feed into the premises of energy users. The success of those commercial projects has demonstrated to both the energy industry and the financial markets that there is potential in small-scale CBM schemes.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of an appeal by StrataGas against the local authority's decision to turn down its application to drill several wells to test coal-bed methane potential in his constituency and the surrounding area. As he acknowledged, a public inquiry will convene later this month before an independent inspector, which means that the appeal is on-going. The inspector will submit a report to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who will decide whether the appeal is to be upheld or rejected. Officials in my Department have made a submission to the inquiry, as have many other interested parties. Although I do not want to impinge on my right hon. Friend's responsibilities—I am talking in general terms rather than specifically considering the application—I shall re-state in summary the key points from that submission, which reflect the general policy points that I have made.

The UK's energy self-sufficiency will decline as, over coming years, we become increasingly dependent on imports of fuel, particularly gas. The Department's oil and gas directorate is anxious to ensure that all economic petroleum in Great Britain and on the UK continental shelf is exploited in an efficient, responsible and timely manner.

Britain's coal reserves offer considerable potential for the development of a viable coal-bed methane industry. However, not all coal seams are identical: they need different techniques to make the gas flow. Although useful, lessons learned from the United States do not provide all the information necessary to underpin technical decisions about exploitation in the UK.

Again, I make my next point as a general statement of fact rather than an opinion on the specific application: the gassy coals of north Staffordshire make it a promising area for the production of mines-related methane. There are seven extant petroleum licences covering acreage in the northern half of Staffordshire, each of which is targeting coal-mine methane, either through the exploitation of vent gas—Silverdale is one of those projects—or through accessing gas trapped in unworked coal seams as is proposed by StrataGas.

**Paul Farrelly:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's information and his assurances that my remarks about StrataGas will be carefully considered. I have not seen the DTI's submission to the inquiry, but from his summary I take it that the submission is a statement of general policy and cannot be taken as backing a specific scheme against local concerns, because that is a matter for the planning inquiry. I take it that it would therefore be wrong for any company to imply that it had specific support from the DTI for a specific scheme.

**Mr. Wilson:** We have 60 seconds of the debate left, and I do not want to waste them by playing with words. If the DTI has offered a licence, that represents support within the licensing context. I am trying to distinguish between the licensing process and the planning process. I have set out, as best I can, the sequence of events that mean that licensing does not imply approval under the planning process—

*It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.*

# Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 9 January 2002*

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

## Railways

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

9.30 am

**Mr. John Redwood** (Wokingham): I went to my local railway station in Wokingham yesterday morning to prepare for this important debate today. I did so, yet again, more in hope than anything else, as I come from a part of the country where strikes are already badly affecting the service. I did not leave home as early as usual and arrived at the station car park at 9 o'clock. It was almost empty. I went through the usual routine of discovering that the car park ticket machine would not take my money. I had to go elsewhere to buy a ticket to make my car parking legal and I waited for a long time for a train that was delayed by nine minutes; one of the few services still running.

The station is a mess and needs reconstruction. There is no proper or secure parking, and it is difficult to get a bus in and out of the station. There is no proper transport interchange and, at the morning peaks—especially for an hour and a half after 7.40 am—there are only three trains to London from a place only 37 miles west of the capital. Many of us want to come to London, but when the trains are running, the services are crowded and difficult to get on.

If the Government were serious about wanting a better railway and transport system, Ministers would get on the trains and see what we all experience daily when we try to travel on the trains. They should start to spend the large amounts of money that they are talking about making available practically and positively to make a real difference.

I have proposed a plan for my local area that could be more widely used. The plan includes the improvement of traffic access to the station by a new link road to the main road; a mid-rise car park with security cameras and supervision; commercial development to help pay for the other property changes needed in the area; a bus interchange with bus services geared to the train times; and a new station. The current station does not have proper waiting facilities. One has to stand out in the rain, the cold and the wind that we often experience in winter. The plan would also include moving the station down the track, because it is too close to a principal road into the town. For safety reasons, the level crossing barriers must stay down much longer than would otherwise be needed. That increases the traffic jams in the town and makes it even more difficult to get to the station.

The Government say that they want an integrated transport policy. I am in favour of an integrated transport policy if that means simple things, such as being able to drive to a station, park, buy a ticket and get on a train in reasonable time. The Government seem to be fixated by how long it takes to carry out certain rail journeys once a passenger is on a train. My constituents and I are interested in point-to-point journey time from the place we start from to the point at which we want to arrive. That is not usually from station to station. While the Government are claiming that they want to try to sort out the mess on the railways, they and many Labour and Liberal Democrat councils throughout the country are making it visibly more difficult for people to use the trains by impeding road access to stations and by failing to make the connections between the motorist and the train that are needed if train usage is to build up in the way that we would like.

The Government would be well advised to look at capacity on the tracks and the trains. The commuter railways are the most likely railways to be successful; the railways are—or could be—the best at moving a large number of people at approximately the same time on busy and otherwise congested routes. The Government should ask why there is so little capacity on commuter railway links into London and the other big cities throughout the country. There are both short and medium-term answers to the current capacity constraint. Building new track is likely to be problematic in all but the most obvious bottlenecks. Interest groups will make the same objections to new train lines as are made to new motorways; often with good reason.

Now that the Government have taken control of so much of the railway system, they should examine options such as longer trains and platforms, double-decker trains—which will require some bridge-raising—or new technology that will enable more trains per hour to use the same piece of track. At the moment, using steel-on-steel technology creates a safety constraint because it necessitates long braking distances and long separation of train from train. During the morning peak time, if one flies over congested parts of the country in a light aircraft, one can see massive congestion on the roads, with buses, lorries, coaches and cars bumper to bumper because they can approach each other closely. However, railway tracks are largely empty. They are punctuated by a few trains, which are separated, for obvious safety reasons. The Minister needs to consider the technology used.

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): Following privatisation, one of the main successes was that more people and freight were travelling by rail. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that the whole thrust of the Government's 10-year transport plan is in jeopardy because more than 50 per cent. of investment was to be private? That would have alleviated the problem of lack of capacity for commuter trains and freight. Where does he think that the Government will find the investment that the private sector would otherwise have made before the demise of Railtrack?

**Mr. Redwood:** My hon. Friend is quite right, and I was about to talk about money. We need massive sums of private investment throughout our transport system. When people are free to invest, they invest large sums of money. Last year was a record one for car purchases, which is a sure sign that people feel that they have to make their own transport provision. Of course, they cannot buy their own road space. They have a problem because the Government has a monopoly on road space

*[Mr. Redwood]*

and does not supply enough of it. People are willing to spend a lot of money on their own flexible transport system. As my hon. Friend says, we are about to undergo the same experience with the railways.

Investors would be happy to invest in decent means of conveyance along railway routes in and out of our major towns and cities, but that is currently blocked by indecision, or by wrong decisions taken by the Government. For example, my local train company would love to spend more on new trains, but agonising negotiations on its franchise renewal have taken far longer than they should have done. Investment has been put on ice by the Government's inability to cut through difficulties and conclude negotiations. That they have constantly changed policy and intervened directly and indirectly via the Strategic Rail Authority undoubtedly complicates the matter.

**Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the users are prepared to spend a lot of money on our railways? It is especially true of the commuters he mentions; commuters from Chippenham spend £3 million per year. In that context, would he support the activities of the largest commuter organisation ever known, the British Rail Advisory Group, run by my constituent, Mr. David da Costa? He has suggested a strike by rail users on 1 March. Only by withdrawing our support for the railways on 1 March can we make it plain to the Government what they would be losing if they did not have us.

**Mr. Redwood:** My hon. Friend draws me down a dangerous road, or railway line. I sympathise with the aims of that worthy organisation. I hope that the Government and the railway companies would want high-level discussions with my hon. Friend's constituent and his group to avoid the need for direct action. I share the frustrations of his constituent and many of my own. I try to use the railways whenever possible, but I find it increasingly difficult to do so because of the problems that I have identified.

**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin** (West Derbyshire): Does my right hon. Friend recall the Deputy Prime Minister saying almost five years ago that, within five years, this country would have a train system of which we would be proud? Bearing it in mind that we have 16 weeks to go until we reach the end of those magical five years, what chance does my right hon. Friend think the Deputy Prime Minister has of achieving his ambition?

**Mr. Redwood:** My hon. Friend makes his point in a delightfully mischievous way. I share his fear that we will not see a transformation within the next 16 weeks; the record so far is of continuing decline and disastrous decisions. We know that the Deputy Prime Minister had to be taken off the case, and we read from authoritative sources that the current Secretary of State is about to go the same way. I note that, after his long holiday in India, he does not have the time to be with us this morning; that is a great pity, in view of the strong interest from a wide range of Members.

**Mr. David Lidington** (Aylesbury): My right hon. Friend referred to the delay in taking decisions about refranchising. I draw his attention to the fact that it is now some 15 or 16 months since M40 Trains was selected as the preferred bidder for the Chiltern franchise, which everyone accepts is one of the best-run railway franchises. We still have not had a decision, which has added to the uncertainty and the delay in investment. Is it not time that we had some decisions from the Government?

**Mr. Redwood:** My hon. Friend makes another effective point, with which I entirely sympathise. I hope that the Minister will try to lift some of the fog and gloom from railway policy. He could tell us his deadlines for the important franchises that are out for competition or negotiation and whether the franchise holders will be given a decent length of franchise to make long-term investment worth while. He could tell us whether the authoritative briefings in the press that the Government are seeking a major amalgamation of the train companies are correct. If those briefings are correct, how will they be carried out in relation to the existing pattern of franchise award and negotiations? Will the move be another cause of delay and disruption? How will the amalgamations be carried out against the strong competition policy? That is largely driven by often sensible rules from Brussels that mean that it would be difficult for the Government to do all the pro-monopoly and cartel work that they might like to do on this subject, as well as some others. It is time that we had some answers, because we need more investment by the train-operating companies.

More important, the Minister owes it to hon. Members to tell us about the Government's timetable for getting Railtrack back into operating shape and into the private sector, which I believe is their intention. The Minister speaks on behalf of a Government who say that they want a private sector Railtrack in the form of a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. Will he give us a timetable for when we will know more about that bid, when the documentation will be sent to potential bidders and when the deadline will be for interested parties and consortia to bid for such interesting and potentially valuable assets?

**Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the only benefit that commuters in my area are seeing is the batch of splendid new trains that was ordered the week after Connex won the franchise under the previous Conservative Government; the one positive and immediate fruit of privatisation? The Deputy Prime Minister may have been thinking of the fact that it took five years to build those trains and others like them up and down the country when he promised a better railway system within five years. It is no good having the best trains in the world unless some of the concerns that my right hon. Friend has rightly set out about Railtrack are met. The trains need decent tracks to run on.

**Mr. Redwood:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support and glad that he has given yet another example of how privatisation worked in its early years before this Government decided to do it enormous damage by the wrong kind of regulation and the wrong kind of bankruptcy. We now learn that the Government believe that £4.5 billion should be made available to the railway

industry, on top of the £34 billion in their 10-year transport plan. Will the Minister confirm that and place on record for the first time how much of the 10-year plan money is destined for railway track, as opposed to other railway spending? Will he tell us how much money is destined for Railtrack and its successor-in-title in the next three years?

That is the minimum of information that we should expect in the House of Commons and that the Government will have to supply to their company limited by guarantee and any other bidder interested in Railtrack. I do not understand why it is such a secret. We all know that they will have to disclose that information. It is impossible for commercial interests to compile a sensible bid and come up with a decent view on whether Railtrack, in its current shape, has positive or negative value to them without knowing what the flow of Government subsidy into the organisation will be.

The decision to bankrupt Railtrack was taken by the Government who had it in their power to negotiate and do a deal with the Railtrack that was then in existence. We all know that that company was going to receive public money and that there was the negotiation over how much it needed in view of the regulatory constraints imposed upon it. I can guarantee that it will now be a lot dearer. The Government will have to put a lot more money into the successor-in-title to Railtrack than if they had done a sensible deal with Railtrack, instead of deciding to put it into receivership on 5 October.

We are now three months on from the receivership. We are no clearer about how much money is available and what sort of bidders might come forward. We know no more about how a not-for-profit company can raise private capital. It is quite an unusual concept to raise private capital without profit or dividends to distribute to reward the people who make the investment. One presumes that it will be bond-financed and that the short-term cost of capital of the company limited by guarantee will be higher than the cost of capital of a for-profit, equity-based company because bond finance is carried out at higher interest rates than equity finance raised at dividend yield. It would be interesting to hear the Minister's latest thoughts on those important issues.

It is also a great disappointment to many of us on the Conservative Benches that the hon. Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), the Deputy Chief Whip, is not here. We read in *The Guardian*—how could it possibly be wrong?—that the Deputy Chief Whip is now the main agent of running the railways. I refer, of course, to the Government Deputy Chief Whip; the Opposition Deputy Chief Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), is assiduous in his duties and understands the importance of railways. I can quite understand why the Government Deputy Chief Whip is not here. He is obviously embarrassed that his secret activities have found their way into *The Guardian*. Will the Minister confirm the 10 Downing street line; that *The Guardian* has made up this story and the Deputy Chief Whip is not attempting to fix the difficult industrial relations problems of the railway?

**Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): Given the severity of the problems he describes, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is pitiful that out of the more than 400 Labour MPs, just two are present for the debate?

**Mr. Redwood:** It is noticeable that there are not many here. Many Labour Members are deeply embarrassed by the state of the railways and do not wish to have to hear again just how bad it is. Perhaps many of them have not been able to get here yet this morning because the trains are so appallingly bad. They are now taking to the inadequate roads.

**Mr. Brazier:** My right hon. Friend is quite right to put that charitable interpretation on the matter. After all, yesterday's *Evening Standard* told us that out of 55 London Labour MPs, only one could be bothered to come to a debate on the tube. Perhaps the others were stuck on the tube.

**Mr. Redwood:** Their embarrassment on this matter is understandable. However, I want to transcend party politics and make a plea to the Government; the money that is being put towards transport investment now should come forward rapidly but sensibly. It should be applied to making real improvements, which means buying the equipment needed to do the job. Nothing can really move on the railways at a satisfactory pace or in a satisfactory way until the Government make a series of decisions. They must decide how they will get Railtrack out of administration more quickly and into the private sector again, as they claim to want to do. They must decide how they will agree franchises of a suitable length with a reasonable number of train companies so that that uncertainty can be cleared away and they can get on with providing the private investment.

I hope that the Minister can give me an assurance that nothing in the current structure of the SRA and the receivership would impede the plans that I have suggested, which seem to have been generally accepted in my area, for a new station, a transport interchange and all the rest. Much of that can be paid for out of private investment and development gain, but we need a favourable wind from the SRA, the Government and the receiver, as Railtrack has an interest in the development. The main mover will be South West Trains. I trust that its franchise will soon be sorted out and it will then be fully committed to the scheme.

Is the Government's stance, as of 10 o'clock today, to remain disengaged from the industrial disruption that we are witnessing which is spreading and getting worse? In view of the close friendships and links between certain rail unions and the Government, could the Government play a role through the Deputy Chief Whip or otherwise? It would be a great pity if our train system were further disrupted as a result of pressures and politics in one trade union. The travelling public deserve better and I hope that the Minister will respond in a similar spirit.

Many hon. Members want to join the debate, so I shall bring my remarks to a close. I could say much more about the lamentable state of our railways and our transport system, but I shall not burden the Minister with yet more questions. I just hope that he will provide greater certainty about the reprivatisation of Railtrack, the new private investment that could then flow and the franchise terms for many train-operating companies.

9.51 am

**Mrs. Ann Cryer** (Keighley): I shall start with a comment that will please the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles). I declare an interest, in that I have five non-profit-making £10 shares in the Keighley and Worth Valley Light Railway company. I am also president of that railway's society. I declare the interest because that railway's future could be badly affected if we do not keep a decent railway system running into platforms 1 and 2 at Keighley station.

I was surprised by and welcomed many of the ideas for improvements proposed by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). However, it is disappointing that the Conservatives could have implemented many of those ideas in their 18 years in office, but did not. They lacked a commitment to our railway system, railway users and the men and women who run it. Proposing those ideas at this stage made the right hon. Gentleman's speech a little empty, although I enjoyed it because I am a rail enthusiast and I agree with much of what he said.

One of the biggest mistakes that my party made was probably to abandon our commitment to renationalise the rail network in the run-up to the 1997 general election. Had we stuck with that commitment, it might have deterred the Conservative Government from privatising the rail network. Preventing them from doing that would have been a good deal for us all. Unfortunately, we backed down, which in my view allowed that Government to go ahead with their rail privatisation policy.

**Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): Will the hon. Lady explain why, under British Rail, passenger numbers remained static or declined over a number of years, and why it was only after privatising the railways that we started to see a steady growth in the number of passengers?

**Mrs. Cryer:** The answer is extremely simple. The clogging up of car transport and the gridlock in our towns was such that people abandoned their cars in favour of railways. That is why there has been an increase in the number of train passengers. I am delighted that people are abandoning their cars and coming on to the railways. My worry is that the chaos on the east coast main line experienced by myself and by the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) during the six months between late summer and last spring has put people off. Those living in Leeds started to get back into their cars for business trips down south.

Personally, I did not forsake the railways—I persisted—but I had a hard time. I had reached the point where I felt that we simply could not go on as we were with the existing Railtrack organisation. It was putting many of my constituents and myself into great difficulties.

**Mr. McLoughlin:** This is the first time that I have heard a Labour Member saying that had Labour stuck to its views, privatisation would not have happened. However, if privatisation had not taken place, would we not have seen the entire rail network, rather than one section of it, brought to a standstill by unions over the past couple of days?

**Mrs. Cryer:** That has no bearing whatever. I said that it would have been good to persist with the threat of renationalisation because it might well have deterred the previous Government, whose plans could have been put to naught if we were elected. The Conservative Government would have thought twice and perhaps sought better solutions. They made a dog's dinner of privatisation, as even some Conservative Members would agree, and the travelling public are paying the price.

Hon. Members based above and beyond Leeds well know the problems experienced with Railtrack during the six months that I mentioned earlier. It started with Hatfield; who could fail to be critical of Railtrack about the happenings on that dreadful day? A whole train came off the track when the steel split. I should have been on that train. I do not often thank Robert Kilroy-Silk, but he invited me on his show that morning, so I went to Borehamwood and missed that particular train. I caught a later train at Stevenage.

I must give credit to GNER. Many people stood on that platform not knowing what on earth was going on. Eventually word came through about the derailment, though we did not know that the rail had split. We waited on the platform and a train came within three-quarters of an hour. After such a dreadful incident, it is a great credit to the men and women who operate the railways that another train was up and running in such a short time. That was the beginning of things going wrong last winter.

**Miss McIntosh:** I remind the Chamber that I am a minor shareholder in Railtrack; I probably own a few more shares than the hon. Lady. She and I would agree that safety must be paramount on the railways. I share her concern about the broken rail, and the Select Committee investigated that further. Can the hon. Lady advise me? Is the dispute with the RMT about pay, or were two union members found to have seriously breached the safety code? If safety is paramount, should they not be disciplined for breaching the code?

**Mrs. Cryer:** I have no knowledge of the internal organisation of the RMT, so I know no more than the hon. Lady. Breaches of safety should be disciplined because the safety of the travelling public is paramount.

I shall continue with my list of moans about what affects the travelling public in the Leeds area. After Hatfield, things were getting a little better, but then we had the floods, which devastated part of my constituency and had a dreadful effect on the rail network. The train lines from Leeds are like a spider's web. The Airedale and Wharfdale lines serve my constituency, and many of my constituents depend on those lines to commute to Leeds or to London. Many of the problems that we experience are down to Railtrack. It was responsible for the Hatfield accident, and the floods.

Throughout all that, we had the Leeds First improvement project. The work went on and on; well past what we were told would be the final date.

I welcomed that much-needed project. There are now 16 platforms at Leeds City station. We used to have total gridlock—unusual on the railways—at the west end of the station, and I experienced problems taking the Airedale or Wharfdale lines into Leeds. Trains coming in from the various commuter areas were held up for 10, 15 or 20 minutes, which often meant missing the connection to London. That happened to me several times; it still happens occasionally.

We must deal with all the problems on the railways, because it is important to keep the travelling public on the trains and not in their cars. Three of my six grandchildren suffer from asthma, which I am convinced is related to increased road traffic. Cars are getting cleaner, but that is not the total answer. We must get people out of their cars and on to the trains; even buses would be better.

Arriva has been short of drivers on the Wharfdale line to Ilkley and on the Airedale line, which goes through my constituency up to Skipton. That is another problem of privatisation. The company's drivers were poached by bigger companies. Train services have been cut; in fact, Arriva had to rewrite the timetable completely. It is getting on top of the problem and has done a deal with ASLEF, whereby pay for Arriva drivers will be improved. I am pleased by that development, which will lessen the potential for poaching by other railway companies.

People's lives are seriously affected by train problems in the Leeds area. I have received hundreds of letters from constituents complaining about their inability to get to Leeds or to London on the east coast main line. One of my constituents works in a bank in Leeds and has a child minder to look after her two children. She said that a few weeks ago she was unable to give the child minder an assurance about when she would be back to relieve her because she could not be sure that the train from Leeds to Silsden would be running. Such problems emanate from faulty privatisation and are the result of bigger companies poaching staff from smaller companies such as Arriva.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reply to my points. We must achieve an even greater movement of people out of their cars and on to the railway network. I welcomed the comments of the right hon. Member for Wokingham and look forward to improvements such as those he mentioned.

Shipley, the railway station nearest my house, is 220 miles from London. I believe that six trains run each way, every day, from that station to London. I cannot moan about that service, which is excellent. However, Shipley is a bit short of car-parking facilities, which creates difficulties. I am sometimes tempted to drive to Wakefield, where GNER provides ample parking. At Keighley, in my constituency, there is a shortage of car-parking spaces. Providing more car-parking spaces at stations or having linking bus services from villages to railway stations with a good turn round at stations—as happens in the Harrogate area—would encourage people to use the trains rather than their cars.

I, more than anyone, am aware of the tragedies resulting from car accidents. I want less dependence on cars for that reason, as well as their effect on air quality. However, if dependence on the car is to be reduced, trains must be reliable, safe and cheap. If those three essentials cannot be achieved, we will be on a hiding to nothing, whatever happens to Railtrack or its successor, and we will not succeed in providing a rail network to be proud of. I am proud of it now, but there are things going wrong. The Leeds area has had a rough deal for the past 18 months, although there has been some improvement and Leeds City station is becoming a wonderful place.

I want assurances from the Minister about some of the matters that I have raised this morning.

10.6 am

**Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on securing the debate in such an apposite week. I want to ask the Minister one or two questions about the present dispute. First, will he condemn the RMT for the disruptive action that is causing so much trouble for the travelling public this week? Secondly, if these wholly unnecessary strikes continue, will the Minister and his party sever their ties with that union?

The dispute is only one element of the chaos surrounding the rail network. I suspect that the Minister will talk about the problems that privatisation and the mismanagement of Railtrack have caused, but the Government must take responsibility for the problems on the rail network that their actions have caused. They have got it wrong on several counts. First, they failed to respond quickly enough to post-privatisation growth on the network. In the past five years, there has been an unprecedented growth in the number of passengers, but no action by the Government. Virtually no major enhancements of the network have begun.

In five years' time, the Government will not be able to deliver significant expansion to capacity because they have not started work on projects that can deliver that expansion. The only projects on the stocks at present are phase 1 of the west coast main line, a small widening project on Chiltern, the Leeds City station project and phase 1 of the channel tunnel rail link. That is all. The lot of the travelling public will not improve as a result of those schemes alone.

The Government are determined to take control by over-regulation. They have imposed an increasingly complex regulatory structure that is characterised by hostility between Railtrack and the regulator. There is a huge number of new rules and regulations that the Minister listed in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). In the past few years, 19 new laws have been imposed on Railtrack.

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about regulations. Is he brave enough to agree with me that although Lord Cullen made some sensible recommendations about improving safety on the railways, his recommendation on safety regulations was not so successful, as it added complexity when what was needed was simplification?

**Chris Grayling:** The important point, to which I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer), is that Lord Cullen's report specifically stated that, since privatisation, safety on the railways

*[Chris Grayling]*

has improved, not worsened. We all deplore what happened at Hatfield and Ladbroke Grove, but we must not forget that safety is improving, not worsening.

It is clear that the Government's so-called 10-year plan is not a plan. It is a vague collection of wishes and desires that does not represent the clear strategy that the industry is looking for. The Minister and his Government must address that.

The Government's other mistake, which the Deputy Prime Minister has now admitted, was over-dependence on Railtrack to deliver an investment programme that was far beyond the scope of any public company to deliver. That is coming home to roost. The Government expected too much of one organisation, with the result that they were instrumental in putting the burden of pressure on to Railtrack's management, as we have seen in the past few months.

Turning to the events of last year, it is certain that the Secretary of State did not understand the situation in the industry and was shooting from the hip when he decided to force Railtrack into administration. That ill-thought-out decision has destroyed confidence inside the industry. Railtrack was not insolvent; it was taking on a huge investment programme that required it to continue to raise enormous amounts of capital. To enable it to do that, it needed the Government's confidence and support. The Secretary of State withdrew that confidence and made it impossible for Railtrack to continue to deliver its promises. The Government must accept that their own action was fundamentally responsible for bringing to a halt the investment programme in the railways that might have made a difference to the travelling public in the next few years.

It is also clear that, in making his decision, the Secretary of State talked to no one. The Select Committee heard that he did not speak to the Strategic Rail Authority or to the rail regulator. He did not talk in detail about his thoughts and ideas to anyone in the industry. He made his decision on the basis of consultations within his Department and in discussions with professional services firms and investment banks that would benefit financially from his decision. That decision was regrettable, as a result. The situation was made worse because the Secretary of State has been, at least, inconsistent in his stories about the chain of events leading to Railtrack's administration.

Why does all that matter? Why do we keep pressing the Minister on the situation, his decisions and his discussions? It matters because the Secretary of State made a decision without thinking it through, without taking proper advice and without having a clear idea of what was to happen next. The immediate consequence is that investment has dried up. I shall give an example from one of my two local franchises, South Central. The special-purpose vehicle that was designed to deliver important improvement for passengers is now on the shelf because of the uncertainty in the industry. The situation has had an enormously adverse effect on morale among the Railtrack work force. Does the Minister not understand that many of the shareholders who lost their savings are the same people he expects to deliver improvements over the next few years? It is extraordinary that the Government fail to understand that.

**Dr. Ashok Kumar** (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): I keep hearing Conservative Members saying that we should support Railtrack, but they refuse to tell us how much more money they would provide to support Railtrack. Can the hon. Gentleman give us a figure today, for the record?

**Chris Grayling:** I simply return the question to the hon. Gentleman. Does he believe that confiscating the assets of railway workers is an appropriate way to encourage proper performance in the rail industry?

**Mr. Redwood:** It is very clear that if we had given rather less than the Government are now giving to the administrator, Railtrack would have been over the moon.

**Chris Grayling:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that.

The other fundamentally flawed decision by the Secretary of State last year concerned the franchise round. Within four weeks of taking over his job, he intervened in a process that was close to delivering long-term franchises and a long-term commitment to companies such as GNER, which would then have been able to deliver investment of the kind that the hon. Member for Keighley seeks to improve the quality of the services that her constituents enjoy. The Secretary of State's decision to revert to two-year franchise renewals brought that process to a complete halt. I have been told by rolling stock companies and train operators that it has fundamentally damaged the process of investing in infrastructure and new rolling stock, and that is greatly to be lamented.

Now we see the Government scrambling around in all directions, trying to work out what happens next. On the funding front, I asked the Secretary of State a few weeks ago whether Railtrack's successor will operate within the same budget as that set out for Railtrack for control period 2 over the next five years. The answer was yes. Now we learn that that was not true. In fact, the rail industry will get an extra £4.5 billion that the Government denied to Railtrack, although Railtrack had told the Government that it would be necessary in order to bring the network up to a level of quality that would improve the lot of the passenger.

There is a singular lack of a strategy for the industry. We hope next week to see the Strategic Rail Authority's plan to implement the Government's ambitions. However, even that plan seems to be veiled in confusion. It was drawn up by the previous chief executive of the SRA, who was sacked when the new chairman took over in December. I am not sure whether the plan is Richard Bowker's or Mike Grant's. That may not matter anyway, because John Birt has now been brought in to draw up another plan for transport. It is interesting to note that this is the second time that the Government have brought in a senior television executive to try to sort out our transport infrastructure. It did not work last time, although Lord Macdonald is still a Minister, so why should it work this time? Have the Government considered bringing in experts on transport, rather than television, to help them to deliver their transport strategy?

We have no clear idea about what happens next in relation to Railtrack. There is no timetable. If we ask questions, Ministers flannel. We do not know if the next owner of Railtrack will be public or private. Ministers have been reluctant to be clear about that in Select Committee discussions. We have no idea who will repay the debt that the Government are running up with the Railtrack administrator under the commercial loan agreement. By the end of the administration period, the administrator will owe £2 billion or more to the Government, and there is no clear indication of where the money to repay that loan is to come from.

We are starting to hear wild rumours about services. Will there be a Beeching 2, whereby we lose rural lines to create extra capacity on the main network? Will there be fewer trains so as to make them all run on time? That would be disastrous for people who are already crammed into their morning suburban trains.

Where do we stand? What can the travelling public expect? On my local line, we were hoping fairly soon to get platform extensions and longer trains as part of the South West Trains plan for its franchise extension; but no, that is on the shelf. The company told me that, given the current hiatus, it is unlikely that the work can be done until 2007. Many other renewals around the network are running late.

Yesterday I asked the Minister a question about when South Central, Chiltern Railways and South West Trains can expect their franchise agreements to be completed. I was told that it would be unhelpful for the Government to speculate. Is it really unhelpful for us to know when our local train companies will get the security that they need to invest in the future of their passenger services? On large projects, it is now impossible for the Government to deliver major investment programmes that will be open in five years' time. It is too late; it cannot be done.

There are other flies in the ointment. The Government are committed over the next few years to implementing the advanced train protection system—ATP—at a substantial cost. Yet people in the industry tell me that it will not be possible to deliver major enhancements to the network at the same time as introducing ATP. What will the Government do? Will ATP come first or second?

**Miss McIntosh:** During an Adjournment debate that I secured at the end of last year, the Minister had to correct himself and say that he did indeed envisage a role for the independent rail regulator. Can my hon. Friend press the Minister to clarify the role of independent regulation if Railtrack were to remain in private hands?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I hope that the Minister was listening to that question and will be able to answer it at the end of this debate.

During a meeting yesterday with one of the rolling stock companies, I was told that, in effect, orders for new trains have dried up because of the current chaos in the industry. As a result, there will be a hiatus before passengers see the next generation of trains that are crucial to the Government's aim of meeting the growth targets in their 10-year plan.

**Mr. Prisk:** My hon. Friend and I represent constituencies with a very high proportion of commuters, and in many cases it is commuters who are bearing the brunt of what is becoming a second-rate service. My own constituency has witnessed a significant decline in commuter services since September. Is the same true of my hon. Friend's constituency?

**Chris Grayling:** I have a constituent who keeps a record—he and I joke about it—of the performance of the trains that he catches to and from work. I asked him that very question a couple of weeks ago, and he replied that services have definitely deteriorated since the shambles of Railtrack's being taken into administration.

When will there be a clear timetable for investment in the network? When will the current franchise replacement round be completed? Will the Minister make it clear whether ATP or infrastructure improvements will come first? Bearing in mind the comments of the chairman of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), in this week's edition of *The Sunday Times*, will the Minister explain clearly what progress is being made in getting Railtrack out of administration? By what date will that definitely happen? Will he confirm that the changes will not mean cuts in services in order to deliver better statistics for the Government?

**Mrs. Ann Cryer:** If bringing Railtrack back into permanent private ownership is so important and the hon. Gentleman is so committed to it, does he also think that it would be a good idea for all of our roads to be privately owned? What is the view of the road hauliers, who are good friends of the Conservative party, and of some car users?

**Chris Grayling:** As I have said, what the industry needs is a strategy, rather than the current directionless shambles. We look to the Minister and his colleagues to deliver the sense of direction that is lacking at the moment. If the Government do not recognise their mistakes and begin to deliver such a strategy quickly, the travelling public will face a bleak future.

10.22 am

**Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): It is a very rare occasion for a Welsh nationalist to congratulate the former colonial governor of Wales—as the former Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), was once known—but I am delighted to do so, because the debate that he has instigated is timely. There was almost an even more amazing occurrence, in that he was tempted down the path of supporting a rail strike, albeit of a different kind. However, he did not quite reach that point, so we must be contented with the rare event of a Welsh nationalist supporting a Conservative-initiated debate.

**Mr. Gray:** The hon. Gentleman is referring to the boycott of the railways proposed by BRAG on 1 March. I should make it clear, however, that what is proposed is not a strike, but simply that people withhold their use of a particular service.

**Mr. Thomas:** The withholding of one's labour or service does indeed constitute a strike; that is what I should want to call it.

*[Mr. Thomas]*

I want to discuss the railway infrastructure in Wales, particularly mid-Wales, in the light of recent events such as Hatfield and the Government's takeover of Railtrack in October. The Cambrian line in mid-Wales is one of the most rural lines in the United Kingdom. Although there might be some hesitation, I could name every rural railway station on it without fear of repetition—aficionados of the panel game "Just a Minute" would recognise the style of Clement Freud—for more than one minute and still not reach Machynlleth. I want to impress on hon. Members that the Cambrian line is a rural line that is absolutely vital to mid-Wales.

**Mr. Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk): I spent a Christmas in Machynlleth, which I understand had the last Welsh Parliament about 500 years ago. Is it possible that the reason why the area is now governed by those other than the Welsh is because nobody could find Machynlleth? It is too far away.

**Mr. Thomas:** That may have been the last time we had a Welsh Parliament but it was not the last Welsh Parliament; we have one yet to come. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman looks forward to that.

The Cambrian line has a two-hourly service and three trains on a Sunday. There has been no freight for at least seven years since oil delivery to Aberystwyth was taken off the rails, to the annoyance of anyone who now drives there; people get stuck behind tankers delivering oil that was once carried on rail. The clear single-line track that goes from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth and up the coast to Pwllheli cannot be improved or deliver more than a two-hourly service unless a number of signalling and loop improvements are introduced.

The plan exists for a £6.5 million investment to improve the line by introducing an hourly service and to improve punctuality. Currently, punctuality stands at 50 per cent. to 60 per cent., so hon. Members can imagine how many trains are missed at connections in Wolverhampton and Birmingham after leaving mid-Wales and how many trains are missed when returning. The number of times that I have caught taxis from Shrewsbury—of course, at the rail company's expense—is an uncomfortable thought. A meeting on Saturday with the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth rail passengers association gave me further anecdotal evidence of how often that happens and how poor punctuality has been.

The good news is that there is a Wales and Borders franchise in place and significant improvements to services have been made by Wales and Borders as the outline franchisee for the whole of Wales. That has been achieved under present arrangements. The difficulty is that without infrastructure improvements, we will never have an hourly service or a proper rail service that the tourism industry, students at Aberystwyth college, general business and the public need in rural Wales. Such an hourly service would sustain, over long distances, the fragile rural communities of Wales.

The money for the £6.5 million plan exists. Although the National Assembly for Wales need not do so, it has pledged a significant part of its transport infrastructure grant; some £2.5 million. The other £4 million has been agreed, in principle, by the Strategic Rail Authority, but has been put on hold since October. I wonder whether that date is significant. Since October, Railtrack has told us that it cannot progress with the Dyfi junction loop and improvements on the Cambrian line; not because it does not have the money but because it does not have the engineers.

The Minister seems to agree on that, but train-operating companies have told me that the engineers could be found in private companies. We have also been told that Railtrack is prioritising major systems such as the west coast and east coast main lines; I have major worries about that. These are important UK-wide strategies but the Government face a difficulty because they are now responsible for Railtrack. Should they abandon rural routes in favour of main lines, or maintain a UK-wide and Wales-wide railway system?

Abandoning the Cambrian line improvement project is dangerous because it is the foremost priority for transport in Wales, as the Welsh Assembly has said. If it is improved, we will have proper rural railway infrastructure in Wales. The Assembly said that it was prepared to put in £2.5 million and the SRA said that it would put in £4 million, but we have not had the reassurance that smaller projects such as the Cambrian line will be pushed ahead. The abandonment of that project represents the abandonment of everything that is happening in Wales at the moment.

I press the Minister to look again at what is being done on the Cambrian line in particular and in Wales in general. The 10-year plan from the Strategic Rail Authority is expected in two weeks' time, and it must contain improvements to the Cambrian line in addition to upgrades in other parts of Wales. If that does not happen, a difficult, but ultimately successful, partnership that has been built up between the private sector—the train-operating companies and Railtrack—and the National Assembly for Wales will be abandoned, resulting in the loss of a huge sum of money from our transport infrastructure. Given the money available—there is a question about certain engineering facilities—those improvements must be seen to go ahead.

There has been an 18-month hiatus already, but we still do not have the all-Wales franchise that we were promised. Now there is a further hiatus with regard to a project that was supposed to start in October. That is not the way to run a railway. The Government's announcements indicate that the money and resources are there, but the strategy and management are not.

10.30 am

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): It is traditional to begin a contribution by congratulating the hon. Member who has secured the debate on securing it, which has always struck me as odd. I should prefer to congratulate the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) not on securing the debate but on his contribution, which was helpful. I also congratulate him on his recent newspaper articles, although I did not agree with all of them. In particular, his article in *The Independent* was a useful contribution. Like the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), I am conscious that we are debating the state of the railways, and I agree with him that we do not need Lord Birt to tell us their current state; they are in a parlous state, as anybody who tries to use them knows.

The state of our railways has not been helped in recent days by the unnecessary strike action by the RMT, and I suspect that many Government and Opposition Members agree with me on that point. Frankly, the RMT's leaders are off their trolleys because the travelling public need further strikes like they need holes in the head. If disruption of the type that we have seen during the past few days continues, we will see large numbers of people beginning to drift away from our railways—passengers may protest on 1 March, by boycotting the railways—which will lead to the increased congestion and chaos on our roads to which the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) referred.

We will see the railways moving into decline, and RMT members will start to lose their jobs. Their action was foolish because it created chaos for the travelling public. I am in favour of everyone, including RMT members, benefiting from a successful railway. However, we do not have a successful railway, and RMT members ought to be working as hard as everybody else to ensure that we get one. That said, the hon. Member for Keighley praised many people who work on the railways. I am conscious that morale in the railway system is low, and it is incumbent on all of us to keep saying how grateful we are to the many people who work on the railways who are doing a good job. If we have criticisms, they are of management, and not of those who work on the railways.

What is the state of the railways? The Secretary of State, who appeared on GMTV this morning, summed it up by stating, "It is simply unacceptable." He is absolutely right; it is unacceptable, but what will be done about it? To re-formulate the three words used by the hon. Member for Keighley, how are we going to create a safe, reliable and affordable railway? Our current railway system is none of those three things, and we can all cite figures to illustrate that point. One set of figures that I was working on overnight is for delays. They were announced recently as a result of parliamentary questions that I asked before Christmas. An analysis of those figures demonstrates that in the first eight months of last year, compared with the first eight months of the previous year, there was a 70 per cent. increase in delays of five minutes or more on our railways.

Calculated in terms of numbers of working days lost, the figures demonstrate that last year an amazing 3,400 years were lost from people's lives as a result of train delays. Of course, business, too, lost large sums of money because those people were not working. There are many other ways of illustrating the current problem, but what are we to do about it? The real problem is that the Government's solution, which we have heard time and again—the Secretary of State repeated it on television this morning—is the 10-year plan, which is somehow supposed to solve all our problems on the railway.

The 10-year plan is a smokescreen. An analysis of what the Government say that the 10-year plan will deliver shows that it will not deliver very much at all. We are told that it is £180 billion for transport, but if we look at that at a constant price base it is only £157 billion at current prices. If we take away the money that is already spent on public transport—the public resource expenditure, the local council's pay and so on—only £109 billion is for direct investment in the transport system. Of that, the vast majority is to come from the private sector, meaning that only £54.7 billion of public investment comes from the Government. Some of that will go on public transport and our road-building programme, so £54.7 billion becomes £32.2 billion for public investment in public transport and less than 40 per cent. of that will go to the railways.

That comes to a staggering £12.7 billion. So of the £180 billion that should solve all the problems, the Government are putting in a staggering £12 billion. That might seem a lot of money, but it is little more than the Conservative Government spent on our railways. Indeed, some analyses show that it is less than the Conservatives spent on our railways. The 10-year plan is not the solution. I want to suggest a five-point plan that the Government could put in place straight away.

First, they could take action to tackle excessive fares by including in the new franchise round a further tranche of fares within the regulatory mechanism. They could also take tougher action on punctuality. I hope that they do not continue with the perverse penalty system. Secondly, they should publish immediately the Health and Safety Commission report showing where we are in respect of the implementation of Professor Uff's and Lord Cullen's recommendations. Have the 41 out of 89 recommendations in Lord Cullen's report that were due to be implemented by 19 December 2001, including improvements to signalling in the Paddington area, been implemented? The Minister knows the answer. It is sitting on the Secretary of State's desk, and I hope that we will be told today whether it has happened. Thirdly, the Government could reduce fragmentation by announcing immediately their plans to reduce the number of train-operating companies. Fourthly, they could simplify the regulatory machinery, as the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell said. Fifthly, they could reform the whole regime and create a simpler structure by putting the rail regulator and the safety regulator into the Strategic Rail Authority, along the lines of the Civil Aviation Authority structure.

The Government could act on those five positive proposals to start reducing the chaos on our railways by sorting out the structure and allowing the experts to come in, and to start to manage the railway service so that it becomes safe, reliable and affordable.

10.40 am

**Mr. Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar): I did not have the pleasure of hearing the Secretary of State on television this morning. He is especially beleaguered at the moment and it is as if he can do nothing right. I do not want hon. Members to think that we do not agree with some of his actions. I put the Opposition behind the Secretary of State in agreeing with his analysis of the railways. When he was asked on "Newsnight" on 20 December whether the railways had got better since the Labour party came to power, he said courageously, "Of course not. They have become worse."

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on securing the debate and on what we all seem to agree was a thoughtful and telling contribution. He got to the heart of the problem when he talked about the need, and the inability, to increase capacity. He also made some telling points about loading gauge and, implicitly, the need for continuation

*[Mr. Eric Pickles]*

of the west coast upgrade. The Minister raised his eyebrows when my right hon. Friend talked about trying to get trains closer together. However, that is common practice on the continent, and in the channel tunnel Euro 3 signalling is used. As my right hon. Friend knows, the most important thing that we can do to increase capacity is to introduce such signalling on the entire network. At the thick end, that could cost approximately £8 billion to install, and shows why private investment is so important. It also shows the great loss of private investment from the Government's 10-year plans as a result of the Secretary of State's actions.

It was a pleasure to listen to the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer). I was in Keighley before Christmas and bumped into someone from the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway Preservation Society who spoke glowingly about the hon. Lady's contribution as a vice-president of that august organisation. It came as a surprise that she could write off a 25 per cent. increase in passengers and blame Railtrack for floods and pestilence. Her most telling comment was about Arriva and its desire for additional drivers. Arriva offered more money to drivers, and that is why there is a strike.

The strike is all about differentials. I never thought that we would return to the time of differentials. If we do not like the colour of our waistcoats, we go on strike. If we are not happy that a couple of our union officials have been disciplined because they have been careless with health and safety, we go on strike. We are now striking about differentials. The last time that there was a strike on the railways about differentials, Abba were at the peak of their powers, flared trousers were common, and Ministers used to go around secretly meeting trade union officials. It sounds as if we might be right to return to differentials, because that appears to be the current situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) talked a lot of sense about the strike. I would like to make a contribution. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) is here. His constituent is forming a strike—for want of a better word, and it seems to me that the Labour party should show some solidarity. Those hon. Members who are sponsored by the trade unions and railways should return a day's subscription as a way of showing some solidarity with commuters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell was right to point out the £4 billion extra that the Government are having to fork out because of Railtrack. When Labour Members start to tease and ask what the Conservative party would do, they should remember that the Government are putting out more money than Railtrack was asking for. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) talked about the number of taxis that he has had to take from Shrewsbury. At least he can show some solidarity with and understanding for Lord Birt, who is a considerable expert in matters of taxis.

It is now three months since Railtrack went into administration. I remind the Minister that the Secretary of State said at the time that it would be out within three to six months. The Minister responsible in another place said yesterday that it would take many months. What is the real position? We know that the Secretary of State's decision is likely to be subject to two court cases—one concerning the shareholders, the other concerning Railtrack. We know that costs are beginning to spiral out of control due to problems linked to administration and that taxpayers are having to foot the bill. The administration is already costing the taxpayer £1 million a day, while fees for advisers are costing an additional £500,000 a day.

On top of that, there are many official and unofficial Government advisers. It may interest hon. Members to know that I have been making a tally of the number of people who are advising either the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister. The latest appointment for the Prime Minister has been made today, with Mr. Matthew Elson from McKinsey joining up. Other advisers include Wendy Thomson from the Audit Commission, Geoff Mulgan, who is working on a report on social exclusion and transport, Adair Turner from the CBI, Penny Hughes from Coca-Cola, Nick Lovegrove from McKinsey, and Arnab Banerji from F&C Management Ltd. This is almost like the middle years of Brezhnev, when each secret policeman had another secret policeman watching him.

There is an old joke about succession in Communist regimes and preparing three envelopes. I shall not bore hon. Members with it, but the final envelope contains the name of the predecessor. It seems that the Secretary of State is holding the third envelope, because today *The Daily Telegraph* quotes a Government source as saying:

"Unlike David Blunkett, who bought time at the Home Office by dumping on what Jack Straw had done, Steve hasn't taken the knife to Prescott's legacy—and that is maybe what he should do. It is all Prescott's legacy. Steve has been Transport Secretary for six months and the problem is over four years."

Never let it be said that I was not the first to announce a new Government strategy in the Chamber.

There are several questions to which we need answers. In particular, we need clear ideas on how the proposed new company limited by guarantee will be funded. We need to know the level of subsidy because we must ensure open competition in the running of that company, and other companies that may want to bid for the Railtrack business. We need to know where its responsibilities begin and end, and how it will be regulated.

The Secretary of State ran a coach and horses through the regulatory regime when he decided to put Railtrack into administration. When will Railtrack come out of administration, and who will decide where that business will go? Will the European regulations on competition be implemented? We must be sure that our railways recover from the disaster of the past three months.

10.50 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson):** I congratulate the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on securing the debate on an important and topical matter. I am happy to deal with the points that he and his hon. Friends have made. I read with interest his article in *The Independent* on 2 January, entitled:

"We can solve all our rail problems by taking a more rational approach."

Nothing that I have heard from the Opposition today would lead me to believe that they had a rational approach.

I was interested to see that the right hon. Member for Wokingham seated himself next to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), the Opposition transport spokesman. Who is the authentic voice of the Tories on transport? The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar points at the right hon. Member for Wokingham, confirming that the right hon. Gentleman is the authentic voice.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) asked about the Chiltern line. The SRA has briefed my officials on the shape of the emerging franchise. The position is being finalised and I expect a formal request for approval shortly, which will be good news for many people.

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) said that there were only two Labour Members present. I counted five at that time; there were as many Labour Members as Conservatives. Sadly, the hon. Gentleman is not here to hear that; he might read *Hansard* later, or his hon. Friends may tell him what I have said.

Several hon. Members raised the issue of the current strikes. The Government believes that disagreements over pay should not lead to strikes, especially in vital public services, because they cause great inconvenience to the public and will not contribute to railway recovery. I hope that both sides will get round the table and resolve those matters very soon. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) was advocating militancy and strikes. I look forward to hearing about him sorting out those problems with beer and sandwiches in the North Wiltshire Tory headquarters.

**Mr. Gray:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Jamieson:** I will not give way because I want to respond to several points. The right hon. Member for Wokingham made a point about the £4.5 billion provided for the SRA, alleging that that was extra funding. All the elements of that so-called extra funding have been previously announced and have been public knowledge for some time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) spoke with great clarity and graphically outlined some of the difficulties and the strengths of the rail system in her area. She recognised that many improvements had taken place, and spoke about the integration of buses, road and rail. I can say to her and to the right hon. Member for Wokingham that local authorities have received substantial sums of money for local transport integration. My hon. Friend mentioned staff being poached from one company to another; an issue also mentioned obliquely when the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) spoke about the shortage of staff to carry out necessary work. The Department for Education and Skills has its framework skills strategy and the Strategic Rail Authority has its concept of a national rail academy, both of which should help to address the serious skills shortages.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion spoke about the line from Shrewsbury through to Machynlleth, which is vital to the future economic success of Wales, to the university of Aberystwyth and to tourism. The Government want progress made on that line as soon as possible. The hon. Gentleman articulated the problem; it is a matter not of funding, but of finding people with the right skills to carry out the work. One reason why people may have been pulled away from such projects—only temporarily, I hope—is the massive underinvestment in other parts of the railway system, which has drawn some of the requisite expertise elsewhere.

Does the right hon. Member for Wokingham recognise this scenario:

"We have gridlock. The rush hour begins at 6 a.m. and is still in full flow after three hours. In many parts of the south-east the traffic queue from one junction runs to the queue to the next"?

**Mr. Redwood** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Jamieson:** I see that he does. So he should, as he made those comments in another article in 1996. There was no Labour Government then; he was talking, after 17 years of Tory government, about a lack of investment. To hear Conservative Members today, one would think that the rail industry was in a state of terminal decline. We heard Mr. Doom, Mr. Gloom and others from the Conservative side.

It would be helpful to hear an alternative viewpoint, so let me remind Conservative Members of some facts, however unpalatable they may find them. In the financial years 1999-2000 and 2000-01, total investment in the railways increased by 29 per cent. Over the past four years, the total length of the railway network increased by 20 per cent. In the four weeks before Christmas last year, record passenger numbers were registered.

One reason why more people are on the railways, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Grayling), is that a million more people are working in this country, leading to more economic activity and greater use of the railways.

Equipping trains with the train protection warning system is proceeding apace, with 33 per cent. of trains already fitted. It is expected to rise to 75 per cent. by the end of the year, with the remainder completed by 2003. Numerous station improvements are also in progress or have already been carried out.

On 19 December, the Strategic Rail Authority set out its revised franchising programme to deliver short and long-term improvements to passengers. It is realistic, reflects the experience of users and strikes a balance between securing early gains for passengers that will make a real difference and longer-term investment. Last spring, the franchising programme was bogged down by delay, inactivity and lack of focus; today it is back on track. The rail industry welcomes the initiative and we now look to the train-operating companies to co-operate with the SRA to deliver improvements and restore public confidence.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham might like to hear what Michael Holden, the Railtrack southern regional director, wrote in a recent article.

"We might complain that it is politicians that have brought us to this, but I believe we should be concerned at the way in which our own organisations are delivering and as professionals staff actually sorting it out."

*[Mr. Jamieson]*

In the dark, cold days of the new year, we look for a little light relief, levity or even uplift, but I never thought that I would read about levitating trains, which the right hon. Gentleman's article mentions. In a breathtaking analysis, he says that steel wheels are heavy, hard and pummel the rails and that there are too many gradients and bends on our rails. With that clear, critical and intellectual analysis, I can see why the Opposition are in such a muddle—

**Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair):** Order. Time is up. I ask all hon. Members who are not staying for the next debate to leave quickly and quietly.

## Autism

11 am

**Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): I am delighted to have secured this debate at the beginning of autism awareness year 2002. My initiating it is particularly appropriate because Ivan and Charika Corea, whose initiative autism awareness year is, are my constituents. They live in Buckhurst Hill, Essex, in the London borough of Redbridge with their five-year-old son, Charin, on whose behalf they have fought to access the services that he needs as a child with an autistic spectrum disorder.

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability. This complex condition affects the ability to communicate and socialise with others. Charin is one of an estimated 520,000 individuals in the United Kingdom with autism—60 per 10,000 children under eight, according to the Medical Research Council's "Review of Autism Research: Epidemiology and Causes", which was published last month. It says that

"the prevalence of autism in the adult population is not known."

Charin was born on 3 February 1996 at the Royal London hospital in Whitechapel by emergency caesarean, because he was suffering from foetal distress. By the age of 21 months, Charin had changed from an active animated baby into a withdrawn child who was unable to speak, made no eye contact and lived in a world of his own.

The diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder began a time of frustration, anger, desperation and exasperation for Ivan and Charika as they battled for appropriate care for Charin. Ivan wrote to me, other Members of Parliament, voluntary organisations, business people and celebrities. I stand here today introducing this debate for autism awareness year 2002 because of his persistence and commitment. There are many calls on an MP's time, as hon. Members well know, and there are many appeals to lobby for more resources for this underfunded service and that worthwhile cause. Before I met Ivan, I was involved with and supported many health campaigns, but my interest and involvement in autism is almost entirely due to Ivan, Charika and their fight for Charin.

Autism awareness year 2002 began, Ivan told me, as

"a small acorn of an idea in our lounge".

It is now the largest ever autism movement in the UK, involving nearly 300 organisations as partners, including the British Institute for Brain Injured Children, the Disabilities Trust, the National Autistic Society, Parents Autism Campaign for Education and Autism London.

One of many pleas made by Ivan for support for the year found its target with the British Institute for Brain Injured Children, which took up the challenge to declare the year with the assistance of the Disabilities Trust. They set up a partners meeting for organisations expressing an interest, at the end of which they had an impressive ribbon to mark the year, which I am wearing, from an organisation called Allergy Induced Autism and an invitation to apply for a grant from the Shirley Foundation. It also supports the all-party group on autism.

I must acknowledge the excellent work of that group, which was formed nearly two years ago and is inspirationally led by my hon. Friend the Member for

South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman). We have 145 Members from both Houses, including Ministers and Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, and our meetings are interesting, informative and well attended.

Autism awareness year 2002 is supported by 153 Members of Parliament who signed early-day motion 103 just before the general election last year. As a result of the campaign, the Scottish Parliament held a debate on 6 December 2001 on issues surrounding autism and a website to publicise the events and links of the year was launched by the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), at the Labour party conference last October.

The year's events started this week with Autism Sunday on 6 January. January has been designated the month of prayer for autism, and members of churches, mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras and temples will pray together for autists throughout the UK.

On 11 February, the Patrick Gunawardena 2002 Education Awards UK will be held in the House to thank MPs, peers, parent groups, carers, charities and the media for supporting the autistic community. Patrick Gunawardena was a distinguished educationist from South Asia who also taught in the UK. On 14 February, an inaugural conference is scheduled to be held by the prestigious London health charity the King's Fund, followed by nine regional seminars.

What is autism awareness year 2002 all about? The mission statement is to raise awareness through partnerships on the issues surrounding autism and to influence and inspire to action those individuals in key positions to facilitate the changes needed. The aims and objectives are to target the political, educational, health and social care decision and policy makers and primary budget holders; to improve awareness in the relevant statutory sectors, giving them much-needed knowledge of what autism is, its effect on the individual concerned and what can be done to bring about improvement; to inspire local authorities to take a long, hard look at autism and to develop and implement clearly defined strategies to deal with the increase in this condition; to influence the Government to ensure equity and equality for autistic individuals; to achieve for parents with children who are autistic the ultimate benefit of being able to gain access to needed services in their local community; to work towards inclusion of those with autism at all levels; and to raise public awareness beyond the myths.

Why is it important to have a year-long campaign? When referring to Charin at the beginning of my speech, I said that estimates of people with ASD in the UK are at about the half million mark, but many who work in the autism field believe that that figure could be doubled, as many people are undiagnosed and unknown to the authorities. That is why I strongly support the all-party group's call for clear data gathering by the Government, so that proper planning and provision can be made for the services that ASD people need.

Other important issues relating to autism are illustrated by the following statistics and facts: 33 per cent. of adults with autism have no social involvement; only 12 per cent. of those diagnosed with autism are able to work; ASD often falls into the gap between mental health and learning disabilities; only 38 per cent. of people with autism or Asperger's have a community care assessment, and of those only 16 per cent. were offered one; only 45 per cent. of those assessed received the services specified in the assessment; 49 per cent. of adults with autism or Asperger's are still at home with their parents; the average lifetime cost of supporting an autistic person is estimated to be £2.9 million, excluding the loss to the economy of autistic people who cannot live independently or earn their own living. The total cost to the economy is about £1 billion a year.

The British Institute for Brain Injured Children tells me that the Government are already spending a great deal on autism indirectly, for example on tribunals. A survey by Parents Autism Campaign for Education found that a quarter of its sample had to resort to special educational needs tribunals to get the support they need in several examples: administration and specialist time while the duplication of assessments continues; during transition with accommodation costs and mentoring for adults diagnosed late; meeting the cost of mental health problems caused as a result of late or misdiagnosis and family mental health problems; the prosecution through the criminal justice system of undiagnosed adults and adolescents and those with inadequate support in the community; and excluded children. Above all, autism awareness year is a golden opportunity for families, carers and all those working for people with ASD to shout loudly about autists' needs.

The courses of action identified by groups and individuals who have contacted me include an urgent need for routine screening of young children before going to school and throughout their education; more investment in research into the causes of autism with ring-fenced funding to ensure that it is given the priority it deserves; more investment in schools, specialist units, early intervention and support services including residential and respite care, again with designated funds; increasing awareness of accompanying physical problems, including food allergies and bowel disorders; the need for a diagnostic one-day one-stop shop to prevent concerned families from being passed to a succession of different professionals to secure a clear diagnosis; establishing a clear pathway from diagnosis to intervention to give families proper support; an initiative to promote autism awareness and skills training for all who work with people with autism; recognition of and provision for adult autists; access to appropriate education from pre-school onwards; consistency and equity in funding allocation—the PACE survey found that over a third of parents of autistic children reported difficulties in obtaining LEA funding and a fifth of over-fives received no funding at all; budget pooling by local agencies; the need for autism to have its own classification and not be categorised as a learning difficulty; and increasing the availability of qualified experts including specialist teachers, educational psychologists and speech and language therapists, which has been a particular problem in my area for some time. A number of worried families have contacted me and I have raised their concerns with the local health and education authorities and in the House.

Redbridge primary care trust has arranged a series of meetings for parents and carers, including one tomorrow. Furthermore, Ivan and Charika have heard that there is a local education panel meeting tomorrow to discuss the future of Charin's specialist speech

*[Linda Perham]*

therapy and educational support. They, like so many other parents and carers, feel that they should not have to keep battling for their child's rights. I agree with them.

I pay tribute to the work of local groups that have provided me with information and whose members are tireless in their support for others as well as coping with their own children's needs—some have several ASD children themselves. Redbridge Parents in Partnership, with which I have a long association dating back to my time as a local councillor, celebrates its 10th anniversary in May and I must acknowledge the work of Redbridge Autistic Families Together, Parents of Autistic Children Together and the Autism Professional Interest Group, which are compiling a Redbridge guide to social and communication difficulties services.

In particular, I acknowledge the assistance given to me for the debate by Fiona Loynes, the policy researcher for the all-party autism group; Pam Brooks from the British Institute for Brain Injured Children; and Milena Inzani from Autism London. I leave almost the last word to my constituent, Ivan Corea, whose dream for autism awareness year 2002 has been realised:

"I am really excited by it all. I have worked so hard to raise awareness of the condition as a result of the stress and trauma we went through regarding Charin. It's been so exhausting, but it's worth it. It's wonderful to see it all happening."

I know that the Government and the Minister are prepared to listen and that progress has been made in the past few years on several concerns of those who work to improve the lives of autistic people. I hope that autism awareness year 2002 will act as a springboard for real and sustained advances in the treatment and understanding of those with autistic spectrum disorders, so that those special individuals can achieve their true potential.

11.15 am

**Mrs. Angela Browning** (Tiverton and Honiton): First, I declare a non-remunerated position as a special councillor on the national council of the National Autistic Society. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham). In bringing the debate to the Chamber, she does a service to us all, particularly people with autism and their parents.

Autism is now almost a mainstream issue in the Houses of Parliament. A huge amount of progress has been made, and I congratulate the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), who chairs the all-party group, on their role in ensuring that when MPs receive constituency casework, as we all do, they not only have a better understanding of autism, but are able to stand shoulder to shoulder with their constituents, as the hon. Lady has done this morning. We must ensure that the support that we give our constituents helps to improve their lives.

Autism is a complex condition, primarily because it covers such a wide spectrum. That in itself can cause difficulties. I shall concentrate on the aspects that I believe should be given priority during autism awareness year to ensure that awareness is translated into appropriate action and support.

It is sometimes said that autism is a rare condition, yet it is estimated that autistic spectrum disorders are approximately four times more common than cerebral palsy and 17 times more common than Down's syndrome. Autism touches the lives of 500,000 families in the UK, and many health, education, social services and other professionals routinely come across people with autism. Problems arise if the professionals do not recognise or suspect autism. If they disregard the significance of the symptoms presented to them or, even worse, make an inappropriate referral or treat the child or adult for something other than autism, that can lead to a downward spiral for the patient. That is the worst-case scenario.

In autism awareness year, we must ensure that the general public are more aware and we need them to be more tolerant when they come across someone with an autistic spectrum disorder. Prejudice in any form is to be abhorred, and it prevents true integration for those with autism. Bullying at school and unkind remarks are still severe problems for children with autism.

Autistic children grow into autistic adults, and a difficulty is that what most people might consider to be odd behaviour—I am always cautious about the use of language and I hope that I have chosen the right words—is sometimes thought rather threatening. Adults will tolerate inappropriate behaviour in a young child, but they are less sympathetic to a strapping young lad in his late teens or an adult in his 20s. They may see the behaviour as threatening, but those of us who deal with autism in our daily lives know that it is just normal autistic behaviour. The general public must develop a much wider tolerance and understanding of people with autism.

I shall touch on professionals and the role that they can play in autism awareness year. It is disheartening when parents take their child to a GP or a hospital specialist and their knowledge of the child is dismissed. Professionals sometimes think that parents become over-emotional, but parents are emotional about their children—I become emotional about my 32-year-old—and that never changes, even when they are 50. Parents may be able to make an important contribution to a diagnosis, and that should not be dismissed because they are emotional about their child. Living with autistic children is not easy and it is not surprising that their parents are sometimes emotional. The professionals should be open minded when parents attend a GP's surgery or a hospital with a child who may be autistic.

We rightly demand of medical professionals that they err on the side of caution if they are unsure and refer the child or adult—late diagnosis is not uncommon—to someone with experience of working with and diagnosing autism. It is different from many other conditions, so a degree of specialism from the medical profession is required to ensure that the diagnosis is accurate and to obtain a clear picture of where the sufferer is on the autism spectrum. That is important in drawing up a programme to help sufferers and their parents or carers. I hope that autism awareness year is recognised by all professionals and the medical profession in particular.

During an Adjournment debate on Asperger syndrome, I flagged up a matter of great concern and I hope that you will indulge me, Mr. McWilliam, if I do so again. Adult sufferers, particularly those at the more

able end of the spectrum, often develop mental health problems on top of the autistic condition. The hon. Member for Ilford, North referred to that. When such people come under the remit of mental health professionals, the autism may not be recognised. If there is a misdiagnosis, the patient may be sectioned under the Mental Health Acts or be given inappropriate drug treatment for a condition other than autism:

It is important that mental health specialists—there are very few who specialise in autism—are able to look through the mental health problems to what we would describe as normal autistic behaviour. The two are often confused and if sufferers get into a downward spiral of mental health treatment with drugs and in-patient stays—it is traumatic for people with autism to go into any hospital, particularly a mental health hospital—their problems are compounded.

I say to the health, social services and education professionals, "Autism awareness year is your year as well." It is a year for professionals to make appropriate referrals and to understand that providing the best educational opportunities—many sufferers have huge potential—requires more than just a little more one-to-one attention. It requires understanding, case by case, of the way in which the condition manifests itself and best practice in maximising each child's potential.

The hon. Member for Ilford, North made two comments that rang a bell with me. First, she rightly said that services are patchy. Where someone lives should not affect whether they have access to appropriate services, and standards must be raised uniformly throughout the country. Secondly, she referred to the experience of her constituents in the case of Charin, using the words "fought" and "battled". As Members of Parliament and hardened politicians, we are used to fighting our corner and fighting battles, but far too often weary parents have to fight too great a battle. They are frequently at a loss over how best to deal with a child and serve its best interests. It should not be that way, and I hope that by the end of this year the battle will have been fought and won.

11.25 am

**Dr. Stephen Ladyman** (South Thanet): It is an honour to speak in this timely debate at the beginning of autism awareness year, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) on securing it. I also congratulate her on many aspects of her contribution. Seldom have I heard such a good summary of the conditions that affect autistic people and the patchiness of service provision in this country.

It is also an honour to follow the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), who is a constant battler on behalf of autistic people. As she said, today's contribution is not her first in such debates, and it will not be her last. My hon. Friend and the hon. Lady were kind enough to say good things about the all-party group on autism, which I have the honour to chair, and they also said some nice things about me, although I should point out that the group's successes are ours, not mine.

In the two years since the group was set up, my admiration for fellow Members of the House has grown tremendously. Not once has anyone attempted to use this issue or the group for party advantage. Everyone has worked together closely, criticism of the Government has been constructive, praise has been given where due and everyone has offered both criticism and praise. In turn, the Government have responded in the way that we would like Governments to respond always. They have been open, taken up some of our ideas, been prepared to discuss matters with us and helped to move the agenda forward.

The success of the all-party autism group also owes a great deal to the steering group and those outside the House who support us and work with us to ensure that we have information. Thanks to the readiness with which the Government have accepted our ideas in the past two years, we have, in effect, been pushing at an open door, and they should be congratulated on that. A huge task remains ahead of us, however.

I pay tribute to Ivan, Charika and Charin Corea, who have fought hard in the past few months to establish autism awareness year, and it is wonderful that my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North has secured this debate, given that she is their Member of Parliament. This year is also the 40th anniversary of the National Autistic Society, and I hope that the events associated with that celebration and with autism awareness year enable us to do a great service for autistic people by raising awareness of autism to new levels by the end of the year, not just in the House and among the Government, but throughout the whole country. I also congratulate *The Times*, which ran its Christmas appeal in aid of the National Autistic Society. In the past month, it has published a series of excellent and informative articles on autism, and it has done a great deal to raise awareness of the issue in the run-up to autism awareness year.

What is important, however, is not how we start the year, but how we end it. We should judge the year on whether we have moved the agenda forward, got more resources into helping autistic people and put an end to the patchy services throughout the country. I am glad that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), is responding to the debate, as I believe that she has the ear of a man at the Treasury who has the ear of an even bigger man at the Treasury. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North said, autism has an economic dimension. It costs £1 billion a year and has a lifetime cost that is pocket change short of £3 million per autistic person. Those costs can be reduced, but only by putting resources in early.

The all-party group has found that assessment in schools is far from adequate or uniform. All children should be assessed as toddlers to discover whether they have autistic tendencies, and as soon as those are picked up, resources must be put in to help. The more we intervene early and the more resources we put in, as day follows night we will get better outcomes. People will need less support later in life and will be able to make a bigger and more viable contribution to supporting themselves and to the country. We must put money up front to save it at the end. That will eventually involve joined-up thinking between social services, health and education authorities, the Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that everyone works together to create a uniform service.

*[Dr. Stephen Ladyman]*

I want briefly to tell hon. Members the story of a constituent of mine who introduced me to the problems of autistic people, but I am afraid that it does not have a happy ending. About four years ago, two mums and a dad came to see me. All had recently found that their children were autistic as toddlers and decided that they wanted their child to have a therapy called the Lovaas technique. However, they were denied that therapy by the local education authority.

The parents decided that one of them would take a test case to the SEN tribunal, and they came to see me about a week before to tell me what was going on. After hearing the case, the tribunal decided that the LEA was within its rights to deny Lovaas therapy, because it was not proven to be better than any other therapy that might be available.

Having won the case, the LEA decided to be generous. It gave Lovaas therapy to two of the families, but not to the one that brought the test case, because that case had been rejected. Those parents had to provide Lovass therapy from their own financial resources. As a result, the family was brought to the brink of financial ruin. A few months ago, the grandmother approached me to update me on the situation. She said that the child had made great progress over the past few years through Lovaas therapy, entirely financed by the family, and they had concluded that it might be possible for the child to have a mainstream school place. That would have been impossible without that privately provided intensive therapy.

I contacted the local education authority and received a letter in December saying that it had identified a mainstream school place for the child and would hold a multi-agency meeting, which takes place next week, to discuss how to support the child's return to mainstream school. The fact that the child can return to school is entirely due to the family's independent private financing of Lovaas therapy, at no expense to the LEA. Having sent the letter to the parents, I found that they knew nothing about the meeting. The LEA had not even told them that discussions were going on or that the meeting was to take place next week—all that was done without their involvement. Nevertheless, they were delighted.

Unfortunately, this week the father telephoned me to say that their marriage has finally broken up. The strain and financial consequences of providing the care proved to be too much of a struggle. That is the result of lack of support for a family that we, through the local education authority and the state, should provide. Consequently, the child will not make progress, the costs to the nation will be higher and the personal costs to the family are enormous. At the end of autism awareness year, we must be in a position whereby such families get the support that they need from the moment that they are identified as having an autistic child right through to their education and throughout adulthood.

Let us not forget the plight of autistic adults in this country. For example, 60 per cent. of autistic adults do not find out that they are autistic until they are 16. By that time, they have been through school and they have lost the opportunity to get the support that they need. They become more dependent on the state after that, and we must deal with the problem.

I conclude with this brief analogy, which I have used several times, including at the all-party group's last meeting. Every Member of Parliament knows the syndrome represented by what I call the shopping bag lady. She comes to an MP's surgery with a plastic shopping bag full of letters. In my experience, such people are either involved in a court case that they have taken through every court in the land— nobody can understand it, but they think that their MP can help— or they are mums with autistic children, which means that the shopping bag is full of letters that they have had to write over the years in an attempt to get either recognition for the problems that they face or the right sort of support or to get their doctors to recognise the condition. Some have to struggle to get the child's dad to recognise the condition, as mum often spots it before dad.

For many months, such a woman will be told by her GP that she is "a silly worrying mother", which means that mum must battle with the GP to get recognition. Having obtained recognition from the GP, she must battle with the education authority and the health authority. Eventually, when the child gets older, she will battle with the Benefits Agency on his or her behalf. Those plastic bags are full of letters that such women have to write to get services that ought to be automatic and available everywhere. If we start to change the way that agencies provide support for autistic people so that fewer shopping bag ladies have to attend our surgeries, autism awareness year will have done its job.

11.37 am

**Liz Blackman** (Erewash): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) on introducing the debate. I also congratulate her and my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) and the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), on raising parliamentary awareness of autism.

As Members of Parliament, we have all touched the lives of the families of those who have the condition known as autism. There are common denominators in every case with which I have dealt. There is always a high level of frustration centring on diagnosis, as well as wrangling or battling—a common theme this morning—about responsibility and funding between different statutory bodies and about the appropriateness and quality of support. I deal with parents, carers, professionals and people with the condition who come into my surgery. That experience was described by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton reminded me of a recent case involving a young person who has Asperger's syndrome whose social worker had gone off on long-term sick leave and not been replaced. I intervened, and another social worker was appointed. I had cause to speak to the new social worker, who had a specialism in disability. When I asked, "What do you know about Asperger's syndrome?" she looked me in the eye and said, "I'll be quite honest, absolutely nothing." She knew about other disabilities, but not AS, so I handed her a copy of the Adjournment debate

introduced by the hon. Lady, because it set out so well not only the symptoms but the difficulties faced by young people with AS.

I pay tribute to the tremendous work by the National Autistic Society. Its interrelationship with the work being done in Westminster has been vital to moving the agenda on. Members of Parliament, professionals, and—to a degree—the public are now more aware of the condition of autism, but awareness must be further raised, so this year is important.

Many statistics and much information about autism have been provided by the previous three speakers, and I fully endorse everything that they said. I decided that from the outset I would concentrate on the specific disability of Asperger's syndrome. AS often baffles parents, carers, professionals and colleagues—if the individual is lucky enough to be in work—more than other disabilities on the autistic spectrum because it is high functioning autism. Many people with AS have qualifications and good language skills, so without spending some time with them and going beneath the surface, it is not necessarily possible to pick up the fact that there is a problem or disability. It is so easy to assume that such individuals are functioning, but so wrong to do so.

The behaviour of people with AS is characterised by huge difficulties with social interaction and by rigid thought patterns. They find it immensely hard to read social cues and they display obsessive behaviour. When they reach adult life, they have tremendous difficulty integrating. Life is much harder as an adult: as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton said, a young person or child is allowed certain quirks or oddities, but allowances or tolerance for such behaviour disappear for adults. People with AS have great difficulty in holding down a job: as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North said, only 12 per cent. are in full-time employment and almost 25 per cent. of adults with AS do nothing at all. They are often housebound because they do not possess the confidence or social skills to go out, make contacts, have friendships and establish emotional relationships.

In effect, AS puts individuals betwixt and between because they display no apparent physical difficulties and are coherent on the surface. The intolerance of other adults towards adults with AS is hurtful to those with the condition. They are often ridiculed, shunned and bullied. Life is cruel to them. Their intelligence, which is often average or above average, enables them to compare themselves with their siblings and peer group more effectively than other young people with autism. They know that they are unable to achieve the rites of passage of their peers and siblings, and they can predict what life holds in store for them with a fair degree of certainty. They know that they will be lonely, that they will not establish friendships, and that they will not be able to form a long-lasting relationship or marry.

It is hardly surprising that such people have low self-esteem, and that they are often clinically depressed and have mental health problems. It is also unsurprising that about 8 per cent. of this group commit suicide. I would be interested to know whether Government statistics state how many suicides are committed by young people with AS. I suspect that the number is high.

**Mrs. Browning:** The hon. Lady will recall that I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), to examine that question in my Adjournment debate on Asperger's syndrome. I hope that the Department of Health will consider it. A suicide or attempted suicide rate of 8 per cent. among that group is unacceptable. As the hon. Lady and other hon. Members know well, many such incidents are preventable.

**Liz Blackman:** I agree. That harks back to my point that the clarity of thought of young people with AS and the way in which they are able clearly to assess their life chances drive them to such a desperate state.

Such people have the right to have their needs assessed by local authorities, but only 38 per cent. receive a community care assessment, only 16 per cent. are offered one as of right—the rest must fight to get one—and only 50 per cent. receive appropriate services. For young people with Asperger's syndrome, a key stage of life comes at the age of 18, marking the transition from adolescence to adulthood. However, only slightly more than half had a transition plan in place at that stage, and 65 per cent. of adults had no community care plan. Parents are confused and do not know which statutory service is responsible—indeed, the responsibility often falls between agencies, and because no lead agency is identified, people constantly fall into the gap between mental health and learning disability services.

The Government have made significant progress in their work for people with autism and Asperger syndrome. The White Paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" does not preclude those with AS from benefiting from such services if that is the best way to meet their needs. Prominent in the guidance is the fact that young people with AS may require an assessment of their social functioning to establish their level of need. That principle is sound, but everything is dependent on practice.

I would like to explore the statistic that only 12 per cent. of young autists are in work. Attention must be and is beginning to be paid to access opportunities for employment and to continuous support for young people in employment. Local authorities have just produced the first of three annual investment plans on welfare to work for disabled people, but the proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

I dealt recently with two cases involving young people with Asperger's syndrome. They came under the remit of the Employment Service disability team and the Interwork scheme. One should be entering the scheme in the next few days, albeit after a long haul. The other is currently in the scheme, but problems have developed and that young person cannot contact the Remploy Interwork job coach. He is depressed about certain events at work, but his job coach is inaccessible. I am sure that the scheme works well for many young people, but it must work well for them all. The case illustrates the fact that greater rigour is needed in the systems to support those young people.

I acknowledge that there is good practice on the ground, but I smiled when other hon. Members used the same words—"patchy" and "battling"—as I had written when preparing my speech. Such words are typical of the cases that Members of Parliament deal

*[Liz Blackman]*

with. Without a coherent strategy, I am not convinced that people with autism and Asperger's will get appropriate services. The key is Government guidance to local authorities, health authorities and other statutory bodies to clear up the confusion surrounding the appropriate support services and their responsibilities. People need unified support packages, but those are not currently being assembled consistently.

Life can be better for those young people when, rather than the current squabbling, there is adequate awareness, good training, unified support packages, clear lines of responsibility for funding and action and an identifiable gateway to services. Many parents do not know where to start and there must be a clear gateway of access. There is an absolute need for a transition plan from adolescence to adulthood, when continuous support is needed. The key is resources and the rigorous monitoring of the system, so that we know where it works, where there is good practice and where there are gaps.

Every young person with AS whom I have met has a great deal to give to their local community and to society. Their talents are being wasted and they are being consigned to loneliness and despair. That cannot and should not be tolerated. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet said, autistic awareness being so high on the agenda this year gives us a golden opportunity to make progress on the issues raised in this debate.

11.52 am

**Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): I did not intend to speak, but I want to congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) on securing the debate and to recount my experience of autism.

One learns a great deal when one becomes a Member of Parliament—that is what is great about the job. I was a teacher before I became an MP. When I started teaching in 1979, one lad in my class was described as autistic. Fortunately, he had full-time support in the class, but I had little opportunity to speak to his assistant and little knowledge of the condition, as I was given no background information about it. It was not until two or three years ago when I became a parliamentary candidate and constituents came to see me that I began to understand what autism is. That was 18 years after spending seven or eight years as a teacher and many more in the education profession. That is a frightening deficit—I hope that it is not so bad for teachers now. In retrospect, I realise how gaping was the void of my knowledge of the condition.

I learned more about the condition because people came to me for help. I pay tribute to Claire Franklin: she works tirelessly not only for her own child, but for others by attending special educational needs tribunals on their behalf, although she is less able to do so now because she fears the way in which the LEA will treat her child as a consequence. That is frightening. Jimmy Spence, who was a councillor on the Isle of Wight, first raised the issue with me. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), who visited the island two or three years ago and met a large group of people, mainly mothers with children who suffer from autistic spectrum disorder.

My great interest is education, so I shall confine my remarks to how we can treat children better in the education system. I will also lean heavily on the remarks made by the hon. Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman), who pointed to the need for a single gateway. As a former teacher and someone who has worked for an LEA in London, I see a great problem with the special educational needs legislation. The education service is required to take action, but other services "may" do so—"may" is a word that appears all too frequently in the legislation.

What goes on in the classroom and the school is only a small part of the education that the child needs. Especially in the case of a child who suffers from an autism spectrum disorder, it is no good to concentrate only on what goes on in the classroom. All too often, the SEN statement sets out only what the LEA must provide in the classroom and the school. It may refer to what the health authority or the social services authority do, but the LEA has no obligation to provide those services. The statement seldom provides for what goes on before and after school, or even on the way to school, and it almost certainly will not refer to the child's needs in the holidays, let alone to the needs of parents or of siblings, who often come second to the child with the greatest need.

I have a suggestion: in respect of SEN statements, the education service should take a leading role and accept the responsibility for meeting the financial needs of a child with an autistic spectrum disorder, whether that provision is made through education, the health service or social services. If a child needs language support, it is no good the health service saying—as happens all too frequently—that it does not have the money and cannot provide the service. That would not be acceptable for the education service, and should not be acceptable for the health service. If parents need social services support in the holidays to provide respite care, or care for their other children, it should not be acceptable for the social services authority to say that it cannot afford that, any more than such an explanation is acceptable for the education authority. I hope that that single suggestion gives the Minister food for thought.

11.58 am

**Paul Holmes** (Chesterfield): The debate has been considered and issues relating to autism have been carefully analysed. The hon. Members for Ilford, North (Linda Perham), for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), for Erewash (Liz Blackman) and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) made eloquent cases and gave moving personal examples from their experience of people with autism.

Autism is a condition that has been fully recognised and brought to the attention of professionals and politicians only in recent years. That is due to the efforts of parents and families of those with autism, and they deserve praise. Those families and self-help groups have much in common with those who are fighting to raise awareness of other issues such as attention deficit disorder or endometriosis, which have not had medical and professional recognition until recently.

Before the election in June, I spent 22 years as a secondary school teacher, when I gradually became aware of the condition of autism. I taught several

children with autistic syndromes in an 11-18 school, and last year I taught a girl in year 7 who had fragile X syndrome. My experience mirrors the research findings of the groups involved in raising awareness of autism: according to them, 70 per cent. of teachers have taught children with autism. During my career, I taught four who had clear diagnoses of autism and several others whose autism was suspected but whose parents were struggling to prove it.

The research shows that during teacher training only 5 per cent. of teachers have been taught how to recognise and deal with the syndrome—when I trained, 22 years ago, I received no special needs education training—and that a further 5 per cent. have been on a training day linked to autism at some point in their careers. I was one of the 90 per cent. who did not receive any basic training in autism awareness. The teaching profession needs to address that issue. We did receive training from the special needs department, which circulated information when children with the syndrome arrived, but that is no substitute for proper training.

**Dr. Ladyman:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman and I am grateful that he raises the question of teacher awareness. The National Autistic Society documented the story of a little girl with an autistic spectrum disorder who was disruptive during literacy hours when the children sat in a circle. An autistic-aware teacher, who had received training, realised that putting a coloured carpet tile in the same place each day for the girl to sit on was all that was needed to solve the problem, which went away.

**Paul Holmes:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that example. I taught a child who was regarded as "a problem child" because of his behaviour. He was very intelligent, but his behaviour was getting in the way of his education and that of his class. After three years, it was recognised that he might be autistic. As a result of that awareness and subsequent staff training, he completed his A-levels successfully and went on to university.

Increasing early awareness by screening at nursery school would make a huge difference to children's life experience. Integration in mainstream schools can work, as it does in so many areas of special educational needs. One eloquent example of that was featured in the question and answer session on *The Times* website on 4 December. A family posted this statement:

"My daughter, Beatrice, is timid, obsessional and falls very clearly within the autistic spectrum. She has been educated at our local primary and secondary school with the full-time support of an LSA. Despite initial reluctance from some members of staff, she integrated very well and took part as fully as she could in school activities. The other children became aware of how to relate to someone whose social interaction was different from theirs and gradually relished the responsibility that this brought. The staff appreciated that teaching styles could be adjusted in a way that was beneficial to the rest of the class... I strongly believe that this approach is what charity is all about. Far too often people feel genuinely that all they need to do is to sign a cheque or put their hands in their pockets and that will be enough. It is not.

Autistic people need their different behaviours to be recognised so that they are not left in complete isolation. This requires a willingness to re-evaluate attitudes and adopt a positive approach to those who do not conform to normal social codes. If *The Times* Christmas Appeal can get this message across I am sure autistic families will be extremely grateful."

Working and learning alongside people who are "different" is rewarding for both adults and children. Integration can work, but it carries a bill. That example involved a full-time learning support assistant, and a cost was attached to that.

In the new year and beyond, we must raise awareness of autism and deal with the funding of relevant professionals, the educational process and support in adult life. We also need more research into the causes of autism, which remain uncertain. Recently, controversy has raged over a potential link with measles, mumps, rubella vaccination. The Government, working with the medical profession, should fund further research into the causes. Important research is due to be published later this year. We need effective screening of young children even before they start formal schooling. Pilot schemes have provided good examples: CHAT, the checklist for autism in toddlers, is an excellent guide. Good practice should be adopted nationally. We need a clear diagnostic definition of the symptoms of autism so that people can recognise it. It is often a long time before autism is recognised, and parents often have to battle to convince health and educational professionals that autism is indeed the problem.

The Centre for Social and Communication Disorders piloted the diagnostic one-stop shop, which has been shown to work. I hope that the Minister will tell us that the pilot justifies rolling the scheme out across the country. What measures will the Government undertake as a result of increased awareness of autism? Funding remains important, and ring-fenced funding has been proposed to ensure that the money is not lost in the wider morass of social services funding.

12.6 pm

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): This has been an excellent debate in which we have heard many well-informed contributions from people with experience and pedigree. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) on securing this timely debate at the beginning of the year. Autism is topical for the wrong reasons—the recent publicity about the MMR vaccination has sidelined the real problems of autism, whatever its causes.

I am particularly interested in this subject in my roles as Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on health and vice-chairman of the all-party group on autism. I join the general love-in by paying tribute to the group's chairman, the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), who showed such effort and determination in setting the group up. He has achieved much in promoting understanding of autism. I also congratulate the National Autistic Society, which has distributed little ribbons today, albeit not yet to me. In its 40th year, I congratulate the society on promoting awareness of autism, establishing educational centres and providing support to families and local authorities, setting up help lines, producing literature, training and encouraging research. It provides a huge amount of help.

In common with other hon. Members, I became more aware of autism and Asperger's when desperate cases came to light at my constituency surgery. I realised that the problem was more prevalent than I had believed. It is estimated that every constituency in England has an

*[Tim Loughton]*

average of 848 people with an autism spectrum disorder. Autism affects perhaps 500,000 families in this country at a cost of more than £1 billion. It remains too little understood, though the position is improving.

Autism still suffers from the "naughty child on the bus" syndrome. Unlike a child who cannot walk, for example, a child with autism may have no physical signs of any disability. Autistic children often play up, as ably described by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), but the problem is often dismissed as mothers being unable to keep their children under control. We must educate people that there is more to autism. We must understand that is it not just bad behaviour simply because we cannot see a physical disability.

The hon. Member for South Thanet mentioned *The Times* Christmas appeal. The articles were exceedingly helpful, in that they gave real-life examples of what it means to look after an autistic child growing into adulthood. It is difficult to determine whether the prevalence of autism is increasing or whether diagnosis is improving, but it is clear that early diagnosis is vital and that long-term pathways for treatment and care must be identified at an early stage. Only then can we provide the appropriate support that people desperately need and ensure that problems are noticed before they worsen.

We heard the statistics about lifetime extra costs and emotional strain on families. Joined-up provision is the vital key. PACE refers to the responsibility vacuum between the resources required and what is on offer from local education and health authorities. A common constituency problem we encounter is that of parents of autistic children who have no clear gateways—as the hon. Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman) said, they do not know to whom they should go. The polite term is "ambiguity around responsibility", but the real term is buck passing.

Often, there is a vicious triangle. How many times have we dealt with the local education authority first, then the local council's social services department and, finally, the primary care trust within the national health service? The need might be for speech therapists, social workers, or extra support in the classroom. It is so difficult to obtain one third of the funding from each of three bodies; in some cases, it requires a great deal of work, and the effort, time and money wasted in getting to that point is intolerable. That is the battle—the word on everyone's lips—in which we politicians have to engage.

Disaster can result if such efforts are not successful: the police may become involved, or mental health problems may arise. I know one mother who had her autistic son arrested for stealing the family car, simply to jolt the local authority into providing her with the help that she desperately needed. Children or adults with extreme cases of Asperger's may be sectioned under the Mental Health Acts or given inappropriate medication, which may trigger a downward spiral. The hon. Member for Ilford, North gave us the statistics: people with autism disorders are five times more likely to commit suicide, one in 30 people with autism has felt suicidal, and one third of autistic adults suffer from depression.

Autism awareness year is important. A whole year is a good step up from the autism awareness week of previous years. Many events are planned. I pay tribute to the BIBIC for taking on the campaign and acting as facilitator, as well as to the Corea family—I am not sure how many times the hon. Lady mentioned her constituents—for the great determination that they have shown on behalf of their child. I am sure that the year will be successful and will bring enormous benefits for many thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of families who have children with autistic disorders.

We parliamentarians can also take some credit, not only for the work of the all-party group, but for the 153 MPs who signed the early-day motion and for the support that we have had in the House of Lords. With the NAS and the 250 organisations that have added their support to autism awareness year, we can take some credit for raising the profile of the issue. Much else is happening besides the King's Fund conference on 14 February. The success of the year will be judged not by the number of people who turn up at individual events, but by its legacy of awareness among professionals and the public at large. That is what is important.

We must concentrate on five areas. The first is assessing the problem's extent, because we do not have up-to-date prevalence figures. There are too many 'differentials between counties'—let alone countries'—experiences, perhaps owing to different expertise and provision in different counties and their ability to assess the scale of the problem. We must have much better data and better ways of collecting and assessing data. There are different impacts at different ages in a child's development.

Secondly, we need to do more research into causes and to have a greater public awareness campaign. As the hon. Member for Ilford, North said, we need to dispel the myths. Unique among her colleagues, the Minister has been exceedingly wise and brave in indicating what she was prepared to do in terms of ensuring that her children have the MMR vaccination. Vaccination in parts of the country is down to 72 per cent., which may have an enormous impact. Measles is a killer. I have a 41-year-old constituent who suffered severe brain damage as a result of contracting measles at an early age. We need to educate the public much more, not merely flag up a possible link between autism and MMR. There is much more to it.

Thirdly, we need to do much better on early diagnosis. The average age for diagnosis of autism is six, four years after most parents seek help. We must treat early and provide suitable support to avoid regression into severe autistic behaviour. That is not necessarily difficult. The hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) mentioned the CHAT technique, developed at Cambridge university, which should be more extensively available.

Who takes the lead in spotting the signs of autism early? That is the problem. Is it the health visitor, the GP, other health or education officials or the specialist teacher when the child starts nursery or school? Often a family friend who knows a little about the subject notices something. I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton: for goodness' sake, listen to parents—they know quite a lot, however emotional they may be when they turn up at a

GP's surgery. In addition, it would be much more helpful if diagnosis were regarded as a signpost, not a label.

Fourthly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) illustrated so clearly from his experience, there should be much better support at school, both in the classroom and on the way to and from it. The problem is that autism is a broad spectrum with a high diversity of need. Inadequate statements are often given, which lead to long wrangles through tribunals. Learning difficulty tags often apply only to people with IQs of less than 70, but we have heard that many people with Asperger's have higher and often above average intelligence. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton says, autism is an iceberg condition: at least two thirds is below the surface. We must tackle the enormous divergence in the experiences of LEAs and the availability of specialist teachers, particularly specialist speech therapists. We need many more special autism awareness units in mainstream schools, and we must strengthen the SEN code of practice.

Finally, we must provide support for the extended families and carers who deal with people with autism and who face the enormous emotional impact of doing so. The hon. Member for South Thanet talked about marriage breakdown; I have seen in my constituency how common that is, because of all the pressures. Furthermore, the economic consequences are severe. It is much more difficult to diagnose autism and Asperger's in adults than in children, because there are fewer contexts in which identification might occur, but only after diagnosis can suitable treatment be made available.

It is vital to support parents. The Sussex Autistic Society, with which I do some work, has get-togethers for parents and professionals. The children can be taken off their hands and entertained in specialist light and sound rooms, while the adults share their experiences. Training should be available for parents, and respite care is essential to give them a break from the constant pressure. We do not value carers enough, but we should make their job as easy as possible because they take so much of the burden off the state.

Today's debate and the work that will be done throughout the year are important to getting the message across to the public and increasing awareness of autism; only then will we be able to secure a co-ordinated approach. We must increase awareness among health and education officials and social services, and reflect the issue in employment policies. We need to reveal much more of the iceberg and to cut down the number of shopping bag ladies. Only after that has been done will we be able to have a debate that does not feature words such as "battling" and "patchy". The campaign has got off to an excellent start and I wish it well.

12.19 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper):** I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) on securing a debate on this important issue in autism awareness year, and on voicing her constituents' concerns so powerfully. We have heard some passionate speeches from Members on both sides of the Chamber. They have extensive experience and expertise and they are right to feel very strongly about the issue. I also pay tribute to the all-party group: we often underestimate the influence and achievements of such groups. The all-party group on breast cancer, for example, has done a great deal to raise awareness of that condition.

As the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said, autism has, in effect, been mainstreamed in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and we need to do the same throughout society. Too little is known about autism, not only in society in general but among professionals and experts. During this debate, many important points have been made extremely well, and they should be followed up. The key themes that have emerged are the need for more and better research; improved diagnosis and early intervention; improved medical and professional recognition and understanding of autism; better partnership working among the various agencies that provide support for those with autism and their families; ways to tackle the patchiness of services; better support for and greater involvement of parents; and recognition of the individual needs of those with autism and their families.

It is important that we acknowledge that autism is a complex condition that affects not only the individuals with the condition, but their families, siblings, parents, carers, teachers and school mates. It is not a simple problem to which there are simple solutions. The Government warmly welcome autism awareness year. I pay tribute to the efforts of the Corea family, who are constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North, in getting it under way. I also pay tribute to the extensive work done for many years by the National Autistic Society in raising awareness and expertise.

Progress is already being made in respect of many of the themes that have been identified, such as improved multi-agency working, improved partnerships and research, and increased emphasis on early diagnosis. I shall mention a few of the measures that are already contributing to improving the situation of those with autism and their families, and highlight some of the next steps and key opportunities arising from autism awareness year, especially the development of the national service framework for children. In responding to some of the points raised by hon. Members, I shall point out the steps that are already being taken and the areas in which we need to go further.

Research was mentioned by the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes), among others. It is clear that we need to know more about the causes and prevalence of autism. That is why last year the Government asked the Medical Research Council to undertake a major and detailed review of current knowledge about autism, and to suggest possible areas of further research. NAS and PACE were involved in that work and I thank them for their contribution.

The MRC published the report of its detailed review on 13 December last year. It provides a clear, authoritative picture of the latest state of scientific research, and reflects acceptance of the fact that autism is not as rare as was previously thought, although it notes that the apparent increase in the prevalence of autism is likely to have resulted from better diagnosis and clearer definition, as well as from increased

*[Yvette Cooper]*

awareness. The report suggests that many factors play a role in causing autism, and that the strongest evidence to date is that there is a major genetic component. In line with other independent expert reviews, the MRC group confirmed that the evidence does not support a causal link between MMR vaccination and autism.

The fact that the MRC carried out the review considerably strengthens the case for fresh autism research, as does establishing a highlighting notice relating to autism and mapping out the key areas for the most fruitful research. I hope that strong research proposals will emerge in many of the areas that the MRC identified.

Many hon. Members concentrated on services for those with autism. An important first step is diagnosis. We heard about the need for one-stop shops and a single gateway to improve diagnosis and early intervention, and that must be the way forward. We must make it much easier for parents to navigate an often complex network of consultations surrounding diagnosis. In many areas that is done successfully, and one of the challenges is to ensure that best practice in those areas is adopted across the board.

We are taking a close interest in an independent initiative, the national initiative on autism, which is chaired by Professor Ann Le Couteur and is investigating screening, diagnosis and early intervention. It is expected to report this year and we will take its conclusions extremely seriously. The Department of Health commissioned Tony Holland to produce a report on Asperger's syndrome. That report includes recommendations on professional groups increasing their awareness, the need for health and social services to work together, and the need for population-based studies in adults and children to establish prevalence. Work is under way to implement "Valuing People" and to provide services for people with a learning disability, concentrating on improving co-ordination between agencies to supply the focused and individual services that people with learning disabilities, including autism, may need.

Improvements are taking place in education. The revised SEN code of practice has been in place since 1 January, and the guidance on assessing the different areas of children's SEN specifically highlights autistic spectrum disorders. In 2002, the Department for Education and Skills autism working group will publish its good practice guidance, which will be important to raising awareness across education and improving best practice. The quality protects programme is also making a contribution.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** Will the Minister give way?

**Yvette Cooper:** I am short of time, so I cannot.

The area that I want to focus on in the short time that I have left—I apologise for rushing through the issues—is the national service framework for children, which is just beginning its work and will consider not only health, but partnerships between health and social services and between health and education.

The framework will deal with every aspect of children's health; it will not be able to single out every condition and disease for detailed attention. However, the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), and I have decided that autism is particularly important and we want to use it as an example of the way in which services should be provided. We want to make autism an exemplar under the national service framework, so that when the framework is concluded people will be able to see how services should be provided—usually through partnerships and covering many of the aspects that we have discussed today, including early diagnosis—to provide the best quality services for those with autism.

I strongly urge hon. Members with an interest in this issue to become involved in the debate on the national service framework for children. I have a strong regard for the national service framework because it is having a powerful impact on improving services and setting national standards throughout the NHS. It provides a great opportunity for those with an interest in autism.

I apologise for not being able to cover many of the matters raised, including issues relating to adulthood.

**Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair):** Time is up. We must move on to the next debate.

## Standard Spending Assessment (Somerset)

12.30 pm

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about the standard spending assessment for Somerset. This seems to be a dreary ritual that we must go through each year. I seem to have been making precisely the same arguments for more than 17 years and I know that the Minister shares my background in local government, so he has probably been making the same arguments, on both sides of the fence, for an equal period. The sad fact is that, until the apportionment of local government finance is right, or at least approximately right, we must continue to make the case for the areas that we represent, and I certainly make no apology for speaking for Somerset.

It is good to see in the Chamber a full house of my colleagues who represent Somerset constituencies: my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and the hon. Members for Taunton (Mr. Flook) and for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger). I hope that our arguments are the same, because we are speaking for the communities that we represent.

I am familiar with the recitals that we must make on these occasions, and I shall not dwell on the structural problems with the present formula, because we are all familiar with them. Somerset is a rural county in the south-west and its local authority shares with many others the difficulty that additional costs in the county are not properly met by the formula—for example, the cost of providing a large number of small schools in a rural county, the cost of transport and the cost of providing for a dispersed population. We have more minor roads per person in the county than almost any other authority.

As the Minister and I are familiar with local government, let us not dwell on the more formulaic versions of this debate. I assure him that I am not about to wave shrouds or bleeding stumps at him, and I ask him to do me the favour of not insulting the intelligence of Somerset people by saying that everything in the formula is perfect and that Somerset has a good deal. We all know that that is not so.

I want to raise key matters, including social services, education, the Somerset levels and the problem of flooding and the cost of flood defence. I shall then refer briefly to district councils and the effect of council tax on those living in the county.

I start with social services, which cause enormous concern in Somerset. I was lucky to secure an Adjournment debate on 16 October 2001 when I drew attention to what is reasonably described as a crisis in the provision of long-term care in the county. I know that Somerset is not alone in experiencing that problem, but I also know that it is a matter of considerable concern to the director of social services and his staff and to many people who have relatives in long-term care or who require those services themselves. Care homes throughout the county have been closed, with devastating effects on people. Many businesses that provide care home facilities are precarious to the point of going under and there are real difficulties in providing domiciliary care to the standard required because of recruitment problems.

During my Adjournment debate, I received assurances from Ministers that were largely couched in the view that significant extra money was to be provided by the Government to help relieve what was recognised to be a serious situation for social services. They implied that it would make a significant difference to Somerset, which is, according to reputation and history, one of the best social services authorities. Independent assessments from the inspectorate and the Audit Commission have proved that the care provided by Somerset is of a high order; it was also one of the pioneers of effective co-operation between health authorities and the private sector.

The promise of cash has turned out to be illusory. There has been an increase of an extra £3 million in the base budget, but against that an almost equivalent loss has occurred—some £2.6 million—in the form of specific grants.

I shall draw the Minister's attention to three main points. The first concerns what are termed preserved rights, which relate to the income support that was available to residents before 1993 and is supposed to have been provided for in the settlement. The difficulty is that the figure has been calculated on the basis of the case load in December 2000 and multiplied by a factor based on the iniquitous area cost adjustment. That has resulted in a substantial shortfall between what is provided for by the formula and what is needed for dealing with real people in real communities who need real help. A figure need not be plucked out of the air because we have evidence, from information provided by the Benefits Agency, of how many people should receive the preserved rights money. The agency's figures, which are up to date and genuine, tell us that Somerset's allocation should be £6.3 million. However, under the formula that the Government have chosen to use, the figure is £5.5 million, which creates a shortfall of £800,000.

The second issue relates to residential allowances, which is the money that should be transferred to the county council to meet the cost of care packages when residential care allowances stop at the end of the financial year. In a 2001 paper from the Department of Health, the Government state that, if the formula is based on equity, Somerset should receive £1.29 million to meet the costs of that new responsibility. Instead, however, the Govt have used a formula based on the extraordinary machinations of the SSA and the area cost adjustment, which means that Somerset will be allocated only £850,000, creating a shortfall of £440,000. Perhaps the reason for the shortfall is that Somerset makes heavy use of independent sector placements. For heaven's sake, that is what the Government asked local authorities to do. It is part of the great partnership between the public and private sectors that the Government advocate. Somerset puts that policy into action and does what the Government want it to do even before they have thought of it, but it is penalised as a result, which cannot be right.

Promoting independence grants are the third element within social services. Recurrent expenditure should be continued because of winter pressures and because partnership and prevention grants are being put together. It has, however, been reduced for the inelegantly named winter PIGs—promoting independence grants for winter months—and the result

*[Mr. David Heath]*

is a shortfall of £1.4 million. The money that the Government claim to provide for social services with one hand is being taken away with the other, to the detriment of social services in Somerset and the dismay of people who rely on those services. The big question is why the Government do not use the actual cost of services for their calculation. Given that the services are available and that they are provided from their sources, why are they not used in the formulation?

**Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory** (Wells): The hon. Gentleman is putting the case for Somerset very well, and I strongly support his view that Somerset is badly treated in several respects. The Government have admitted that in past years, and we are looking for action. Does he agree that our case would be strengthened if we were to ensure that we were economical in our expenditure on functions such as the procurement of purchasing, which was recently the subject of an Audit Commission report, and on regional bodies and assemblies that have little public support and can absorb too much public money, which ought to be channelled into the areas that he is ably illuminating?

**Mr. Heath:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I agree that it is important that the county council prioritises the areas in which it spends its money, and that it maintains the reputation that it has always had for frugality and care with public finances. The county council will make its own decisions about how to spend its money, and it is wrong for us to try to pre-empt those decisions. Nevertheless, it is essential that the county council retain; its position, which it has held over many years and under varying administrations, of prioritising those areas that are most important to people in the county.

The area that has consumed the majority of funds available to Somerset over many years—way beyond the SSA allocation—is education, which brings us to a fundamental difference of opinion with the Government. I cannot accept, and I suspect that other hon. Members cannot accept, that the SSA per pupil in Somerset is so far out of kilter with that elsewhere in the country.

**Mr. David Laws** (Yeovil): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his persistence on this issue and his success in securing today's debate. Does he recall that at the beginning of the previous Parliament he received an acknowledgement from an Education Minister that Somerset has too low an SSA, which is unjustifiable? Will he press the Minister on the need to address that issue in the upcoming review of the education SSA so that the deficit in Somerset as set against the national average of about £200 per primary and secondary pupil can be dealt with as soon as possible?

**Mr. Heath:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Minister to which he referred, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris), is now prominent in the education field because she is the current Secretary of State for Education and Skills. In the previous Parliament what was almost a repertory company assembled for Adjournment debates on the imbalance in the SSA, in which she admitted that the Government had got the education SSA for Somerset wrong. That was also recognised by the previous Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), who used to talk about the Somerset factor, which was the factor of unfairness in the formula.

My children attend schools in Frome which receive £1,500 per year per child less than children in a leafy London borough such as Hillingdon. I am not obsessed with Hillingdon, but it is the borough in which the Prime Minister sends his children to school. There is a differential that cannot be papered over by reference to the extra costs of education because the SSA does not take into account the unit costs of a rural county. The result is a distorting effect on the other services that the council provides. Although the council rightly sees education as a priority and is prepared to spend massively over SSA provision, that squeezes all the other services that people expect the council to provide.

I must now be brief on my other points, as I want to leave the Minister time to reply.

Everyone knows about the issues of flood defence in Somerset. Half my constituency is under water during the winter months; the same applies to the constituencies of many of my hon. Friends. It is a massive problem. Somerset is dealing effectively with the problem this year, and the flood defence committee has put up its precept by 30 per cent. to carry out some of the work that the Government want. However, the Government have not given a single extra penny this year to help with those additional costs of £1.5 million.

**Mr. Adrian Flook** (Taunton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for securing the debate.

It is not even a question of the Government providing the same amount as last year; they have given less money. Will the hon. Gentleman join us in asking the Government for at least matching revenues to put towards flood defence?

**Mr. Heath:** The hon. Gentleman is right, and if we want to take the issue seriously—it is becoming more serious as the years pass—we need the Government to agree that, if the defences are being put in place this year, the money should come from the Government this year, not some years in the future. It is no good for them to run away from the issue.

Most of my comments have concerned the county council, because it controls the majority of the council tax and expenditure in the county, but my next point concerns South Somerset district council. It made the valuable point to me that, although its settlement looks good on paper, it is not. It looks as if it has extra money, and it should have received additional money from the housing transfer in a Government grant. However, the capping procedure brought in by the Government means that the good citizens of south Somerset will not benefit from that; indeed, they will be put in a worse position, which is wrong.

**Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Heath:** I shall give way briefly and for the last time.

**Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** I believe that the whole of Somerset can be included in this point. The situation with foot and mouth on Exmoor gave rise to the same problem. The council spent £250,000, but did not receive any help from the Government. That is exactly the same situation as in south Somerset.

**Mr. Heath:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right. I do not know the situation in west Somerset, but I am sure that we would hear exactly the same points from people in Mendip, Sedgemore and Taunton Deane. There is no time to list every problem.

What is the result? I fear that we will have substantial increases in council tax again this year, not because Somerset or any district council, whatever political party controls it, has been profligate in its use of funds, but because of Government policy. That will be replicated in county and district councils throughout the south-west peninsula, and it is likely that the norm for south-west counties will be a council tax increase that goes into double figures. The Government will downplay the situation and say that the increases are likely to be only 5 or 6 per cent., or whatever figure they come up with. They try the same trick every year and then say that the councils must have overspent. We know the facts, and it will be an unsupportable increase. The impact on individuals will be disastrous, as they will have to find extra funds, often out of fixed incomes, without receiving any benefit: they get worse rather than better services, which cannot be right. I do not have time to go into the iniquities of the uniform business rate, but I could speak for another half hour about its effect on businesses in the county.

South-west authorities are treated badly by the current formula. The SSA per capita in the south-west is £876. It is £1,265 in London, £1,043 in the north-east, and £1,027 in the north-west. The England average is £995. Some time, some Government will have to get this right for the west country, because we are losing patience with a system that delivers so badly for our region and provides us with so little benefit. There are many factors—partly the SSA formula, which is to be reviewed next year, and partly the iniquitous area cost adjustment, which is unsupportable to anybody other than those who receive it, who obviously would like it to be maintained. The Government cannot constantly retreat behind the need for consensus with local authorities. They will not achieve it, as the winners will never give up what they have, and the losers will always want more.

I fervently wish that the Minister would provide some answers on the future design of local government finance and say how the effects that I have described can be mitigated. Nothing would please me more than never to have such a debate again, because I am bored stiff producing a litany of despair from Somerset and the west country each year about the way the area is treated by consecutive Governments. That will happen only when we get a fair deal from the Government, and I believe that we are a long way from that.

12.50 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead):** I join the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) in bemoaning the fact that we do not have sufficient time adequately to address the detail of the issues that he has raised.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate on this important issue. He told me that he would not go into the arcane details and the highways and byways of the SSA system, and I shall attempt not to do so. He outlined how the SSA system relates to local authorities and how it decides grant outcomes and produces, over time, problems for those local authorities. That applies not only to Somerset but to local government more widely. I shall speak about the issue generally, although I shall attempt to address the hon. Gentleman's points about Somerset, too.

Next year's finance settlement is, by any measure, good for local government. It demonstrates our continued commitment to investing in local government. The settlement should in general allow councils to improve their services while keeping to reasonable increases in council tax. I underline what I said about the SSA system. Despite the considerable investment that we have provided each year since taking office, some authorities still face pressures. I acknowledge that, and understand where those pressures come from and how they impact on local authorities. We shall consider those matters with local government as we consider the spending plans for 2003-04 onwards in the context of the upcoming spending review.

We were able to increase provision for local government in the spending review 2000. Next year's proposed settlement benefits from the plans laid at that time. The proposals currently under consultation provide that Government grants and business rates support will be £47.3 billion in the next financial year. That is an increase of £3.3 billion, or 7.4 per cent.

Overall spending on education will rise by £2.1 billion, or 8.7 per cent. Personal social services will increase by £684 million or 6.5 per cent. Those figures relate to the national settlement. The hon. Gentleman will take limited comfort from that overall statement, although it was important to make it to answer some of his points about Somerset.

If we consider the comparative figures, we can see that Somerset will receive a good settlement this year. The council has benefited from the extra investment that we have made in local government. For the four years before 1998-99, Somerset received an increase in SSA of only 2.1 per cent. each year. Since then, the county has received an average increase of 5 per cent. Under our proposals for next year, Somerset will get a general grant increase of 6.1 per cent., or £14 million, which is more than three times the rate of inflation. That compares favourably with a number of other local authorities in England.

The hon. Gentleman made specific points about circumstances in Somerset which relate to the operation of the standard spending assessment, including social services expenditure. The Government well understand the pressures on social services authorities, especially in relation to care packages and long-term care for people in their homes or in residential care establishments. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that yesterday the Government announced the figures for the so-called bed-blocking initiative, which will provide £726,000 for Somerset for the next year and at least that amount for the year after that. It will go a considerable way to assist Somerset with high-maintenance care packages for people in care homes.

*[Dr. Alan Whitehead]*

The wider issue in respect of care homes, especially in southern England, is the continuing provision of such homes, the cost of packages and property, and the temptation that some care homes face to cash up when substantial amounts of money come their way for the land on which they stand. The resulting distortion in the number of places available and the question of how to deal with that problem in the long term are matters of great concern which the Government understand.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the allocation of residential allowance by SSA, rather than by past patterns of expenditure. The residential allowance transfer is for new cases, that is, for people placed in care after 1 April 2002. The SSA calculation on the basis of need is right, but it is true that past patterns penalised councils that chose to use their own homes for those arrangements, and we wanted to get rid of that unfairness.

I am aware of the strength of feeling about the education funding formula for Somerset. I will not go into details about what has been provided for education funding; the figures show that Somerset children will get a substantial increase in the amount made available for their education in the coming year.

The hon. Gentleman raised deeper questions about how the SSA formula works in relation to education, social services and other functions and I shall say a few words about it in the brief time available. The Government are committed to a fundamental reform of the SSA formula. As I have a background in local government, I recognise that a formula that attempts to achieve equity of outcome by providing an indicator for everything and a weight to that indicator on occasions, using Byzantine formulae, sometimes has the opposite effect. I was not alone among local authority leaders in thinking that I had been a good boy in a particular year only to find that the outcome of the formula showed that I had not been a good boy, and had had no apparent effect in the real world.

The SSA formula as it stands tends to penalise those authorities that had relatively low levels of expenditure in the early 1990s when it was introduced. It relates to a world that is different from the real world in respect of the costs of the indicators used. For example, the SSA formula assumes that the average band D council level is about £700, when that is increasingly drifting away from reality. A formula that allocates changes in grants according to indicators that do not relate closely to reality will inevitably produce distortions. Consequently, we are committed to making changes. I issue a challenge to local government, which I hope will discuss the changes positively. Do we want a simpler formula that is easier to understand, but which causes problems with equity, or do we want to increase equity? I suggest that we need a more simple, straightforward and understandable formula, based on reality. The Government are committed to finding such a formula.

**Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair):** Order. Time is up.

## Drugs Trade (Afghanistan)

1 pm

**Mr. Jim Murphy** (Eastwood): I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce a debate on the drugs trade in Afghanistan, a problem that has gained in international prominence as the world has focused on that region. The debate is being held at a crucial time, given that there is a new Government in that country who seem more determined than their predecessors to take such an issue seriously.

A new drug crop is now growing in Afghanistan and international attention is focusing more than ever on that country and the problems that it faces. At present, there is a debate in the press and elsewhere about the role of the British Government in foreign affairs. The drugs problem is an international issue as well as an important domestic one, and it is impossible to distinguish between the two. Those who suggest that we should pay less attention to such issues are wrong, and we should not ignore the problem in the international context or the domestic consequences of the trade.

It has been well recorded that 90 per cent. of all heroin used in the United Kingdom comes from Afghanistan. Tragically, in the past year, more than 1,000 people have lost their lives to drug overdoses. More than 100 people lost their lives because of drugs in my city of Glasgow, and more than 70 of them lost their lives to one drug—heroin. When 70 people in one city die from heroin overdoses and 90 per cent. of the heroin in that city comes from Afghanistan, no one can tell me or the families of those who died that this is not important.

There is a financial issue, but I want to advance it as being of secondary importance in the debate. The Home Office estimates that the cost of law and order in respect of the drug problem in this country is £1.2 billion per annum. The drug has caused enormous human and financial cost. It is an enormous pull on the criminal justice system, not to mention a drain on resources in our health service. That is why, in advance of today's debate, I produced a 10-point plan that will go some way towards alleviating the problems internationally.

I want to mention my support for Iran and other nations in their border security. I do not usually support Iran. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), and I have discussed Iran in other contexts and I have been a staunch opponent of much of its regime not only domestically, but internationally. However, it deserves our support on the drugs issue. I understand that 80 per cent. of all heroin seized in the world is captured by Iranian border control and security forces. We cannot expect it to carry out such action without our support, given that large amounts of the drug are bound for our communities. If we expect our communities to be protected from drugs, we must defend our front line, and that is often achieved by border controls.

We must find ways to help Afghan addicts. There is dispute about the extent of drug addiction in Afghanistan, but some estimates put it as high as one in 10 people, with specific problems among refugee populations. There is only one treatment centre in the country and the Afghan Government and population face an enormous domestic problem.

We must invest and research to find naturally growing fungi that attack the opium poppy in the fields, which would deal with the problem at source. If we are to clamp down on the supply from Afghanistan, we must ensure that it is not simply displaced and sourced to another region or nation, such as Burma or countries in that area.

I have several specific suggestions, and I would welcome the Minister's comments on those or on other matters that relate to the Government's attitude to the issue. The United Nations estimates that the Taliban had a stockpile of 300 tonnes of heroin. The almost 300,000 heroin users in the United Kingdom consume about 30 tonnes of heroin annually. Therefore, 10 years of heroin supply for the UK is sitting in the stockpiles built up by the Taliban and, no doubt, the Northern Alliance when it was in opposition.

What is the Government's attitude to that and what action is being taken? I found that difficult to ascertain as the international conflict developed and the entirely justifiable military action got under way. I demanded of the Ministry of Defence and the Secretary of State for Defence that the stockpiles of heroin be considered a legitimate target to be bombed and destroyed. I ask for guidance—if it is not available today then at a later date—on the status of the stockpile that the Taliban were keen to offload on the international market. Do we know where it is and its status? What action is being taken to deal with it?

What is the international community's attitude to those who previously prospered and profited from the heroin trade? I advocate that those who were involved centrally should not be allowed to hold Government office. People who continue to try to profit from the heroin should not be allowed to hold promoted posts in the new Afghan armed forces.

I am not ignorant of the role of heroin in Afghanistan's economy and the power politics of Afghanistan. However, we must end that nation's addiction to it and the reliance on it of Afghanistan's Government and warlord power brokers. Will the Minister tell us the international coalition's attitude to those whose hands are dirty with the profits of the heroin trade?

I shall now deal with tying aspects of aid to an agreed programme of reducing drug trafficking and drug production. I have heard people say that it would be heartless to impose such conditions on the Afghan population. If the scheme were handled properly, that would not be the case. We already, rightly, attach humanitarian conditions to humanitarian aid. I take a keen interest in southern Africa, and I grew up in South Africa. I support efforts to ensure that aid is tied to poverty eradication, the promotion of numeracy and literacy, the provision of primary education and clean water, health provision, and to investment in the masses rather than the elites. All those conditions are welcome. The third world and international development campaign groups who opposed them were well intentioned but wrong.

We should seek to provide enormous aid in some way. We are already committed to some aid, but more is needed, some of which should be tied to an agreed drug reduction programme, even to certain regions of Afghanistan. The less that drugs are sent to the United Kingdom, the more aid will be sent to Afghanistan. Some aid should be unconditional and we should give generous support for redevelopment, the creation of an economy, and the building of schools that are so necessary, especially for young girls. However, I seek a way in which aid can be even more generous if drugs and the drugs trade are removed from that nation. I believe that the intention behind that initiative would be widely welcomed.

I am keen to press, and will continue to campaign, for an amnesty for opium farmers in Afghanistan, and for the international community to destroy the processed crop in Afghanistan before it can leave the country. I do not propose the methods—military activity or weapons—that I advocated during the international bombing, but suggest an agreed way with the new Afghan Government so that farmers are compensated for handing over their crops and are free from prosecution that year only. Prosecution has not been as commonplace in Afghanistan as it should have been, but I hope that under the new Government, Government agencies will take a dim view of those who grow the poppy seeds.

I hope that we use this historic opportunity and act on the proposal. It would be a one-off initiative that would not be repeated. Farmers would be compensated and free from prosecution. They would have an amnesty, but those who continued to grow and profit from the drugs trade would, hopefully, be prosecuted in future years. Some might say that that is a waste of money and that the Government have more pressing concerns and greater demands on their expenditure. However, when we consider the enormous loss of life caused by the drugs trade and the huge demand on law and order and health resources, the amnesty is a small price to pay.

There is some debate about the exact cost, which depends on how much we believe is growing in Afghanistan and how much is still stockpiled. The estimates range up to a maximum of £150 million, but a more reliable figure of £40 million is advanced. Regardless of the cost, the international coalition, with Britain at its core, should be playing a leading role in trying to ensure that farmers are compensated for the destruction of their crops.

Of course, we believe that those crops should not have been grown, and in an ideal world, those people would be prosecuted here and now. However, we live not in that world, but in one where the Taliban and the Northern Alliance have turned a blind eye and in some ways encouraged the growth of those crops. We are dealing with a world in which we can only prevent the crop from being processed and imported into our communities and into the lives of so many of our citizens by compensating the farmers and destroying the crops through an agreed programme with the Afghan Government, or under the auspices of the United Nations. It should be done in a way that would remove that enormous export market in heroin from Afghanistan. According to the Home Office, a heroin user will steal, on average, up to £20,000 a year to feed their habit, and considering that there are nearly 300,000 heroin users in this country, that would be a small price to pay. It could deal with the problem in an international context as long as the supply chain was not simply displaced to other nations.

*[Mr. Jim Murphy]*

Before 11 September, Afghanistan was regarded as an exporter of two major products: training in terror—as is all too tragically apparent—and heroin. We have rightly and properly begun to deal with the threat of terror, and it is now time that we turned with equal determination to the problem of heroin. I look forward in the coming weeks and months—but hopefully not years—to campaigning for the Government to lead the way in an amnesty and compensation scheme that will destroy a crop that has, through drug overdoses, destroyed all too many of my constituents and those of the Minister.

1.15 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) for proposing this debate on combating the drugs trade in Afghanistan. This serious subject is of huge significance to the United Kingdom. Around 90 per cent. of the 20 to 30 tonnes of heroin used on our streets annually originates as opium poppy in Afghanistan. My hon. Friend succinctly and successfully outlined the devastating social and economic costs of that on the streets of our towns and cities, including those of his own constituency. He also recognised that combating the drugs trade in Afghanistan will be no easy task.

Many of the countries that produce drugs have several things in common: poverty, conflict, poor or no governance, and weak law enforcement. Afghanistan is a prime example, allowing drug production not simply to go unchallenged but to be actively encouraged. Those issues cannot be addressed overnight.

Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest countries. It has been host to conflict for over 20 years, governance has been weak or non-existent and the rule of law is virtually unknown. The majority of opium poppy farmers in Afghanistan are not wealthy. They grow opium poppy as part of their livelihood strategy. It is a durable crop—opium can be stored for several years—which is a desirable quality in a country where the infrastructure is so poor that perishable produce is extremely difficult and prohibitively expensive to get to market. Opium has a relatively high cash value. Most farm plots are so small that insufficient food can be grown on them to feed a farmer's family, so growing opium poppy is often the only means of survival.

Because opium is one of the few commodities in Afghanistan that has a guaranteed market, loans can be secured against a future crop. That is often the only source of credit available to the rural poor. Those factors, combined with the lack of alternative off-farm income opportunities and the existence of a large number of underemployed labourers who are available for the time-consuming task of harvesting opium, have entrenched opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan's economy.

Under the Taliban regime, opium production in Afghanistan doubled. That is no coincidence. That regime was deeply involved in the drugs trade, deriving a significant proportion of its income from it. In July 2000, Mullah Omar issued an edict banning opium poppy cultivation as un-Islamic. However, we believe that there were other motives for the ban: an attempt to consolidate the market and increase opium prices, and international pressure. In any event it was highly effective, but surplus production in previous years led to the creation of large stockpiles of opium. We have no figures that are absolutely reliable. Perhaps as my hon. Friend has said, the stockpiles are enough to last for several years.

Those stockpiles continued to be traded, trafficked and controlled by the Taliban regime, despite the ban on cultivation. As a result, the price of opium increased tenfold, allowing the Taliban to reap the benefit. During the recent opium poppy planting season—September to December—it is probable that widespread cultivation resumed. That is the result of high opium prices, encouragement by traffickers and a lack of alternative means of income for farmers. While the Taliban regime has gone, many of the trafficking networks remain intact and the circumstances that allow the drugs trade to flourish still prevail.

The drugs trade in Afghanistan is a complex issue, and there is no simple or immediate solution. However, the installation of the new interim Administration presents us with a unique opportunity to combat the problem once and for all. The first step has already been taken. At the Bonn conference it was agreed that the interim Administration would co-operate with the international community in the fight against drugs. The issue of tackling illicit drugs features prominently in the UN-led political process for Afghanistan and is mentioned specifically in the proposed organisational structure of the future UN assistance mission in Afghanistan.

It will be essential therefore for central and regional authorities, based on the rule of law and operating under agreed good governance practices, to be fully engaged in any efforts to eradicate the drugs problem in Afghanistan. It will also be essential to continue efforts to attack traffickers. If they can be removed from the equation, or have their activities significantly disrupted in the short term, there will be less of a market for the crop currently in the ground, and less incentive for farmers to invest in the labour to harvest it.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray): On behalf of the Scottish National party, I welcome the Minister to this important debate. May I suggest one partial solution? As he outlined, there is a strong demand not just for illegal, but for legal opium. One potential solution would be to secure legal pharmaceutical production from opium-producing sources in Afghanistan to unlink them from illegal heroin sales. Should that not also go hand in hand with efforts by the UK and other international coalition Governments to establish an effective, secure strategy of enforcement to ensure that there is movement away from the illegal trade to a legal, sustainable basis for the poor farming population in Afghanistan?

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I must slightly correct the hon. Gentleman. There is a legitimate demand for legal pharmaceutical opium production, but it is tiny in global terms. It is miniscule compared with the illegal trade. The legal production that takes place in other parts of the world, including India, already provides enough for legitimate medicinal needs. I am not sure that that suggestion is an answer to our problems.

In the medium and longer term, breaking the dependence of small farmers on poppy cultivation will be the key to successful drug control. Credit from traffickers secured against future poppy cultivation results in higher levels of poppy growing than would otherwise necessarily be attractive to farmers. So alternative sources of credit may be needed. It may also be necessary to tackle the accumulated poppy debt from previous years. Drug control should be integrated into long-term development programmes—diversifying rural livelihoods away from poppy cultivation.

On an official visit to Thailand just before Christmas I had the privilege to observe some of the very good work there. I flew over some of the northern area of Thailand on the border with Burma, which in the past has been a real problem for opium poppy cultivation. The cultivation there has been almost completely eradicated through an eradication programme, combined with a crop substitution programmes. I also visited a village that had previously been completely dependent on growing opium poppy and was now growing fruit and vegetables and sending them to Bangkok to be sold. Those involved were making five times more than they were making from the sale of opium poppy.

Successful crop substitution programmes are possible. As my hon. Friend knows, many parts of Afghanistan that currently grow opium poppy are highly fertile and were once successful exporters of fruit such as pomegranates. The best pomegranates in the world come from the Kandahar. There are alternatives to which we could move back.

My hon. Friend made a number of specific suggestions, and I thank him for his 10-point plan. I will certainly give his suggestions careful consideration. There are no plans to buy the current opium crop. There are some disagreements about the cost. Figures ranging from $50 million to $150 million have been mentioned, but regardless of the cost, there are disadvantages to that approach. It would deal only with this year's crop, and it could reinforce the perception that opium can be traded for financial assistance. It could prompt other Afghan farmers, who are not currently involved, to start cultivating the opium poppy. It also might encourage something that my hon. Friend said that he wanted to avoid—opium producers in other countries trying to increase production in the hope that their crop might be subject to a similar buy-out. However, we shall examine that proposal more carefully.

My hon. Friend also called for research into the development of an environmentally friendly biological agent, which would destroy the opium poppy. We support research that could provide such a breakthrough. He also rightly outlined the importance of the help that we are giving to the neighbouring states—Iran especially—in the central Asian republics. He may be interested to know that Iran is the biggest single recipient of UK money aid for tackling drug trafficking problems. Although he mentioned the devastating impact of opium production in Afghanistan in relation to drug addiction, he may also like to know that in the past 20 years, 3,500 Iranian border officials have been killed while carrying out their duties to try to stem the flow of heroin from Iran over the border. That has a devastating impact, and I am extremely pleased that he supports measures that Iran, supported by Britain and other countries, is taking, and has taken during recent years, to try to solve the problem. Since 1998, the UK has spent £3.9 million on Iran and we also give a great deal of help to Pakistan and the central Asian republics.

It is essential, not just for the region, which has suffered grievously from the failed state status of Afghanistan and consequent opium production, but because of the devastating social and economic impact, especially on constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend, that we help Afghanistan to break its dependence on the drugs trade and the influence exerted by traffickers. Together with the international community, we will provide every assistance to Afghanistan's new Administration to combat this evil trade and its underlying causes. Effective drug control cuts across many issues, encompassing poverty reduction, security and development. Progress must be maintained on all those fronts for a sustained period. With the help of the international community, Afghanistan and its people, and my hon. Friend's constituents, can look forward to a much brighter future.

## Trunk Roads (Norfolk)

1.29 pm

**Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): I shall focus on west Norfolk's roads, but I also want to touch on various road schemes that cover Norfolk as a whole.

King's Lynn, which is at the heart of my constituency, is an important sub-regional centre. King's Lynn and its hinterland has a population of about 30,000, and a thriving industrial base that comprises several large firms, such as Campbell's, Bespak, Foster's and DOW Chemicals. The region's industrial base has traditionally been founded on food processing, but it is now more diverse, and there are also many smaller businesses. King's Lynn also has the Queen Elizabeth hospital, a busy general hospital that employs hundreds of people. The town is the headquarters of the local borough council for King's Lynn and west Norfolk, and many national agencies have local offices there. It is, therefore, a busy, thriving, provincial market town.

However, the Achilles' heel of King's Lynn and west Norfolk has always been the area's poor road and transport network. Firms want to come to King's Lynn, and, when they arrive, they want to stay and expand. They like west Norfolk; they appreciate its hard-working people and its beautiful environment. However, their first concern is the poor trunk road and main road links. To be fair, we now have an electrified railway system that connects King's Lynn, through Cambridge, to London. We have an excellent dual stretch of road west of King's Lynn, on the A47, between King's Lynn and Wisbech, which was opened under the previous Conservative Government, in 1994.

Perhaps the key scheme in west Norfolk, however, is the Hardwick flyover, and I want to refer to it in detail. The Hardwick roundabout is the junction of the A47, the A10 and the A149, and it consistently experiences heavy congestion—all that is required to create long tailbacks is a vehicle breaking down, or an accident—and in the summer, when holiday traffic heads up to the Norfolk coast and towns such as Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft, the delays become longer. The Hardwick flyover has acquired symbolic status in our campaign for better communications for west Norfolk. This morning, on Radio Norfolk, Peter Bridgham, the director general of our local chamber of commerce, said that King's Lynn is becoming better known for the Hardwick scheme than for anything else.

I will give a brief history of the Hardwick scheme, because it is important to be aware of its full context. The South Lynn bypass was built towards the end of the 1970s, and the embankments and the flyovers at the Hardwick and Saddlebow roundabouts were also constructed at that time. Therefore, we have had a constant and tantalising reminder of a missed opportunity to complete the project. In 1978, the Hardwick flyover could have been built for a fraction of the current cost, and Christopher Brocklebank-Fowler, then the Member of Parliament for the area, pushed the Labour Government hard to build it. I took over from him, and lobbied successive Ministers. A breakthrough was achieved in 1989 with Paul Channon, now Lord Channon. The "Trunk Roads to Prosperity" White Paper included the Hardwick flyover as part of the A10 West Winch bypass scheme. However, after a few years, it became clear that the scheme was going to be complicated and that it would take a long time to be realised, so I lobbied hard to have the Hardwick flyover detached from it.

The Transport Secretary in 1992, Malcolm Rifkind, now Sir Malcolm, detached the flyover from the West Winch bypass scheme, and announced it as a scheme in its own right—as a simple dual carriageway flyover scheme, costing £7 million. Matters proceeded, and the scheme had passed through all of its various planning processes by spring 1996. In February 1997, the then Minister of State, John Watts, gave it a firm starting date of spring 1999, and a costing of about £11.5 million.

However, an election intervened in May 1997. The Labour party won, and the right hon. Member for Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) took an axe to the trunk roads programme. There was local outrage, and an effective campaign was organised by the local media—particularly the *Eastern Daily Press* and the *Lynn News*—to put pressure on the Government. That was backed by my immediate predecessor as Member of Parliament for the area, Dr. George Turner. Eventually the Hardwick flyover was reinstated into the programme. That was announced in 1999, and in 2000 the then Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Lord Whitty, said that work would start in November 2001. The date was then put back a few months to February 2002. There is a snag, however. Unfortunately, the new flyover scheme is a scaled-down version of the 1996 scheme. A single-carriageway flyover will connect the existing A47 dual carriageway on the west side to a new roundabout that will connect to the A47 on the east side. The existing Hardwick roundabout will be converted into two linked roundabouts.

In many ways, the scheme is a bit of a pig's ear. In fact, Dick Broughton, a local councillor in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) and a prominent member of the National Farmers Union—he represents it in a local roads and transport partnership called "Shaping the Future"—described it as unsightly and resembling a disgusting wart. On the other hand, we must not be churlish. We must temper our disappointment at the new, scaled-down scheme with relief at the fact that something, at least, is going to happen. The general feeling was that if we pushed too hard to persuade the Minister and the Highways Agency to revert to the dual carriageway scheme planned by the previous Conservative Administration, there might be yet further delays.

Of course, we were not expecting the bombshell that was dropped on 6 November, when the Highways Agency announced a further delay of seven months. Unfortunately, it gave a very weak excuse for the delay. In a letter to Norfolk county council's portfolio holder for transport, Adrian Gunson, it said:

"I can assure you that at our meeting with officers from the County Council on 12 October...it was still our intention to start work in February 2002. Subsequent to that meeting, Brown and Root were appointed as our new design consultants for the scheme. They carried out an initial review of the design work previously carried out on the scheme and identified a number of...areas which needed to be revisited or where improvements could be made."

The Minister will not be surprised to hear that there is grave concern locally that Ministers and the Highways Agency are ignoring west Norfolk and giving up on us.

Unsurprisingly, Norfolk county council is very angry indeed, not least because on 10 September it initiated work on a £1 million resurfacing scheme for the A10, through North Runcton and West Winch to the Hardwick roundabout. Last May, the A10 was de-trunked, and the county council decided to spend a substantial amount of money on resurfacing. To be fair, the work was carried out to a very high standard by Lafarge Aggregates, and I should also pay tribute to the county council's engineer, Chris Mitchell, and to Quentin Brogdale, the resident engineer.

However, to expedite the resurfacing contract the road was closed for eight weeks, and a great deal of inconvenience was thereby caused to local residents and businesses. The local garage in West Winch closed temporarily during that period. Two pubs, The Cock and The Sportsman, suffered a significant loss of passing trade, and the village post office also suffered. In Setchey, the local garage and numerous other businesses on the industrial estate lost passing trade. In Tottenhill, in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), the Andel hotel suffered financially, as did Brundall's garage. Indeed, all those businesses suffered financially as a result of the A10's closure. Perhaps the Minister could say whether there is any chance of their receiving compensation.

The point is that, if Norfolk county council had known of the new start date for the Hardwick flyover scheme, it would almost certainly have decided not to close the A10. This is an example of incompetence and non-joined-up government. I am pleased that the Minister is here to reply to this debate, because I am looking for a firm guarantee from him that there will be no further delays. People in west Norfolk and King's Lynn are fed up with being pushed to the bottom of the pile. We are fed up with a Government who treat King's Lynn and west Norfolk as East Anglia's poor relations who can quietly be forgotten about. I want firm commitments from the Minister.

There are other priorities in Norfolk and as we are discussing road schemes in the county as a whole, I shall outline six of them. The A47 west of King's Lynn has one important stretch of dual carriageway between King's Lynn and Wisbech, but the rest of the road is single carriageway, although it is a very busy link from King's Lynn and the whole of Norfolk to Peterborough and the midlands. It is a vital stretch of road with a crucial need for a dual carriageway bypass round Thorney and other stretches of dual carriageway. I hope that the Minister will comment on that.

The A17 between King's Lynn and Newark particularly affects my constituency and is the main link from King's Lynn and the rest of Norfolk to the A1 and the north. The only stretch of dual carriageway on the A17 between King's Lynn and Newark is the Sleaford bypass. The rest of the road is single carriageway and is very busy.

Dual carriageway trunk and main roads are so much safer than single carriageways and journey times can be planned with some reliability. They improve people's perception of Norfolk's towns because they imply that the Government and the Highways Agency treat the town, region or sub-region seriously. That is why dualling is so important.

**Mr. Keith Simpson** (Mid-Norfolk): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Bellingham:** In a moment, but first I want to refer briefly to two important schemes that are a priority for us.

The A47 going east of King's Lynn has only two stretches of dual carriageway between King's Lynn and Norwich: the Swaffham bypass is dualled along its whole length and part of the Dereham bypass is dualled. We need more dual carriageway between King's Lynn and Norwich. We also badly need an entire length of the A47 between King's Lynn and Yarmouth to be dualled. The Acle straight has suffered too long as a single carriageway and badly needs to be dualled. As my hon. Friend knows only too well, Yarmouth and Lowestoft are peripheral and suffer high unemployment; they are the least accessible and most vulnerable of East Anglia's sub-regions. That stretch of road must be dualled.

**Mr. Simpson:** I happily rise in support of my hon. Friend. The two issues are road safety and, as I am sure the Minister will understand, the stop-go travelling between Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn, which is detrimental to economic investment. Large parts of my constituency are desperate for the A47 to be dualled.

**Mr. Bellingham:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. He endorses the point that dual carriageway roads are safer. It is frustrating when travelling through his constituency from King's Lynn to Norwich because, although one hits dual carriageway around Swaffham, there is then a poor stretch of road until a short length of dual carriageway round Dereham. The road to Norwich is then all single carriageway.

Safety, reliability of journey times and perception are important. Norfolk has a number of world-class businesses and organisations such as the national construction college in my constituency—the construction industry training board is its governing body—the Norwich Union and so on. It is vital that those organisations are able to plan for the future with some certainty that our road communications will improve.

The A11 connects the M11 and the national motorway network through to Norwich. Quite a lot of the A11 is now dualled, thank goodness, which has made a huge difference when travelling to Norwich by car. I often go by train, but I sometimes drive and in the past it used to take at least three and a half hours from London to Norwich, allowing for various delays on the A11. One can now get to Norwich by car much more quickly because a great deal of the A11 has been dualled. However, there are still two stretches of the road that have not been dualled. There is a particularly bad stretch between Thetford and Roudham Heath, and it is vital that that is dualled as soon as possible. The A11 is the key artery linking Norwich to the motorway network. It is a long stretch of road, and even small parts that remain single carriageway will have a detrimental effect.

*[Mr. Bellingham]*

I turn to a matter of which my hon. Friend is fully apprised because it has been a big controversy locally. There is no link road between the A47 Norwich southern bypass and the new £229 million Norfolk and Norwich hospital at Colney. That is a serious problem. The hospital has on several occasions been described by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health as a flagship. It was built under the previous Government's private finance initiative scheme. It is an excellent hospital, and everyone agrees that it is an important facility for the whole of Norfolk. It is crazy that there is no link road between the southern bypass and the hospital. Direct access is essential not only for road safety, but so that ambulances can get to the hospital more quickly. As things stand, there is a hotchpotch of plans, which do not stack up very well, for improving roads to the hospital.

Norwich is represented by two influential Labour MPs—the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), who is chairman of the Labour party, and the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), who is a distinguished professor. It is a pity that they, working alongside other MPs, have not yet been able to persuade the Government and the Highways Agency to take the link seriously. That is a missed opportunity. What sort of signal does it send to the professionals who work in the hospital? Doctors, nurses and other professionals go there day in, day out. Members of the public who want to use the hospital come along the southern bypass and can see, 200 yd away, the new hospital complex, yet they have to go miles around, possibly facing substantial delays. Even if the Minister cannot give a specific commitment owing to planning or costing problems, a firm steer from him would be welcome in Norfolk.

I want to give the Minister plenty of time to reply. I am grateful for his attendance, and await his reply with great interest.

1.48 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson):** I congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) on securing this important debate.

The hon. Gentleman explained how important transport is to his area. Although we hear that about every part of the country, it is true that traditionally transport links have not been good in Norfolk. However, I must chide him a little for saying that the Government are giving up on Norfolk as if it is a poor relation. I assure him that that is not so, and to suggest otherwise is somewhat insulting to the excellent lobbying on local road and rail systems that has been done by some of his colleagues, as well as by my right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) and for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) and many others.

Despite having a wide brief that covers not only roads but other aspects of transport, I visited the area to see for myself. It is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman was unable to be there on that occasion. However, I had a long discussion with one of his hon. Friends about the value of the new bypasses that we were opening and some of the extra funding for Norfolk which will help with local solutions. If there is time, I shall return to that point.

I am particularly happy at the start of a new year to be given an opportunity to report on the progress that we are making in the planning, design and construction of Norfolk's trunk roads. Let me begin by setting out the background to what we are trying to achieve. In July 1998, the Government published "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England". This set out several key objectives including the establishment of a core network of nationally important routes, comprising some 60 per cent. of the trunk road network, and our priorities for tackling some of the most serious and pressing problems through carefully targeted programmes of improvements, which are known colloquially as TPI. The other 40 per cent. of the network was earmarked for de-trunking roads.

In splitting the trunk road network, our aim was to place responsibility for routes with the authority best placed to make decisions about their future. We have been consulting the local authorities about transferring to them the non-core routes so that the management and improvement of those roads could be fully integrated with local transport and land use strategies.

In Norfolk, responsibility for the A10 and A134 was transferred to the county council on 1 May 2001, and responsibility for the A140 was transferred on 1 June 2001. We are currently in the process of transferring responsibility for the A17. I am sure that that will be good news to the hon. Gentleman who now knows that decisions over those particular roads will be made locally. The other good news for him, although he did not have time in his speech to mention it, was the Government's allocation in local transport plans for those roads, and other roads and schemes. They probably include the scheme that he mentioned concerning access to the hospital, and I accept that his point about that is important.

The quantity of funding that has been given to Norfolk is substantial. I was trawling through the figures, and I would be hard pressed to find a local authority that received a greater increase in its funding for local transport plans than Norfolk. In the financial year 2000-01, Norfolk received £4 million for integrated transport. In the same year, it received £5.2 million for maintenance and bridges. In the current financial year those figures are £10 million and £19.25 million respectively. The funding for maintenance and bridges is almost four times higher. I realise that the hon. Gentleman's speech was limited by time, and that he did not have time to mention those huge rises, but we can knock on the head the idea that the Government have given up on Norfolk because it is receiving substantial sums of money to carry out essential work.

The county's transport responsibilities were recognised in this year's local transport capital settlement. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will examine it closely and perhaps discuss with councillors and others on the local authority how they can best make use of it for the important matters that he raised.

I am sure that the county will make the most of its opportunities. It carried out major maintenance work on the A10 south of the Hardwick roundabout last

autumn, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out. I understand that there was local concern about this because it required a long section of the A10 to be closed for some time. I sympathise with those affected by the disruption but I am advised that the road was too narrow to allow one-way traffic safely to pass while major maintenance works were being carried out.

Transferring responsibility for those roads does not mean that we are neglecting the county. Far from it, the TPI includes a number of schemes to improve access to Norfolk. We plan to improve the A11 trunk road, a major strategic route into Norfolk, by upgrading it fully to dual carriageway standard between the M11 at junction 9 and the Norwich bypass.

Construction began last May on a £42 million scheme to provide a dual carriageway and junction improvements between Roundham Heath and Attleborough and we expect that to be completed in Spring 2003. I was delighted recently to be in discussion with the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) in Attleborough town hall—she gave everyone a good reception with a fine plate of sandwiches. Had the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk been there, he would have seen the pleasure and delight on the faces of the people there at the amount that the Government are investing in that part of Norfolk. I heard praise from people of all political parties, and particularly from those of his party, for the extra funding that had been included in the Government's commitment. One councillor said that it was the first time since he had been in office that there had been a recognition by any Government of the finance and road improvements required.

Proposals for the A11 Fiveways to Thetford improvement and the A11 Attleborough bypass improvement were added to the TPI in March 2000, following appraisal and support given by the regional planning conference. Together, they will provide a dual carriageway for the A11 between the Fiveways roundabout at Barton Mills in Suffolk and the Thetford bypass and the existing single carriageway Attleborough bypass. The Fiveways to Thetford improvements are mainly on line except at the village of Elveden where a bypass will be provided to the north of the village. The sensitive nature of the Breckland sites near the existing road are fully recognised and will be taken into account in the development of the scheme. Those schemes were given overwhelming support at public consultations held in February and March 2001, and I recently announced the preferred routes in Attleborough town hall. Subject to the completion of the statutory procedures, work can start in 2005 with completion in 2007.

Following consideration by the regional planning conference, a scheme to bypass Thorney was added to the TPI in March 2000. Thorney, on the A47 to the east of Peterborough, suffers from a large volume of through traffic including a high proportion of heavy lorries. A bypass will bring safety and environmental benefits to the local community and remove a bottleneck. Strong local support exists for its early construction. As the hon. Gentleman will recall, I announced a preferred route for a 5 km northern bypass for Thorney last November. I assure him that that is also a dual carriageway and, had he been at that town hall meeting, he would have heard the warm applause in response to my remarks. Detailed proposals are being developed and we hope to start the necessary statutory process later this year. I have asked the Highways Agency to speed up delivery of this locally popular scheme without compromising the statutory process, so that work can start in 2004 and be completed in 2006. The construction of the scheme will enhance the trunk network and accessibility into Norfolk.

Improving the road network is not just about building bypasses. We want to make the best use of what already exists. An example of that, as already mentioned, is the Hardwick roundabout at the eastern end of the A47 King's Lynn southern bypass. That roundabout has an important confluence of local traffic and that from the tourist trade. The scheme to improve the roundabout is important to local people and we aim to seek tenders for construction of the scheme this March. That is a few months later than originally planned, and I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for the delay, but it was necessary to allow time for additional design work in many areas. I share his disappointment about that, and hope that people will recognise the importance of ensuring that the scheme is designed and constructed to the highest safety standards.

Sadly, I have had only 11 minutes to respond so I have not been able to cover all the hon. Gentleman's points. If he cares to drop me a short note I will happily respond in writing. He has raised important points, but I hope that he accepts that the Government have in no way neglected the needs of Norfolk; they have been recognised more strongly than ever before.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.*

# Westminster Hall

*Thursday 10 January 2002*

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

## Wave and Tidal Energy

*[Relevant documents: Seventh Report from the Science and Technology Committee Session 2000-01, HC 291, and the Government's response thereto, HC 377.]*

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

2.30 pm

**Dr. Ian Gibson** (Norwich, North): It is a pleasure to open this afternoon's debate on behalf of what is acknowledged to be one of the brainiest, political and successful Select Committees in the Palace of Westminster—humble as I am. During the last Parliament, the Committee produced 24 reports on subjects such as cancer services, genetically modified organisms, mobile telephones, British Biotech and scientific advice to the Government. It was difficult for us to manoeuvre through those thorny subjects, but the Committee's sterling work has been acknowledged by the professions, the media and the public, who are all grateful that the parliamentary system is seen to be examining problems of great interest to them.

During this Parliament, the Committee will be inquiring into matters such as the research assessment exercise in higher education, and science education in schools. I am sure that that will be the start of another successful four-year journey, which will add substance to Government debates and policies during that time.

I pay tribute to some Committee members who are no longer with us. Our sterling Chairman, Dr. Michael Clark, is no longer Member for Rayleigh; we often said that he kept us all in order—we could be quite obstreperous at times—and I am sure that he is watching us today from Essex and enjoying his Committee's performance. I pay tribute also to my hon. Friends the Members for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones). They are no longer members of the Committee, but they did some great work in preparing our report and played a key role in setting up the inquiry.

I pay tribute to a member of the Committee who is here today, my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner), although it grieves me somewhat, because it was my hon. Friend who provoked us into making this inquiry. You will find out why I say that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when his enthusiasm for and knowledge of the subject are displayed this afternoon.

I thank the many officers of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Departments for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the witnesses, those who wrote to us, and the staff and expert advisers who helped us. Our expert advisers were Professor Ian Bryden, Professor John Chesshire and Dr. John Hassard. All have contributed to an erudite report.

Finally, I must thank the Minister for Europe, my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain), who was Minister for Energy and Competitiveness when we conducted our inquiry; he was very supportive of our efforts and appeared before the Committee.

We received 63 written memorandums and held three evidence sessions with six groups of witnesses. We have with us today the Minister for Industry and Energy, my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). We look forward to hearing his comments.

Let us get down to it: what is the background for today's debate on our report on wave and tidal energy and the Government's response? In a way, the report takes us back to the 1970s and 1980s, when discussions on energy provision centred almost entirely on nuclear power. The supporters of nuclear power were often eminent scientists, who were fascinated by the technology and its cleanliness, and its buildings with wonderful domes and other features. Its potential for cheap energy production was sold by royalty and others. Indeed, it was claimed at one point that electricity would cost nothing; I remember being told that, as a schoolboy, when Calder Hall opened.

There was an element of that enthusiasm in the notion of forging a new Britain in the "white heat of technology" in the 1960s. The focus on nuclear power in the energy policies of those times had much to do with the commitment of some political parties to rid us of the mining communities and the coal industry. However, quiet voices were arguing even then for green or renewable energy. They criticised the failure to invest in research into alternatives to nuclear power, and highlighted the astronomical sums of money that were needed for nuclear energy and for dealing with the problem—still unsolved—of storing and disposing of nuclear waste. There was talk—it always turned up at the end of speeches—of solar, wind and wave power but they were rarely treated seriously in those days.

Our inquiry into wave and tidal power set out to examine its viability—technological and commercial—and to look at the current level of activity and the part it might play in the Government's renewable energy strategy, and to consider the research and development programme and any environmental consequences. Finally, we investigated how we compare with other nations in this sphere.

We received some clear, positive answers. They included the response from the then Minister for Energy and Competitiveness. There was much solidarity and agreement about the issues. Our report reviews the scientific and technological work in the field, explains how the energy is created and highlights the fact that the oceans and seas—throughout the world and surrounding the UK—are a vast potential source of energy. In paragraph 23 of our summary, hon. Members will read the positive message that was confirmed by the Committee and our academic and industrial advisers, and with which the Government were in substantial agreement.

Recent headlines suggest that we are literally catching the wave, and the Minister has confirmed that renewable energy targets are to double. Not only is the proportion of our electricity generated by renewable sources to reach 10 per cent. by 2010, but there is a loose commitment for it to reach 20 per cent. by 2020. The EU has moved along similar lines with its recent directive

*[Dr. Ian Gibson]*

insisting that sources of electricity should be clearly identifiable. There is talk of further wind turbines and wind farms, and progress in that regard is certainly visible in areas of our coastline—no doubt we shall hear from hon. Members about what is happening in their part of the country.

For example, in East Anglia, both on and offshore wind farms are being developed. I find the wind turbines rather attractive. I should like to nail my colours to the wind mast; I have a lot of time for those wonderful structures. Although I see them when I go up to north Norfolk, I do not hear much about them—however, they are wonderful. I would rather have one of them at the bottom of my garden than a telecommunications mast.

There are three new wind turbines in Norfolk to provide electricity for 3,500 Norfolk homes—representing an investment of £4 million. That electricity production prevents the emission of 9,500 tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. It is a large contribution to the fight against climate change and global warming.

With the latest technology, there is enough easily accessible offshore wind energy to meet all Europe's electricity needs. Apparently, the US has enough accessible wind energy to satisfy its electricity needs in just three states—North Dakota, Kansas and Texas.

Our inquiry concluded that a revolution is required in planning procedures to facilitate a fundamental change in our energy policy. That is true not only for wave and underwater tidal energy, but also for wind and other renewable energy. It is clear that "one-stop shops" for renewable electricity generation should be a consideration, given the many common problems.

A central problem seems to be the connection to the grid. We cannot really talk about the national grid any longer—any more than we can talk about British Rail. The grid has been privatised. Many different energy suppliers use it in a diversified and fractured market. That creates huge problems when it comes to feeding renewables into the system, and that is addressed in the report. Many renewable energy sites are in remote places; they tend to be fairly small and a long way from the nearest connections, so massive investment is needed to turn the energy market around.

The pivotal question is how such huge restructuring can be facilitated. There is obviously the question of who is going to pay for it but, perhaps even more important, a question about the role that the Government will play—beyond mere finance—in making such a concerted effort possible.

The Government response dodges to a certain extent the question as to their role in solving the problems of fair access to the grid. It is naive to assume that the private sector will do everything. Even if the private sector is made to pay for the necessary investment, a centralised, publicly backed-up co-ordination of private investments will probably be needed. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments.

The parallel with the railway system is a real one. That system started off with dispersed, fragmented investment by private companies, but centralised control was needed to turn it into a functioning, efficient, national network. The system was nationalised. It is not likely that that will happen to the grid now, but it is obvious that localised, competitive companies will not make huge long-term investments, reflecting a change in energy policy, if they are to receive only indirect benefit.

The Government response to the Select Committee report does not really address that important question and I look forward to a reply to it. It is not enough to assume that the market will sort everything out. The Government may not have to put in all the money, but they will probably have to facilitate the concerted extension of the grid.

The problem is not unique to wave and tidal energy; it also affects wind energy. Wind energy looks likely to be the main supplier of renewable energy to meet the new, higher Government target, because it is already at the application stage rather than that of research and development. Our report recommends an increased influx of money, especially for the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, to create critical mass for wind and tidal energy research and development in the UK.

The grid problem will hamper the further development of wind energy, too. The Government response does not discuss wind energy and the parallel problems, even though the technical and political problems are similar and would be best tackled jointly. I hope that the Minister will pay attention to some of those issues in today's debate.

We all agree, I think, that a change in energy policy is needed, despite or because of George W. Bush's disastrous rejection of the Kyoto agreement. Renewables must play an important role in tackling the causes of global climate change. Many forms of renewable energy are available, but wave and tidal energy seem to have moved up the agenda considerably. The Committee looks forward to the Government energy review, which is due shortly, and would like to know when it will be ready, and what follow-up there will be. Will there be a White Paper? A debate is raging behind the scenes, but it must move to the front. We look forward to real debate on energy provision in this country. I am sure that the House will play a big part in that debate.

Other hon. Members will argue more fully some of the points that I have made, and will probably make others. Some might say that we need an energy tsar—a champion to drive renewables. I am in favour of tsars tsars to the right of them, tsars to the left of them, and a tsarina if we can get one—but we certainly need a champion to drive the process forward. Big issues are at stake.

I am glad that our report fits with the Government's decision to embark on a wave energy programme to develop the technologies further. We can build on engineering skills and experience developed during 50 years of offshore gas and oil exploitation. The Department of Trade and Industry has chipped in with £1.7 million. The Government reply states that, since we reported, they have granted funding—or are in the process of granting it—to three wave energy projects and two tidal current schemes. I compliment them on that. The funding is worth more than £3.2 million.

We warmly welcome the wonderful new project on Islay. The Committee was disappointed not to have the chance to visit it. The hotel was booked, the malt whiskies were lined up for our arrival, but I am afraid that a general election got in the way, so we did not go. I apologise if I mispronounced "Islay". We are also grateful for the establishment of the national offshore wave and tidal test centre, and we look forward to hearing how all the units are developing.

A good start has been made and the Committee is pleased to have played a part in that, but we think that more needs to be done to develop the potential of the wave and tidal energy industry. I hope that the Minister will provide more detail about how the Government have begun to move matters forward, and about their plans.

The questions I have raised are urgent because Britain is uniquely placed to get ahead in this promising new technology and to succeed in a competitive international energy market. There is a huge potential export and domestic market, which could do much for this country's industry. The questions are also urgent because we cannot waste any time in our response to global climate change. Let us seize the time. I promise not to ask a question on this subject at Prime Minister's Question Time.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** Order. We are attempting to sort out the problem of the noise, which is coming from somewhere beneath us. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on getting through his speech unfazed by that disturbance, which I hope can be terminated as soon as possible. In the meantime, however, I apologise to hon. Members.

2.44 pm

**Mr. Robert Key** (Salisbury): I warmly welcome the Committee's excellent report, which was presented to the House on 30 April 2001. We have had to wait a long time for this debate, but I am sure that hon. Members' contributions will show how worth while that wait has been.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), the Committee Chairman. I hope that he is as successful in his bid for more wind farms in his constituency as he was yesterday in his bid for more hospital cash.

I welcome the presence of the Minister for Industry and Energy, which at least guarantees that the debate will be fully reported in the *West Highland Free Press*, in which I first came across him many years ago. That is not a flippant comment. Certain things did not happen in the west highlands and the islands 20 or 30 years ago, but had they done so the development and transmission of electricity might have been very different.

I should state unequivocally at the start that the Conservative party is strongly in favour of devoting much more effort to developing renewable, carbon-free energy sources. It is a happy coincidence that the headline of today's leader in the London *Evening Standard* reads "Conservatives rejoin planet earth". Indeed, we have.

**The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson):** I welcome the hon. Gentleman back.

**Mr. Key:** I am grateful to the Minister. In a few years' time, we shall have exchanged roles, and the issue before us will be my happy responsibility.

The Chairman of the Select Committee rightly introduced the issue by giving us a little history lesson. He mentioned Calder Hall, which opened in 1957. I was 12 years old then, and I remember it well. I still have a piece of paper on which I wrote that Her Majesty the Queen was opening Calder Hall at that moment—it was something that caught the imagination of young people. At the time, I was also paddling round the burns of west Scotland building dams. My ambition was to be a civil engineer and to build hydro-electric schemes in Scotland and, indeed, elsewhere. However, that did not happen, which is why I am here.

Using waves as a method of electricity generation received a lot of research funding in the 1970s, just after the first oil crisis. A feasibility study on four proposals for wave-power generating devices reported in 1978. The Severn barrage committee was set up to explore the possibility of extracting power from the tides in the Severn estuary. Those schemes were shelved because of unfavourable economic conditions at the time.

**Mr. David Drew** (Stroud): As a Severnside Member, I should mention that they were shelved because of great opposition to some of the environmental implications and to the development costs. It was implied that it would come at the cost of an awful lot of housing development.

**Mr. Key:** Absolutely. I remember it well, and I shall return to that. However, much of that housing development has taken place irrespective of the presence of the barrage.

Some of the most consistently energetic waves in the world are found on the British and Irish coastlines. That is important because consistency is one of the problems that we face. It therefore makes good sense to exploit that resource, and I warmly welcome recommendation 1 of the report. I assure hon. Members that I shall not go through all the recommendations.

Wave energy converters extract wave energy and convert it into a useful form, usually through mechanical motion or fluid pressure. There is a lot of mystery about that and, unless they do a lot of homework, many enthusiastic amateurs, including me, find the process a complete mystery. There is much hand-wringing among professional engineers about such misunderstandings on the part of the public.

It is significant that only a handful of tidal power schemes operate anywhere in the world. The biggest is in the Rance estuary between Dinard and St. Malo in France, where I was only last week. Its barrage of 240 MW of turbines was completed as long ago as 1966, as a pilot scheme for a prospective larger barrage across the bay of Mont St. Michel. That was shelved, but the Rance scheme has operated reliably for more than

*[Mr. Key]*

20 years. The French have decided not to pursue the larger scheme because they have invested heavily in carbon-free generation by nuclear power instead.

I remember the Bay of Fundy project in 1984 well. It is only 20 MW, which is small by any standards. Nevertheless, it was an important project, and I recall its glamour at the time. The concentration in Norway is on small applications on remote islands. The contrast between the large barrage schemes and the small, Norwegian-style plants immediately illustrates the huge diversity of such schemes. Toftestallen was an important wave-power plant until it was swept away by the sea, which illustrates another problem with the technology.

In Australia, Energetech has worked on schemes and already achieved a power purchase agreement with local utilities. In the United States, floating wave-energy devices have been tested on a large scale in the eastern Atlantic. Closer to home in Scotland, the oscillating water column in Islay has caught people's imagination. The project was carried out by a team from Queen's university, Belfast, in 1991 and many lessons were learned from it. The technology in Scotland could generate considerable amounts of energy—about 14 GW from waves and 7.5 GW from tidal streams. By and large, the amount of energy that we could produce from such sources is put at a modest 20 per cent. of consumption, according to Les Duckers in his readable chapter of the Open university's book, "Renewable Energy—Power for a Sustainable Future", which was published in 1998.

Greenpeace is much more ambitious, as one can see on its website, which states:

"The energy that could be utilised from the wave resource around the Scottish coastline has been estimated to exceed the total electricity demand for the UK three times over".

Policy makers must face the problem of the hugely varying views of what could be achieved. The Minister must be wise to such hugely divergent views already, and must find them difficult. Greenpeace's optimism is important. Its evidence to the Select Committee was interesting, and I am sure that Lord Melchett is briefing the clients of Burson-Marsteller on the subject as we speak.

In the UK, three projects have already been awarded contracts under the third Scottish renewables order. I hope that we shall hear from Scottish Members about that, as it is significant. It was the first renewables order open to wave power. However, one relevant problem is that the prices paid for the electricity from those projects are commercially confidential. I can understand why that is so, but it is tricky to evaluate projects without the numbers. That should not put the Government off, however, as they are comparable with predicted electricity costs from the first offshore wind farms.

The first of those projects—the Limpet device—is now operating. It is a 500 kW oscillating wave column deployed by Wavegen on Islay, as we have heard. We must also consider the Pelamis scheme, a 750 kW floating device that Ocean Power Delivery of Edinburgh is developing. It plans to deploy the device this year, and is working on research and development. The third Scottish renewables obligation contract is for a Swedish wave-power design. All those are hugely important, as we are at the start of a new era.

Late last year, I asked the Minister or the Secretary of State to identify the sites of tidal stream generation. I was delighted to receive an answer after 30 October that gave about 44 sites around the coast. The fact that the potential generation sites are a long way from where there is the greatest consumption comes as no surprise to any of us. Some identified sites can only be described as difficult and dangerous; they include the Mull of Kintyre, Corryvreckan, Loch Linnhe-Corran and, in Cornwall, Cape Cornwall, Land's End and the Lizard. Portland Bill is another case in point. Perhaps the most dangerous of all are the Casquets and the Channel Islands. However, it is a significant step that we at least know where we might start looking for that tidal power.

I turn to some problems that we shall face in pursuing that energy source. First, although the lack of emissions is a great benefit, sustainability is undoubtedly a real problem for the electricity market. I was not aware of the situation until I saw some of the new operators, such as TXU in London, carrying on their business. Some of us have an old-fashioned idea about electricity markets, even post-privatisation. The way in which such companies operate with a very fine time threshold is remarkable, but it causes them huge problems, as the wind does not blow consistently and the waves do not wave consistently. Nevertheless, we should welcome the amount of thought that goes into the use of very small time frames. As we see from the sharpest of the energy supply and generation companies, such projects are commercially viable.

There are huge advantages to wave and tidal power, including security of supply, reduction of gas emissions and of regional and local pollution, sustainable development, industrial competitiveness and so on. Therefore, we should welcome wave, wind and water energy. There are few technological barriers to development that could not be solved by transferring expertise, as the Committee suggests in recommendation 4. However, a great deal more research must be done.

I am grateful to Richard Wilson, who, in briefing me on the subject, said that the greatest challenge facing the new and exciting technology of renewables was that of human resources. If renewable energy production is to grow, so must the renewable industry labour force. In this country, we have a small skills base relating to renewable energy, and do not have the human capital resources to fuel the expansion. We must have that if renewable energy is to become a reality. In the short term, renewable energy employers will be obliged to search abroad and in parallel markets for the necessary skill sets.

**Mr. Drew:** It is sad that the greatest technological expertise in this country is in the nuclear industry, whether we love it or hate it. There are few things that one can tell nuclear engineers about how to generate electricity, but the interchange between nuclear and renewables is almost nil. Would the hon. Gentleman commend binding those industries together to get renewables under way so that they can generate electricity properly?

**Mr. Key:** The hon. Gentleman is right. The skills base in the nuclear industry is large and, as the Committee identified, many of those skills are transferable.

However, we still have a substantial shortage. Businesses must be more adept at importing human capital to handle that, just as they would import any other necessary inputs. We need a huge policy change to develop a broader skills base for the renewable energy industry.

A while ago, I asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about that matter in a parliamentary question, which was transferred to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. I asked what plans the Government had to promote increased access to training and development in disciplines related to renewable energy. I wish that the DTI had answered the question, because its answer would have been relevant. However, I was told by the Minister for Lifelong Learning:

"Higher education institutions are autonomous organisations which design and determine their own courses, in response to market forces. A substantial number of higher education institutions are offering a range of courses in renewable energy-related disciplines in the current academic year. The Government are keen to promote an interest in science and technology generally. Science Year...will raise the profile of science and increase pupil engagement with science".—[*Official Report*, 22 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 35W.]

That is all very worthy, but it did not answer the question. It stimulated me to ask many questions about science teachers, or rather the lack of science teachers in our schools, which is crucially relevant. It also, however, leads me to suggest that the Government should not simply rely on market forces. Indeed, nor should education institutions, and I hope that the Government will not just take the line that it is up to education institutions to respond to market forces. I hope that in light of this report, the higher education sector will seek to stimulate courses and research in alternative energy. That will be a challenge.

Another technical aspect that must be addressed, which was dealt with very thoroughly in recommendation 3, concerns the transmission of electricity and the national grid system. About 9 per cent. of power is lost in transmission from the source to the consumer. The problem is being dealt with by the national grid, and the Chairman of the Committee referred to it. I have often wondered—I do not know the answer to this—whether the UK's highly efficient energy markets, which are way ahead of any other European energy market, are riding on the back of the old national grid. I hope that the monopoly that now controls that, the National Grid Company, is fully renewing the grid and extending it. That will be hugely important, as I shall show in a moment.

The problem of transmission is very important. People get confused about the different levels of transmission of energy. First, there are very local embedded supplies of energy, perhaps the most local being a shipping buoy generating its own electricity. Solar energy now drives lights for traffic signs on roads. Certain farms have been generating their own electricity for some time, particularly on the Falkland Islands, where I have seen such arrangements. The transmission costs of energy in such cases are negligible.

Also, much energy is generated at home level. I recall, 40 years ago, in a Perthshire village called Comrie, seeing a house that had had a hydro-electric scheme since the end of the 19th century. Not so far from home, in the Woodford valley outside Salisbury, Heal house had its own hydro plant; but that is very unusual. There are many local networks for villages, towns and valleys, for which the electricity transmission costs are very low.

The problems start when one moves beyond that and considers the national grid. Transmission issues start to clash with environmental problems, notably those of landscape or aesthetic problems. The latest figures given to me by the National Grid Company show that the cost of an overground line is roughly £500,000 a kilometre, whereas an underground line costs £10 million a kilometre. North Yorkshire has shown us how controversial such power lines can be, although I think that they would be less so if the gull wing design of pylon, which I happen to favour, was chosen—but that is a matter of personal aesthetics.

The cost of transmission methods is very important. Internationally, there is another kind of system—I am thinking particularly of the Norway interconnector. In spring 2000, the European Commission funded a feasibility study on that interconnector, which is designed to be 730 km long, carrying 1,320 MW. Implementing such an interconnector would be very expensive, and I shall come to the west coast interconnector in a while.

**Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is aware of it, but after our report was produced, National Grid wrote to the Committee—the letter appears in an appendix to the Government's response—making it clear that the devices that we are discussing would be unlikely to connect to the national grid but would connect to the local supply networks instead.

**Mr. Key:** Yes, the hon. Gentleman is right. In appendix 2 of the Government's response, National Grid said:

"We are concerned that the text of the report causes unwarranted confusion between the national Grid's high voltage network for England and Wales and the other electricity networks to which wave and tide projects are far more likely to connect."

Scotland, which is already a net exporter of energy, is to be a litmus test. It exports to the rest of the UK 25 per cent. of the electricity that it generates. The Scottish Executive renewable energy networks study said:

"It is anticipated that the addition of renewable generation located in Scotland could increase the power transfers from Scotland to England and may necessitate an upgrade of the existing Anglo-Scottish interconnector."

We must ensure that much more research is done on that, because it will be very important. I cannot understand why the Scottish National party is opposed to exporting surplus energy from Scotland. It seems to me to be a good thing to export.

**Mr. Michael Weir** (Angus): The Scottish National party is not opposed to the export of energy; it is opposed to the generation of energy by nuclear reactors.

**Mr. Key:** That obfuscates the problem and does not answer the question, but we shall return to that.

**Mr. Wilson:** May I de-obfuscate? Scotland gets more than 50 per cent. of its electricity from nuclear power, so if that 50 per cent. is taken away, there will not be much left to export.

**Mr. Key:** There lies the challenge to the Minister in his energy review. What will he do about its replacement?

**Mr. David Chidgey (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying from the point. I should be grateful if he would keep to the subject of the debate.

**Mr. Key:** May I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Chidgey? Now I shall have to mind my Ps and Qs, because this is a subject that you know something about.

The problem of planning is a huge issue. We know that there are objections to wind farms, not only to onshore wind farms—perhaps not in Norfolk from what we have heard, but certainly in Cornwall and elsewhere—but to offshore wind farms. Generally, that is on not aesthetic but practical grounds. The Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force object to some wind farms for various obvious reasons. It would not be good to have a wind farm offshore at Warton in Lancashire, near the main runway, as is proposed.

For a long time, there have also been planning objections to barrages. Those are addressed by the Government in a document published only a few weeks ago by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on major infrastructure projects. In conjunction with the Select Committee report, it is interesting to read in that document how the Government propose to tackle the issue. It is also interesting to see how new parliamentary procedures for processing major infrastructure projects will work, sidestepping the current system. Various criteria are laid down, under which projects will qualify, but as I understand it, the Secretary of State will first decide whether a project fits the criteria for parliamentary approval and then a national policy statement will be developed, following public consultation. The third step will be for the public to make their views known before Parliament debates the issues—a sort of pre-legislative scrutiny, which I hope will also be available online. The fourth step would be the parliamentary process itself. The fifth step would be a public inquiry on the detailed aspects of the scheme, on which people would express their views in the normal way. The final step would be the Secretary of State's decision.

One might ask what are the criteria and why they would affect renewable energy. Annexe C of the Government paper states that

"'major infrastructure project' means the carrying out of development to provide any of the following".

The criteria in section 2 are: (a) thermal power stations; (b) nuclear power stations;

"(c) Construction of overhead electric power lines with a voltage of 220 kV or more and a length of more than 15km"—

that is not a very big line; and

"(d) Installations for the production of energy from renewable sources of more than 150MW electricity".

Again, that is not very big.

**Mr. Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove): The hon. Gentleman is dealing with the subject in an erudite way. Will he concede that, in relation to wave and tidal power, virtually all those projects will be beyond the jurisdiction of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and that the real problem is with the Crown Estate, which is the barrier to rapid development of the sea floor and investment in renewables?

**Mr. Key:** I certainly concur about the Crown Estate; I was going to come to that. However, I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman is right; if he will let me finish my point about the document he will see why. Section 5 deals with dams and other installations; section 10 deals with the extraction of petroleum and natural gas; section 11(a) deals with pipelines for the transport of gas, oil or chemicals; section 11(b) with terminals or extensions to existing terminals, compressor stations or gas storage facilities designed to improve gas transmission and distribution; and section 14—this is where Parliament must be extremely careful—with major development by or on behalf of the Crown judged to be of national significance. In other words, it deals with anything that the Secretary of State thinks is a good idea. We might find some clashes when it comes to transmission. Although the planning for a modest tidal flow system off Portland Bill may not intrude significantly, one must still get the electricity ashore in a major tourist area—one of high landscape quality. That challenge will be repeated around our shores. We shall have to watch carefully.

I have yet to make up my mind, as does the Conservative party, on the merits of the proposed new planning system and, in particular, the new parliamentary procedures. We shall listen with great interest to the discussion nationally as well as in Parliament. It could be significant for alternative energy sources, even wave and tidal power, when it comes to the transmission of electricity.

The DTI is looking at the viability of placing an undersea interconnector down the west coast. I was excited when I heard that the Minister was doing that. It could be the key to unlocking a great deal of potential down the west coast. I look forward to the report being published; I understand that it is with the Minister. I hope that it will be published in the near future so that we can all see what it says. If the undersea interconnector is financially impractical, that could have a severe negative impact on the development of renewable energy.

The ATLAS project is a major initiative aimed at establishing an information base on behalf of Directorate-General XVII of the European Commission. It has published papers on wave energy devices and discussed the environmental impact. That is referred to in recommendation 14 of the Select Committee's report, which states:

"The adverse environmental impact of wave and tidal energy devices is minimal and far less than that of nearly any other source of energy, but further research is required to establish the effect of real installations".

Here I join the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), who mentioned the Crown Estate Commissioners. They are largely involved with wind farms and the regulations are complex. They also have responsibility for what happens to the floor of the sea, particularly in estuary areas. One problem is that hydrodynamic devices can impact on the flow patterns of sediment, which could result in the need for very sensitive site selection.

Such devices have other environmental impacts. Of course, there are navigational hazards, but we should not underestimate the impact on inshore fishing in, for example, the Bristol channel, and certainly the Irish sea. I have received many representations from Fleetwood inshore fishermen, who are concerned about wind farms off Barrow-in-Furness. Wave energy devices, in

particular, could also have an impact, but so could tidal flow devices such as those off Lynmouth, in Devon. Moreover, we should consider the visual impact.

Broadly speaking, however, this is a most exciting development, and I have no doubt that there will be a big increase in such activity. I share the Minister's view that Britain has been technically advanced in this area for many years, but in the past 20 years we appear to have lost a lot of that advantage to foreign competitors, notably the Danes. I very much hope that we can regain it. It is true that wind energy technology has been developed on the Isle of Wight, for example, and there have been projects for manufacturing plants on the Mull of Kintyre, but I hope that we will seize the opportunity to develop wave and tidal power equipment. As well as providing an environmental benefit through carbon-free energy generation, such developments are important because they will generate new jobs in traditional technologies, as well as the higher technology to which the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) referred. Such technologies can also be transferred from nuclear energy, which constitutes a great source of supply and strength in engineering.

I agree with the Select Committee that the export market has enormous potential. I should remind the Chamber that the Institution of Mechanical Engineers has been at the forefront of educating the public about such matters. In general terms, anything on this planet that moves needs a mechanical engineer at some point. I salute the enthusiasm and vision of the institution, which has enthused successive generations of children, including me, about the ways in which the application of science can benefit mankind. Today's developments are just another chapter in that story, from Brunel onwards.

I shall end with a corny quote, as I could think of nothing better in considering the way forward. As Shakespeare put it so much better than the rest of us:

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,

Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune".

3.18 pm

**Dr. Desmond Turner** (Brighton, Kemptown): This debate is particularly timely, anticipating as it does the publication of the report of the performance and innovation unit on the future of UK energy supplies. Now is the time to look at the prospective place of wave energy and tidal energy on the spectrum of energy supply.

In answer to a point made by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), I want to make it clear that the report under discussion specifically excludes tidal barrages, which introduce a completely different set of problems. It is a huge irony that one of the most important criteria considered by the PIU is the security of energy supply, because it is difficult to think of a more secure energy source than wave or tide. It is true that wave is somewhat variable, according to weather conditions, but an Atlantic swell sufficient to generate some power is always running, and tidal streams are wholly predictable, varying in speed only with the lunar cycle. The tides will be with us for as long as the solar system exists.

Both sources are completely immune from outside interference or market variation, and they have no price tag. Both sources are absolutely clean and free of emissions. It is unlikely that any other prospective energy source will emerge that is as truly renewable and sustainable as wave or tide power.

That is why, 18 months ago, we thought it important to assess the current state of development and exploitation of those resources and to undertake the report. The total size of the resource is enormous. As the hon. Member for Salisbury noted, there is a wide range of predictions. However, whichever estimate one subscribes to, it can be said with full confidence that the UK is in the fortunate geographical position of having almost the best wave resources and certainly the best tidal stream resources of any country in the world. That is a good starting point.

In 1999, the DTI's energy technology support unit estimated that the energy that was easily and practically accessible was 50 TWh per year from offshore wave power and 36 TWh per year from tidal power—and that from only the 10 most promising sites. Even on extremely conservative estimates, more than a quarter of the UK's total energy consumption of 330 TWh per year is available and exploitable. In fact, I am inclined to err towards the Greenpeace estimate and predict that there is sufficient exploitable energy resource to supply our total energy consumption requirements.

Another important aspect of energy provision is a regular baseline supply. The prime argument of the nuclear lobby is that nothing can supplant nuclear reactors in supplying steady, predictable baseline load. We received evidence from energy generators that they could see few problems for electricity companies in integrating both wave and tidal energy supplies into the grid owing to the reliability and predictability of their output. That certainly applies to tidal power because, apart from the short interval of slack water between tides, there is available power for 24 hours at every site. Not only that, there will eventually be constant supplies due to tidal variations—as long as sites are scattered along the coast. Tidal power is uniquely capable of supplying the baseline load that the nuclear industry claims as its prerogative.

The marine environment is harsh and challenging. However, in the UK we start from a position of advantage, because we have decades of experience in offshore oil exploration and production. We have the expertise and technology base to deal with the problem. We have an enormous transferable skills set and an enormous and readily available work force. We concluded in our report that there were no major technological barriers to the effective deployment of wave or tidal energy devices that cannot be dealt with by transferring existing knowledge within the UK. It seems strange that such an attractive resource has not been tapped before, but perhaps it is not that strange if one considers the history.

As has been mentioned, a UK Government research and development programme was started in 1974 as a response to the oil crisis. Most of us can remember Salter's nodding ducks, and it was gratifying to see Professor Salter back before the Committee as one of the witnesses because he has survived the political vicissitudes of research and development support. That programme led to a trial device that operated successfully for 10 years, but in 1982 the work was terminated because it would never—allegedly—have been commercially viable. Figures may be subject to

*[Dr. Desmond Turner]*

manipulation, and I suggest that a greater factor was pressure from the nuclear energy lobby for the construction of more nuclear power stations, which is exactly what happened.

Another big mistake at the time of commissioning the original wave energy programme was that it was conceived as replicating large power-generating plants. Now we can see the absurdity of thinking that a 2,000 MW power-generation plant could be plonked into the sea. That thinking led to tidal barrages because only they, if implemented on a large scale at a location such as the Severn or Morecambe bay, could produce that amount of power in one installation. However, the picture becomes different if one examines smaller units, as we do with wind energy generation. Happily, in 1999 wave energy research and development started again because the Department of Trade and Industry realised that a major mistake had been made in the early 1980s by stopping research and development.

Denmark's achievements with wind power began in 1982. Its technological development of wind turbines has reached a state of commercial viability, and in the process it has gained an industry that employs about 15,000 people, which, given Denmark's small population, is significant. It is the world market leader in the export of wind turbines and it is responsible for producing about 90 per cent. of the wind turbines that are currently installed throughout the world.

**Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): Does my hon. Friend agree that one important ingredient in Denmark's success was its minimisation of damage to the environment? In particular, cables were buried underground so as not to have a tissue of pylons and voltage cables, which led to wider acceptability of wind power in Danish society than would have been the case if it had had a criss-crossing network destroying the landscape. We should learn from that example.

**Dr. Turner:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention with which I agree. That is one of many lessons that we can learn from Denmark's development of wind power technology.

What position would we have been in if instead of terminating wave power research and development in 1982 we had invested more in it? If we had continued and invested more in it, we might now have as proud an industry in wave power as the Danes have in wind power.

**Mr. Wilson:** I agree with everything that my hon. Friend said about the short-sightedness of the decision that was taken then. It is also worth recording that the same thing happened with wind power. We had a technological lead in wind power and threw it away.

**Dr. Turner:** I thank my hon. Friend for emphasising the point.

We face a different set of imperatives from those of 20 years ago. The prime drivers now, in addition to the need for energy supply, must be the response to environmental change and climate change, and the need for sustainability. The report makes an overwhelming case for putting the maximum energy and financial resources into the development and rapid implementation of wave and tidal power to meet the challenges that we face in the next 50 years and beyond.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): Queen's university in my constituency has analysed past delays and I pay tribute to its work over the years. There were upsets in the early days, but it has gone ahead. What obstacles are now holding back development that would increase employment opportunities, bring other people into the market and enable us to export those facilities?

**Dr. Turner:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I would say that the obstacles are none. If we took the same determined approach that the Danes took to wind power and applied it to wave and tide power, there is no reason why we should not replicate the success that the Danes have achieved with wind-generated power.

I think we can safely say that no energy source befits this country so well as wave and tide, uniquely because of our geography. Luckily, despite Maggie, we still have a lead in wave technology. We are still just at the front and we have a unique skills and technology base to apply to the problem.

Wave, tide and wind energy go together because they are true sustainables and can be used in a national context to contribute to the grid. Photovoltaic energy is also truly sustainable but is probably a non-starter as a contributor to the grid. I want to make a comparison with other sources, because it is strikingly obvious to me that wind and tidal power are outstanding candidates.

Photovoltaics could make a contribution, but the cost is currently high. Photovoltaic tiles on a roof would cost a bomb and would not make a commercially viable contribution to large-scale power generation. Not only that, we do not have the best source of solar energy in the world and at night it is turned off, so there are definite physical limits to what can be expected from solar power and photovoltaics.

Biomass is also in the frame and at the moment it is receiving more support than wave and tide power. That is questionable, so perhaps the Minister will comment on that. Biomass is less technologically challenging than other renewable options, although we should qualify the word "renewable" in respect of biomass because it has drawbacks. For example, its economics are uncertain. I am not aware of any reliable, published figures on the economics of electricity generation by biomass. Unresolved issues of environmental impact and potential pollution exist, and any application in generating plants of a large scale would raise a storm of planning issues. The same can be said for waste incineration. At the moment, municipal waste incineration is also counted as part of renewables, which I find highly questionable.

Both options are described as $CO_2$ neutral and that is rather simplistic because they involve rapid $CO_2$ emission—far more rapid than the speed at which $CO_2$ is taken out of the atmosphere to produce the materials that are being burnt. To describe them as $CO_2$ neutral is therefore putting it strongly.

In respect of municipal waste, the part of the waste stream that will be incinerated is also the part that is most amenable to recycling—newsprint is one example.

Incineration therefore becomes a counter-productive approach in environmental terms. The preliminary document from the PIU refers to the need for new energy crop technologies to be developed, which underlines the fact that biomass technology lags behind wave and tidal paths and, even when developed, it cannot guarantee non-$CO_2$ emitting energy production in the way that wave and tide can. If any hon. Member had the possibility of a large incinerator being sited in or near their constituency, they would know exactly what I mean as regards public response.

The nuclear lobby has been highly active. It is pressing for a new chain of reactors to replace the ageing Magnox stock. Experience tells us that any cost estimates—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Drew:** It is the nuclear lobby.

**Dr. Turner:** I apologise, Mr. Chidgey. I think that that phone call was from my daughter—she always chooses the right time—*[Interruption.]*

**Dr. Gibson:** Switch it off.

**Dr. Turner:** I am trying to. My humble apologies.

Bitter experience tells us that any cost estimates from the nuclear lobby should be taken with tonnes of salt, as should its assessments of whether its technology would work and be safe. As history shows, we can believe almost nothing that the nuclear lobby tells us; it has left a legacy for many generations to come. In the paper this morning, I noticed comments—I forget exactly from whom they came—about the threat of Sellafield. It said that if anyone detonated a big bomb there, a vast area of Britain would be made uninhabitable for 100 years. Safety considerations are therefore overwhelming.

Wind power remains the only truly sustainable source and, in its current state of development, it represents a wonderful example of what can be achieved through a determined, single-minded effort, and of the enormous benefits that can accrue. After 15 years, it contributes 13 per cent. of Denmark's power needs and has created a magnificent industry. However, its exploitation in the United Kingdom has been mainly limited by planning resistance, which has been considerable. Its best opportunity for exploitation lies in offshore installations.

There is a further point to be made in comparing wind with tide. The biggest practical wind installations currently generate 2 MW with a single turbine. Although the machine is rather elegant, it is very big. The blades have a 60 m diameter and they stand on a mast about 50 m high. That can never be inconspicuous. Such machines are elegant, but inconspicuous they are not. By contrast, water turbines generate 2 MW from a 15 m diameter set of blades, completely immersed in the water. Nothing can be seen above the water but a sort of pylon, which would look like and be about the same size as a buoy.

In terms of visual impact, tidal power starts with an enormous advantage and in terms of development costs it is promising. When wind power started out, in about 1982, the generating costs were extremely high. In today's prices they were about 15p per kWh. Since then, those costs have come down progressively through technological development, exploitation and economies of scale. They have now just about gained the upper reaches of commercial viability.

At a comparably immature stage of development, the generating costs of wave and tidal power are already at or around 5p per kWh. Development and large-scale exploration will inevitably bring those costs down to less than 2p an hour, which puts them fairly and squarely within the cost range of present electricity generation from fossil fuels.

The fossil fuel costs, even if one wanted to continue in that direction for other reasons, would not be sustainable at that level, because they depend on almost artificially cheap coal imports and on gas supply contracts that will not stay at their current artificially cheap level. Those costs are bound to rise in the future, and with the development and large-scale application of wave and tide power, we could find that, in addition to all its other merits, it is the cheapest electricity source.

What, then, should be the mix of power sources for the future? The option of replacing nuclear capacity should be ruled out for all time; not only because of the safety and environmental problems and the dodgy economics, but because if we entered into a new nuclear programme, the massive capital investment involved would swallow up the capacity of the market to invest in newer technologies. We would run the risk of satisfying the nuclear lobby by saving perhaps 10,000 jobs in a dying 20th-century industry at the expense of generating, say, 50,000 jobs in a new, 21st-century industry with a sustainable future.

We should look to a wholly non-carbon, sustainable spectrum of energy sources, on which wind, wave and tide should take the main place. That desirable impact level would not happen of its own accord. As the Danes did with wind power, the UK Government would have to will the means to make it happen rather than standing by and waiting for the market with a little development capital. At the moment, only £5 million is on offer. In the context, that is a drop in the ocean.

A short-term option that is not necessarily desirable in the longer term will always attract the market. I was grateful to hear the remarks of the hon. Member for Salisbury, who clearly agreed with that point. We cannot simply rely on the market to solve problems, especially future energy problems.

**Mr. Drew:** I speak from the experience of a visit to Denmark a year ago by the parliamentary renewables and sustainable energy group. One interesting aspect of it was the different approach to raising capital there. Copenhagen's wind generation is paid for in the form of a co-operative. The people of Copenhagen own many of the wind generators. It should be remembered that, in addition to the market or the state, mutual solutions can be advanced.

**Dr. Turner:** I thank my hon. Friend. I, too, took part in the PRASEG visit, and saw that other features also helped the exploitation of wind power. We visited farms where farmers had wind turbines on their land in exchange for taking a cut of the proceeds. Everyone

*[Dr. Turner]*

benefited. There are more ways to skin a cat than those we normally think about. We must be reasonably free-thinking about it.

**Dr. Gibson:** What about animal welfare?

**Dr. Turner:** Perhaps that was an unfortunate analogy.

The difficulty of grid connections has been mentioned. As we say in the report, the Government would need to intervene to help in the extension and modernisation of the grid to meet the problems. The downsides of privatisation have been mentioned, and that is one. Another difficulty faced by companies with demonstrator machines has been the lack of a suitable test site with available connection to the grid. That has meant that companies have had to look to other countries for sites, such as Greenland and Portugal, which is extremely unfortunate. If they have to continue doing so, the industry could move abroad. I am glad that the Government are moving to implement our recommendation to help to provide a test site.

**Mr. Key:** I would welcome the hon. Gentleman's view on the Norwegian interconnector. I am not asking a trick question. It might be possible to import substantial quantities of electricity from Norway generated by wind, wave or hydro-electric power via the interconnector. Might that be an even more economic answer to our country's problem of energy resources?

**Dr. Turner:** That would not necessarily be the best answer, although it might be a short-term one. Our country would be far better served by generating its own sources offshore and being self-reliant. In that way, we would also maximise the industrial potential that goes with energy-generating technologies.

We stand on the threshold of exciting changes in energy production for the future. If we make the right choices and back them vigorously—I am convinced that wave and tide are two of the key choices—we can forge not only a sustainable future for the UK in clean energy, but a massive new industry with enormous export potential and the capacity to contribute towards reducing UK and world $CO_2$ emissions. That is the ultimate conclusion of our report, and I am happy that the Government acknowledged it in their response. What we now need is serious action from the Government. If they give a clear lead, the country could, for quite a modest input of Government money, achieve massive returns.

3.49 pm

**Mr. Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove): We have been privileged to hear three well-informed and well-researched speeches. I am not sure whether I can maintain the standard, but I welcome the debate. It is important for the House and the country. I welcome the report, too, and the introduction that the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) gave it. It makes some timely points, which I hope can be incorporated in the thinking of the performance and innovation unit and in the Government's response via the energy review.

It would be remiss of me not to welcome also the Minister for Industry and Energy. I note the reference in the report and in the remarks of the hon. Member for Norwich, North to the possibility of appointing an energy tsar. I hope that the Minister will not mind my saying that while I do not know whether we need such a tsar, we need an Energy Minister who lasts longer than a year. The Minister is the fourth Energy Minister in four years.

As we know—it has already been mentioned—the energy policy-making function in government is by no means in the hands of one Minister, or even one Department. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Treasury and apparently the Cabinet Office are all involved. Such fragmentation is not conducive to a coherent energy policy, whoever the Government.

The underlying reason that the report has been brought before the House is a gathering awareness of the significance of climate change and the damage that it does to our national and international environment—it is in many ways life-threatening and it is certainly threatening to society—and of the resulting need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and, therefore, to change the way we use energy. The Liberal Democrats are strongly committed to the development of a sustainable, long-term renewable energy policy that can link wealth creation and growth to environmental protection. Those objectives do not have to be in conflict.

Such aims mean that we must examine a wide range of renewable options, and some have already been outlined. The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) ran through a list: solar, wind, biomass, wave and tidal—I do not think that he mentioned geothermal. There are many options available for exploitation here and in neighbouring countries.

We need to take care, in considering this subject, not to fall into the trap that the hon. Gentleman to an extent fell into of treating alternative renewable sources as being in competition. We are in an evolutionary process, in which some resources are available and well developed, at market price levels, so that they should be used and exploited now, while others still need work, but will provide opportunities in the long term. We shall need increasing amounts of renewable energy as fossil fuel runs out and nuclear power drops out of use. We do not need to be combative or competitive in our claims for different renewable technologies.

Two years ago, I published a small booklet on the subject of energy policy. Its title, "Energy—Clean and Green to 2050", encapsulates the key issues for a United Kingdom energy policy. It should be clean in its immediate effects, green in its use of resources and long term. The year 2050 is a long way away, but not in energy policy terms. The design life of the majority of plant that is built now is expected to be more than 25 years and, in many cases, 50 years. If we are to have a sustainable and renewable energy policy by 2050, we must take decisions now.

The argument that I have deployed is that we must consider the medium and long terms. The first stage is to ascertain how we ensure that carbon dioxide emissions do not rise as nuclear power drops out of use. It is

therefore important that a first generation of renewable energy technologies comes into use at market rates, develops and delivers to the energy industry. The Government's horizon currently appears to stop at 2010, although they have wound it forward a little in recent weeks, and the hon. Member for Norwich, North mentioned a loose target for 2020.

We should, however, establish a much longer-term target. It need not be radical or hugely ambitious, as long as it projects far enough forward. If we added just 1 per cent. to our renewable energy stock year by year beyond 2010, 50 per cent. of generation would come from renewables by 2050. Incidentally, that rate of change in sources of generation is slower than the rates of change in sources of electricity generation between 1900 and 1950 and between 1950 and 2000. Some say that we cannot achieve such an aim between 2002 and 2050 because it would require too great a rate of change and an excessive degree of technological development. Those people should consider what has happened to the generation, distribution and use of electricity over the past 100 years. What is being proposed is very modest.

One reason why we need a more coherent and co-ordinated energy policy is that we are talking about not only generation, but the use of energy. I have not yet heard the word "conservation" in the debate. There is tremendous scope for the more efficient use of energy and the conservation of resources, which would be more than sufficient to neutralise the effect of the growth in the use of energy outside the transport sector. I hope, therefore, that the debate will be about not only the Select Committee's report or the viability of wave and tidal power, but the much wider issue of how we develop a renewable and sustainable energy industry.

The interesting point is that we can trigger most of the necessary changes comparatively simply, while still relying on market forces. I am afraid that some of us are not fully reconstructed and not completely wedded to the idea that market forces can deliver everything. However, there is no doubt that they must play a significant part in the energy industry, which is inevitably an international industry. To a large extent, financing and investment for new facilities and conservation must come from private sources, which need a return on their investment.

Later, I want to hear what the Minister has to say about the introduction of the renewables obligation and about what stage we have reached. That measure has, albeit haltingly, put in place an increasing incentive for the private sector to invest in renewables.

**Mr. Wilson:** May I clarify that the renewables obligation will be introduced on 1 April?

**Mr. Stunell:** I thank the Minister for that. The last date that I heard was 3 October 2001, so things are slipping a bit, but I am pleased that he can give us an assurance that the proposals will come into effect.

A desirable outcome could be achieved by placing an escalator on the renewables obligation. If the obligation requires 10 per cent. of electricity to be purchased from renewable sources by 2010, we should aim for 11 per cent. in 2011, 12 per cent. in 2012 and so on, so that the obligation gives investors the certainty that a market will exist for their product and that the drive continues towards renewables.

That brings me to some of the issues in the report, as there is a difference between what it recommends and what the Government's response says is acceptable. The writers of the report suggest that it would be a good idea to have a banded renewables obligation. In other words, some technologies should be given a preferential rate or a requirement should be made for a preferential purchasing regime for some technologies as against others. The Government say that they do not believe that that is the right way forward, for reasons that they adduce in their response.

Broadly speaking, I agree with the Government's response, in that a banded renewables obligation would present serious difficulties. In the past, Governments have had a bad record in picking winning technologies. The introduction of banding presupposes a capacity by legislators to guess correctly which technology will be the one that delivers for Britain. Despite the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown, it is wise for us to keep available a mixed economy of renewable sources. If we chose only one or two technologies in the renewables field in which to invest, we might make the same mistake as was made in the 1950s and 1960s, when we put everything on the nuclear horse.

A better way of regarding the matter is to think of the evolutionary nature of technologies, rather than their competitive nature. Again, there is a difference between the report and the Government's response on that matter. The report says that "the majority" of the £100 million promised for renewable technologies should be put into wave and tidal power. The Government's response lists all the things that they are doing in that regard—as I would if I were the Minister—giving a price tag at the bottom of £2.3 million. That is a lot less than the majority of £100 million.

If we are to consider technologies from an evolutionary standpoint, we must recognise that some technologies, such as onshore and offshore wind power, are at about market level and can respond favourably to a regime dictated by the renewables obligation. Other technologies, of which wave and tidal are examples, are quite a long way—a very long way, one might say—from being at market level. In those cases, twiddling with the renewables obligation is unlikely to produce effective results in the short or medium term. However, investing significant amounts of money to develop prototypes and pilot projects would be worth while. I accept that they would not themselves bring us electricity at a marketable price, but they would allow the industry to develop and expand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) drew my attention to the problems of one of his constituents. That person is an investor in a wave and tidal company, but the company has found that there is a significant gap between what it can achieve at the bench, in the research laboratory, on the computer or in theoretical micro-projects and what is needed to develop a sufficiently robust technology to begin to move towards marketability. There is a gap between the funding available for pure research and that necessary to develop marketable models. The Government's response points in the right direction, and they clearly have good intentions, but they suggest £2.3 million against the Committee's majority wish for £100 million. I hope that the Minister will reconsider that response and that he will give significantly more money to developing prototype and pilot projects.

*[Mr. Stunell]*

The third issue where there appears to be a difference—not necessarily between the Committee and the Government but between the Committee and the national grid—is location. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) dwelt on the subject at some length, but I do not want to cover the same ground. The figures given in the Committee's report are based on the national grid's general presentation and other presentations that it has made. The national grid was built at a time when the culture of the country was to have a small number of very large electricity generating plants, either nuclear or coal, and latterly oil. Those plants were built relatively close to the fossil fuel sources that would feed them, and also as close as possible to the heavy industry that would use the electricity.

During the past 25 years, the consumption of electricity has been diffused and more widely dispersed. The most significant consumption has moved to the south-east and we have lost most of our heavy engineering and manufacturing base, with its single-point sources of consumption. The national grid is now pointing in the wrong direction. Electricity is being generated in the north of England and in Scotland, yet most of it is being consumed in the south-east of England, where we have seen the most rapid expansion of population, of service industries and of commerce.

The next generation, the replacement of our existing stock of generating capacity, needs to comprise smaller, more dispersed units. It would be a mistake to do as the nuclear industry argues, because most of its sites are large and on the coast, well away from consumption areas, and any risk—or objection—would be reduced by 50 per cent. as a result, because there would be no population on the seaward side. It is a mistake to think that the solution to our problem would be to put more large plants on existing sites in the north and on the coast. Those are the wrong places. We need dispersed generation capacity, and if possible it needs to be closer to where it is used.

It is not a trivial problem. It is not a question only of whether the grid is needed. As much as 8 per cent. of our generating capacity is lost between the place of production and generation and the consumption point. Shortening lines of communication would be an important way of conserving energy and achieving a reduction in the need to generate it.

One of the earliest uses of water power was only a few hundred yards from this place on London bridge, where every arch had a water mill in it. There was tidal flow because the river flowed up and down—power from tide was available practically 24 hours a day at London bridge until about 1820.

That brings me to the Government's energy review and the performance and innovation unit report. I hope that that will produce an outcome that will balance the United Kingdom's intended direction on policy across a wide range of renewables, which will be seen as the way of replacing, in the first generation of replacement, the nuclear industry as existing plant comes to the end of its safe life and, in the second stage, fossil fuel as that, increasingly, runs out and its availability for the UK declines.

I have some questions for the Minister. Can he confirm that the loose target for 2020, mentioned by the hon. Member for Norwich, North, will be firmed up? I hope that he will agree that the proportion of renewables used should increase percentage point by percentage point, year after year beyond that. That is the way to make sure that investors have the certainty of a market. I hope that the Minister will say that the financial support package will be increased from the figure that is in his response—is it 2.3 per cent. or £2.3 million, or perhaps the £5 million mentioned by the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown?—to rather closer to the figure recommended by the Committee, which was in excess of £50 million. I hope also that he will confirm that, as the other side of that financial support, he will use the renewables obligation in an innovative way to create a market for all renewables, and that he can encourage us by saying that export opportunities are strongly borne in mind as the Department of Trade and Industry develops its policies.

One of my difficulties over the past four years has been in understanding why the DTI, with the responsibilities that it has for energy, has always appeared to regard renewables as a drag on the market—something that it has to pay for because it is expected to—rather than as the foundation stone of a major export and wealth-creating industry. The example of the Danes has been mentioned. They did not capture the entire international wind turbine market because they had a great technological lead. The companies that lead their production and marketing are former agricultural machinery firms—not high-tech firms—that took on the commitment of the Danish Government for a steady, continuous growth in the requirement for renewable energy. They founded a solid domestic market, and managed to reduce their prices and production so that they could make a great deal of money internationally.

Attention has been drawn more than once to the stark contrast between the Danish situation and that in the UK. I was pleased to hear of the strong commitment of the hon. Member for Salisbury to renewable energy in the future, although he rather glossed over what happened in 1994, when the whole thing was chopped off at the roots. My point is that any energy policy needs to be not bipartisan but tripartisan. There must be objectives that are taken for granted by all the political parties and that are sustained decade after decade.

We have been able to do that with some of our major public services, with occasional wobbles and differences of emphasis but a common understanding that some things are so important that they have to be delivered come what may. I hope that we can make that what happens with energy policy.

We have an excellent report; it is challenging and innovative. I look to the Government to build on their encouraging first response and to put the UK on course for a sustainable, profitable and efficient energy industry.

**Mr. David Chidgey (in the Chair):** Order. Many hon. Members wish to speak. I ask those whom I call to limit their speeches to about eight minutes so that as many hon. Members as possible may contribute to the debate.

4.14 pm

**Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): I am pleased to be able to make a short contribution to this timely debate. We have reached a milestone in the development of energy policies through the ages. However, some important decisions must be taken in the next few weeks and months, and I would not like to be in the position of the Minister and the Secretary of State, because they are being lobbied hard by those who represent all sides in the energy debate. I trust that my right hon. and hon. Friends will make the right decisions.

Unlike the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner), who has sponsored the Select Committee's consideration of this topic, I am not in favour of baseline supply coming from a single source. We have had that in the past. We had a dash for nuclear energy, as has been mentioned. Then, under the Conservative Government, we had the dash for gas. I am in favour of diversity of supply, and I shall try to explain why. I also believe that there is a place for nuclear energy, although perhaps not on the scale that we envisaged in the past.

There has been mention of a tsar. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) that the only tsar with whom I have ever worked closely met the same end as the Russian tsars. The reason why he met that end was that he did not have the power of the Russian tsars. In fact, he had no power whatever. I am not in favour of tsars; I am in favour of leaving power with the Minister and the Secretary of State.

I declare an interest as a chemist. I was a chemist, and possibly still am, and I have never been in favour of burning massive amounts of fossil fuels. Not only is it an inefficient way of developing energy, because most of the energy goes up the chimney in the form of heat, but the precautionary principle has told us recently that we must reduce emissions of gases such as carbon dioxide. However, the more important reason why I object to the burning of fossil fuels such as coal and oil is that, as a chemist, I know that they are extremely valuable sources of the basic building blocks of all the more complex chemicals that we make from them, including pharmaceuticals and dye stuffs. These days, every advanced chemical that we manufacture starts from oil—it used to be from coal—so it makes sense to me to leave those resources in the ground for as long as possible. They should be trickled out to the widest possible benefit of future generations, at least until we develop alternative chemical economies.

The Government's target is for 10 per cent. of electricity to come from renewable sources by 2010. I want to emphasise that, for every 1 per cent. in market share from renewables, there is a 2 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. That is one of the reasons why I fully support the report. I am also in favour of security of supply, which is why I favour diversity of supply. Several times in the previous century, we saw what happened when oil supplies were disrupted, and I want us to be free from circumstances under which we are told what to do by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries. That would eventually affect the price of oil, so there are wider reasons for developing diversity of supply.

As treasurer of the all-party group on warm homes, I cannot help but underline what the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) has already said: the best energy policy is not to use the energy in the first place. I am pleased that the Government are making massive advances in energy-efficiency policy.

There is a third reason why we, as an advanced country, should develop renewables—not only for our benefit but to transfer those renewable and cleaner technologies to the third world. Nobody has mentioned the third world. If everybody in the whole world used the same amount of energy that people in this Chamber use every day, we would be in a right mess. That is the most essential reason for developing renewable and cleaner energy technologies. We have the scientists and engineers with the skills to do that. We can then transfer those technologies to the rapidly developing countries, which have a right to use as much energy as we do.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown said, the wind, the sun and the natural movement of any large quantity of water present huge untapped resources of energy. In the past, we have lost out to Denmark on wind power, and we should not lose out on wave and tidal developments.

The development of the North sea oil and gas industry generated much work for our engineering industry at the very moment when the shipbuilding yards were closing down. We lost huge quantities of shipbuilding capacity to countries such as Japan, which subsidised it, and third-world countries using cheap labour. The developments in the North sea were the salvation of many of those shipyards, especially the small and medium-sized companies that relied on engineering.

We all know what is happening in the North sea at the moment: output is declining. The development of alternative engineering businesses is therefore vital. Wave and tidal power may be the next diversification for those engineers, who have already been saved once, but will soon need to be saved again. We have one of the longest coastlines of any country of a comparable size, and consequently one of the best development possibilities for wave and tidal power anywhere in the world.

I shall leave it to the Minister to recount what the Government have promised in the development of wave and tidal power. However, I am pleased that the Government response to our report, which was published on 21 November, considers five sites for the development of a national test centre, with the conclusion that a marine energy test centre should be located at Stromness on Orkney. That is a significant announcement, and I am pleased that it was made.

I turn to the challenging demands of any development at sea. This country, among others, has overcome the challenges of the sea. We can tether large oil and gas platforms to the sea bed and transport their products to the shore. We can resist the corrosion of the sea on the metal from which they are constructed. We can resist marine fouling—by barnacles, for example—and restrict, or even eliminate, damage from the most severe weather conditions that can be found anywhere in the world. We do not want to lose those skills, because they can be transported to the wave and tidal development that we are calling for. One problem is that anti-fouling paints have become very unpopular because they usually contain tributyl tin, which damages the marine environment. Research on alternatives for tributyl tin is

*[Dr. Brian Iddon]*

well under way. I am pleased to say that Leigh's Paints in Bolton is one of the largest manufacturers of marine paints in this country.

The west coast is obviously the best place to develop wind and tidal power, because the prevailing winds come in off the Atlantic. I was pleased to be at the conference where the Minister announced the west coast interconnector, which the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) mentioned. That could be a significant development. I urge the Minister to get the two sides of the industry—the wind side and the wave and tidal side—to work together on the interconnector if it proves to be feasible in the long run.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown ably described the peaks and troughs of seasonal and daily demand, the baseline that supports most of our electricity supply, and how renewables can tap into that.

At least one company, Seapower Ltd., is already preparing for the hydrogen economy through generation of electricity from wave and tidal devices, and through electrolysis of sea water. Electrolysis produces hydrogen and oxygen, and the hydrogen is then stored in large sea containers and transported to shore. I am convinced that one day soon, the hydrogen economy will begin to take off.

The message about planning consents, which hon. Members have already mentioned, came over loud and clear in evidence from witnesses. If planning constraints prevent us from getting these developments off the ground, it is likely that such companies will go elsewhere—witnesses mentioned Portugal, for example—to develop and test their mechanisms.

In the end, electricity generation is driven by the sale price. Of course, liberalisation of the UK's energy market has affected the sale price: it has gone down, much to the annoyance of environmentalists, who would have liked it to rise. As the price has gone down, people have used it more and more, without thinking about the environmental consequences. Significantly, Dr. James Martin, generation director of Scottish and Southern Energy plc, which generates 48 per cent. of its supply from hydro, told the Committee on 21 March last year that he was studying the decommissioning of hydro in part because of the price drop, but also because the company had reached a difficult stage at which much old plant—it had been in place for 30, 40 or 50 years—was about to be replaced.

At a current estimated cost of 4p to 8p per kWh, wave and tidal energy is significantly more costly than electricity from fossil fuel plants, which costs about 2p to 3p per kWh. The price of wave and tidal energy has been halved in the past 20 years, however, and as test rigs come on-stream it will undoubtedly be more than halved again. What we should really be considering is pounds per tonne of carbon dioxide avoided, which is an important cost component that has not been referred to this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove has already discussed banding in detail, so I shall not rehearse the argument, except to say that I used to be in favour of it. As treasurer of the warm homes group, I have listened to the arguments concerning banding. At one time, I was fairly convinced that we had to have it, but once I heard the Government's arguments I came down on their side. The best method is to grant aid to those technologies that are furthest away from development. Otherwise, as the Government said in their response to our report, we might send the wrong signal and imply that some renewable technologies are more important than others. I do not want to do that.

**Mr. McWalter:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the Committee has sent out such a signal by suggesting that wave and tidal power is a potential British industry of the future? That will not happen, however, unless the right decisions are taken now, so it is necessary for the Committee to underwrite a preference for such technologies.

**Dr. Iddon:** I fully support the report and the development of wave and tidal power to its maximum capacity. I do not believe, however, that it might prove an important contributor to baseline supply, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown seemed to suggest.

In conclusion, I hope that today's debate and the Science and Technology Committee's report on wave and tidal technology will give added stimulus to development of this important renewable resource.

4.29 pm

**Mr. Michael Weir** (Angus): I welcome the report, which makes a good case for wave and tidal power without minimising the difficulties that it faces. The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) mentioned the cost of nuclear energy on its introduction, but I should remind him that the same was said of hydro-electricity. When hydro-electricity was first introduced in Scotland, it was said that it would be too cheap to be worth metering. However, I still get my quarterly bill from Scottish Hydro-Electric, which is to become Scottish and Southern Energy plc.

The report makes it clear that there is considerable potential for wave and tidal power within the UK, not least in Scotland. It is, however, unclear how much energy can be produced by that method. Although we have heard a great deal about Greenpeace's estimates, until we have a large-scale working model we cannot tell how much energy would be produced. That model must come through Government investment, which would be an investment in all our futures.

I draw hon. Members' attention to recommendations 2 and 16, which discuss previous funding. Recommendation 16 states:

"The current level of public spending on wave and tidal energy research is insufficient to give the technology the impetus it needs to develop fully."

Therein lies the rub: wave and tidal energy is only a potential, and more research and money is required before it can be realised, which is a crucial point.

In an intervention on the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), the Minister mentioned the level of nuclear energy generated in Scotland. Although we may quibble about the figures, the important point is that we have a window of opportunity fully to invest in renewables to meet future energy needs.

We are told that the energy review conducted by the Cabinet Office performance and innovation unit will report shortly, but I am sure that the Minister will not accept my invitation to tell us this afternoon what its report will say. Initial leaks suggested that it would lean towards nuclear energy, but later leaks suggested other alternatives.

We in Scotland know that existing nuclear power stations are due to be decommissioned in the near future, with the newest, Torness, due to be decommissioned within the next 20 years. We have a window of opportunity to get new and renewable sources of energy up and running to meet the gap that might appear once these stations are decommissioned.

The Minister will not be surprised to learn that the Scottish National party is resolutely opposed to nuclear power and believes, as I explained to the hon. Member for Salisbury, that existing power stations should be decommissioned at the end of their technological lifespan, and that no new power stations should be built. We are examining how we can get renewables into place within that period.

I mentioned earlier that Government investment will be required, and the Minister pointed out that £100 million is invested in renewables, but that pales into insignificance compared with past investment in the nuclear industry and the current quotes for £85 billion to deal with existing nuclear waste, let alone waste that might be produced by new stations. This would not be the first time that Government money has been put into the energy sector—never forget that the national grid was originally constructed with such money. Paragraph 31 of the report states:

"Previous Governments ensured the very costly connection to facilities such as the Dounreay nuclear fast reactor."

Renewable energy concerns not only our future energy needs, but the problem of $CO_2$ emissions and the planet's future. If this is not a suitable case for the investment of Government money, it is difficult to imagine what is.

We have heard about the national grid's problems, and it is a problem in that most wave and tidal energy is in the north and west of Scotland, while the grid is on the other side of the country. I was taken by Professor Salter's comment in his evidence that it is depressing how inconveniently the Scottish grid has been arranged. It is as though it was designed by someone who did not like nuclear power. That problem must be addressed because none of us believes that the privatised electricity companies will invest sufficient sums to enable the grid to be extended to include energy from wind and wave power. That needs a kick start from the Government and if Government funds are not provided, I suspect that wave and tidal energy will never get far from the drawing board. The most cynical among us might begin to suspect that the meeting at the Randolph hotel, to which Professor Salter referred, might have been reconvened. The Government must provide investment.

The report recognises the huge potential for investment in existing industries in the United Kingdom, particularly Scotland. Shipbuilders could construct the machines, and oil-related industries could diversify into wave and tide power. That will become increasingly important in the north-east of Scotland and parts of my constituency as the exploration phase of oil development runs down.

Recommendation 9 states the position succinctly:

"The enormous potential export market for wave and tidal energy devices easily justifies the public investment now needed to ensure success."

The Government must provide that investment, because the economic viability of the technology for other areas is considerable.

Another potential environmental benefit of wave and tidal power is that it could help to combat coastal erosion. Reference to that is made in the report and specifically in the evidence from RV Power Company Ltd. and Ian Henderson, but is not pursued in detail. I understand that Professor Salter referred elsewhere to the potential benefits. Although the report discusses the matter in connection with east England, there are serious problems with coastal erosion in other areas, including Angus in eastern Scotland, which have required a considerable amount of money. Investment in wave and tidal power would provide benefits for the supply of energy, the environment and the reduction of $CO_2$.

I wanted to refer to other matters, but time is short, so I shall wrestle with the hon. Member for Salisbury for the worst quote of the afternoon by reminding Members that time and tide wait for no man. If we do not grasp the opportunity now, we may end up being beached.

4.38 pm

**Mr. David Drew** (Stroud): I am aware of the time, Mr. Chidgey, and will try to remain within my eight minutes because I know that other Members want to speak. I do not have a doctorate and I am aware that I am mixing with members of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, so my comments will be prosaic rather than erudite—*[Interruption.]* I have my own views on genetic modification, which we will not enter into.

I cannot resist the digs at the nuclear industry. I make no apology for saying that I am an advocate of nuclear energy—partly because it is the largest employer in my constituency—and the technological interface that is offered by the industry. As I tried to say to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), we do not make enough of that understanding. The issue is not nuclear versus renewables; we should be moving in both directions to get rid of fossil fuels as early as possible. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), because the tragedy is that if we try to pretend that it is one or the other, there will be a slower rundown in fossil fuels than the world should permit us.

Apart from his views on nuclear power, the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) were spot on. I agree that we need to consider wave and tidal energy, not tidal barrages. The debate over the Severn barrage has shown how difficult it is to convince consumers that they should move towards new technologies. In all other respects, especially given my interest in fuel poverty, I would welcome the fact that energy prices are lower, in real terms, than they have ever been before, but it makes it more difficult to make the necessary changes because people always think that there is a reason to hold fire. The movement that has taken place has not been an

*[Mr. David Drew]*

unalloyed success. It has done the opposite of what many of us wanted, in that it has made the move to renewables more difficult.

I shall dwell for a moment on what the major report on the Severn barrier told us. I challenge anyone to say that they have read it. It was hardly environmentally friendly, because many trees must have been taken down in its preparation. The project failed because it did not address how to convince people that environmental technologies were right and necessary. The hon. Member for Salisbury gave two instances of why that consciousness was not delivered. Although I do not pretend to have expertise in wave and tidal energy, the experience of wind energy tells us that what is seemingly God-given and must therefore be capable of being tapped into is not always popular. We must accept that not everything in this area will achieve consensus or even, in some instances, majority support. That does not mean that it is wrong for us to explore and to carry out certain things, because the options are much worse.

I do not mind being associated with the nuclear industry. It has many faults, of which lack of transparency is the greatest. It rues the day when it locked itself into a bunker mentality, and I hope that it realises that it must come out of it. If we can harness that technological expertise, we can begin to crack some of the problems in the renewables industry, not all of which are locked into specific parts of it. For example, some relate to how we can link technology to business acumen. I do not pretend that the nuclear industry has been very successful in its ability to come up with the economic answers per se. However, there are some who understand how to meet market conditions and how technology can be advanced without looking entirely in that direction. We ignore that at our peril.

Energy has an obsession with the big answer. That was a mistake in terms of nuclear power. We must look for smaller-scale nuclear solutions, not necessarily large ones. Some hon. Members may have heard "In Our Time" on the radio this morning, which was about nuclear physics. The dream is fusion. Although it is almost 40 years away, it would be silly to throw away the chance to achieve that dream—not for ourselves, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East said, but to deliver energy for the next generation and the third world.

We must look for options, which is why I commend different solutions to embedded generation. These would involve looking not simply to the market or the state, but to co-operative solutions. I say that as a co-operator. We can convince the general public, but not necessarily through the market; that they must feel that they have a stake in the development of the industry.

The report is a good one, and it is crucial that it plays its part in the energy review and the PIU investigation. I hope—and it is not impossible—that we can fill some of the technological lacunae, such as group connections. If we can harness expertise across the energy industry, we can make use of wave and tidal power and the other renewables, and not a day too soon.

4.45 pm

**Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): Like other hon. Members, I welcome the report from what should henceforth be known simply as the Select Committee for clever people. I do not know whether it is necessary to have a PhD to be a member of the Committee, but it is clearly of considerable assistance.

The debate has been immensely enjoyable, and I have enjoyed it even more than I expected. It has covered renewable energy, which has long been a personal and political interest of mine. It has also featured several references to Islay, where I was born and brought up and where my family still live. *[Interruption.]* I shall come to that in a minute. It will also allow me a brief canter on one of my favourite hobby horses—bashing the Crown Estate Commission. One could not ask more from a debate than that.

The report and, in particular, the recommendation for a national marine energy test centre, were welcome in my constituency. As the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) said, the centre will be situated in Stromness. Regrettably, the members of the Committee failed to get to Islay, but they might want to visit Orkney during this Session to ascertain what progress has been made. The hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) referred repeatedly to investment, and credit must be given to Highlands and Islands Enterprise and to the Scottish Executive for funding the centre. As it moves into its later stages, I hope that it will find the same sympathetic response in Whitehall that it has so far in Edinburgh and Inverness.

The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), who introduced the debate, referred to recognising the potential for energy from tidal and wave power, although anyone who has tried to go round the Mull of Oa or through Corryvreckan in a boat would know about that—it is there for us all to see. I hope that some imagination will be used in developing that form of renewable energy. It has long been said in Shetland that Bluemull sound and Yell sound, two of the tidal races referred to by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), have immense potential. In Shetland, there is also significant, although not unqualified enthusiasm for fixed links—bridges between the different islands. If we are to have fixed links between Yell and Unst, it is eminently sensible that they should incorporate turbines for generation. They could use the extraordinary power in that tidal stream.

To pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Angus about investment and that made by the hon. Member for Salisbury about the west coast interconnector, I gently remind the Minister that I wrote to him about those issues on 14 November last year. According to my files, however, I do not appear to have had a reply. I made the point that, although I welcomed the idea of a west coast interconnector, I did not see why even at the stage of a feasibility study it did not go further north than appeared to be proposed. The hon. Member for Salisbury referred to a list of 44 tidal stream sites, which includes no fewer than 12 in the northern isles and a few others along the north coast of Caithness. At the least, the feasibility of taking the interconnector round to Orkney and on to Shetland demands investigation. I ask the Minister to deal with that. As the hon. Member for Angus said, investment in infrastructure such as the west-coast interconnector would be a litmus test if we were to be serious about the development of wave and tidal generation.

Will the Minister tell us what discussions his Department has had with the Crown Estate Commissioners about the laying of a cable down the west coast? From bitter constituency experience, I know that they are jealous of their right to charge rent for use of the sea bed for laying of cables. It seems arrant nonsense for Government money to be invested in infrastructure on one hand to encourage the generation of electricity from wave and tidal power, and taken out with the other in rent to the Crown Estate. If there have been no discussions, as I suspect might be the case, I commend to the Minister that they start sooner rather than later.

The northern isles view the debate with some anxiety. We have been in the vanguard of research and development before, especially with the wind turbines on Burgher hill in Orkney. The Minister may be familiar with them. The project was developed to the point at which it was opened for commercial exploitation, only for the Conservative Government to fail to put in the investment necessary to make it commercial. The excellent work done there was lost, especially to Denmark, which invested further and saw commercial potential realised. We and the Western isles are carrying out the research, and it would be nothing short of sinful if the potential, once realised, was not fully developed.

4.53 pm

**Mr. Calum MacDonald** (Western Isles): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words. I start by congratulating the Committee on producing a superb report. For non-scientists such as me, it is enormously useful. From talking to non-governmental organisations during the past couple of months, I know that they see it as a significant step forward in the debate. I want to touch on how to maximise the benefits of the technology for the entire country, and for the local communities in which the power will be generated.

One of the most striking figures in the report is that Denmark, because of its investment strategy over time—several hon. Members have referred to it—controls 75 per cent. of a global market worth £3.5 billion a year. That tells us that the wind-power industry is not small or frivolous, but of enormous economic importance. We can see that investment strategy in Scotland, in that the manufacturing facility for wind turbines in Kintyre is being developed by Vesta, a Danish company. In my constituency, where AMEC and British Energy are thinking of developing a large wind farm, the Danish and German company Nordex is interested in developing the turbine manufacturing side of the project.

Those examples show the potential of the proper sort of Government policy, intervention and support in the industry for bringing large-scale economic benefit to the country as a whole. I would encourage the Government to think in terms not only of national targets for development of wave and tidal and offshore wind energy, but to keep an eye on what other countries are doing throughout the world. We should make it our target, given our national resources in wind and tidal energy, to emulate what the Danes have done with wind power. We should be controlling, 10 years from now, 75 per cent. of the global market in wave and tidal energy. I would encourage the Government to think not only in terms of what we will need in the UK, but to watch what happens throughout the world. They should watch what our competitors are doing and ensure that our policy moves on, if necessary, to match that, so that we develop a lead in the years to come.

The proposals by AMEC and British Energy in my constituency have been mentioned by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), and several other Members have spoken about what is now called the west-coast interconnector. I remember the evening that the idea of the interconnector emerged. It was at a seminar organised by the Minister in my constituency, where people from the private sector, from Government and from the Scottish Executive were all present. The first evening of the seminar took place at a nice restaurant overlooking the cliffs of Uig, called the Bonaventure, and the idea of the west coast interconnector was born in those congenial circumstances.

It is amazing that what seemed to be a wild aspiration back in July has so quickly taken on the flesh of a practical proposal, so much so that AMEC and British Energy are now looking to invest £700 million to realise a project to run cable down the west coast of Scotland to harness the massive resources there and plug them into the real market, in the south of England. To run that cable over that distance is a very expensive proposition, which will require about £400 million of investment. That is why AMEC is proposing a wind farm of such a scale in my constituency. It needs the cash flow that that will provide to fund the interconnector. If that wind farm happens, as I hope it will, it will be the biggest in the world.

One of the benefits and prime attractions of the proposal, from my point of view, is that it will not only contribute to the country's environmental targets and develop our industrial infrastructure in a significant way, but it will also bring genuine, tangible and substantial benefits to the local communities where the development would be located. The final question that I would like to raise with the Minister is that of how we can maximise that local benefit.

Examining the development of wind power, and I suspect that the same will be true of wave and tidal power, one finds that it does not take many people to run a wind farm—it is not manpower intensive. However, to install such a farm requires many people and creates many construction jobs. To build turbines also requires many people. To manage an export industry in the way in which the Danes do it employs many people. The proposed biggest wind farm in the world, a 600 MW farm with some 300 turbines, will need only 30 people to run and maintain it. The benefit to the local community is not really in job creation; that has to be sought elsewhere.

Wind farms—the same would be true of other renewable energy developments in my constituency—will produce a rich rental stream for developers, thanks largely to Government policy. This development will be located on land that belongs to the local community. It is owned by a body called the Stornaway trust, the board of which is elected every three years by every elector in the district. The rental stream that comes to the landlord in this instance will be recycled into social and economic development in the local community and will indirectly create further jobs. The benefits are real. How can we ensure that similar benefits will be enjoyed as we go on

*[Mr. Calum MacDonald]*

to develop wave and tidal energy? The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) mentioned the role that the Crown Estate Commissioners play. That will be critical. We have a model on the west coast of Scotland in which Crown Estate Commissioners are very much involved in the development of a key local industry— fish farming—which gives them a very rich rental stream. Sadly, very little of that rental stream is recycled into the local communities, which is a source of considerable grievance there.

That is a just about tolerable situation in terms of fish farming, because—

**Mr. David Chidgey (in the Chair):** Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is drifting slightly away from the topic of the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** I just want to make the point that fish farming in the Crown Estate is tolerable in that instance because it directly creates thousands of jobs. Wind farms and wave power will not give that direct benefit to local communities, therefore we must achieve that in other ways. That is why we must consider, as the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland urged, the role of the Crown Estate Commissioners, and how the rental stream that they will draw upon can be recycled into local communities. In many instances—although not necessarily all the way round the coast of Britain—developments will take place in the middle of communities that are suffering depopulation, that exist on the margins with relatively low incomes and that are losing their young people due to a lack of job opportunities.

If we develop a massive new industry adjacent to declining and depopulated communities, we shall not have succeeded in the wider public policy objectives that we should be setting ourselves. I urge that that should be a major consideration in the Government's forward planning.

5.3 pm

**Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): I am aware that my hon. Friend the Minister will not have much time to reply, so I shall try to be brief. I am concerned, as a member of the Committee, that during the debate there has been a drift away from what it has been recommending. I hope to try to put it back on course.

The last three speakers from outlying areas of Scotland have understood the drift of the report, but I am worried about the remarks of my Committee colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon). He suggested that wave and tidal power will continue to be Cinderella suppliers, although he did not use that term, in that he did not expect those sources of power to provide baseline supply.

We cannot do other than say that our aim is to tap a huge energy source in sufficient quantities to make up for the carbon-bearing fuels that we currently burn and the nuclear fuels that none of us wishes to replace by building more nuclear power stations. We are considering a long-term strategy to create an industry that does not use fossil or nuclear fuels. That is the general drift of the Committee's report. It worries me that anyone can suggest that the report is not targeted at the baseline supply; it must be. However, having said that, we must accept that many of the previous actions of the Department of Trade and Industry are not consistent with that.

There has been an imaginative response to many of the Committee's recommendations, accompanied by generous funding, but only for research projects. The hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) was right when he said that this is not only about research projects. We need large-scale prototypes. I do not know whether we need one large-scale prototype the size of this Room, which incorporates methods of harnessing both latitudinal and longitudinal motions in the sea, or whether we need one model for each method, but if we do not have large-scale models, we will not know whether we can begin to think about generating electricity in the volumes that are necessary to implement the Committee's vision in the report. Large-scale models require us to think about not just a Salter duck, but a very large-scale Salter duck, which even Professor Salter says might or might not work. We are talking about very large-scale ventures, venture capital on a very large scale, and uncertain outcomes, albeit with extremely strong and rich potential.

That was the Committee's vision, which the Department has not so far accepted. That was made clear by the Minister's remarks about our renewables obligation. At present, if an electricity supplier needs a renewable component in the fuels that are burned to generate electricity, he will choose the most economic form of that fuel and chisel it in at whatever percentage level is required to meet that obligation. New technology, in its infancy, generates electricity that is much more expensive than that. As wind power reduces in price, it provides tremendous opportunities for the Danes, but we believe that wave and tidal power needs to be protected at this stage. On the renewables obligation, the Government say, in paragraph 11 of their response, that we cannot buck the market. I agree that we cannot do that in the long term. *[Interruption.]* I am aware that the Minister wants to start his speech at 5.10 pm.

What one can do is simply not conform to a market. However, we are talking about committing investment beyond research and making a market in which it will be feasible for people to make the first moves towards creating a large wave and tidal power industry. That was the Committee's vision. Some of the Scottish Members seemed to understand that well, and I hope that, in his response, the Minister will support that ambitious target.

5.10 pm

**The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson):** It is a cliché for the Minister, in replying to the debate, to comment on what an excellent exchange of views there has been. However, without any resort to cliché, I can say that it has been a first-class, valuable debate and an enjoyable afternoon. We cannot often say that in this place.

As the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) said, an added bonus of the debate is that we have taken a pleasant geographical tour. I want

to give my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) the good news: he may have had to delay his visit to Islay and the world's only commercial wave station, but the nearest distillery, at Bruichladdich, has reopened in the meantime. He will easily be able to visit both locations in the course of a day.

I was also delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. MacDonald) took us to the Bonaventure in Uig, which is another of my favourite locations. I like to think that it will be associated historically with the evolution of the ideas that we have been discussing, as well as a few good nights.

I have had a long-standing interest in the subject of our debate. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) spoke of his early and, alas, wasted education in reading the *West Highland Free Press*. Some 20 years ago we published articles by a Mr. David Ross, who was a great proponent of wave power, and I have had an interest in the subject since then. The two papers for which he wrote professionally were the *Daily Express* and the *Tribune*, which I always thought was a slightly odd combination, but one could say that he was following in the Michael Foot tradition. However, he was a great advocate of the source.

As the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) said, it is pleasing that Professor Salter gave evidence. We all remember the hopes that were vested in Salter's duck many years ago. Sadly, for reasons that have been mentioned, it never came to anything. However, I have had a long-standing interest and belief in the source, so to be in a situation in which I may be able to do something about it—albeit marginally and, as the hon. Gentleman implied, perhaps briefly—is a real privilege. It represents an opportunity that I hope I can usefully take.

I am glad of the opportunity to debate an excellent and stimulating report. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North on the way in which he presented it and the Select Committee as a whole on its work. We are at an exciting point in the choices that we can make over energy, and decisions made now will affect our energy mix for many years and will influence the lives of our children and grandchildren, which is not always the way in this place.

The main drivers for change are the need to reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on climate change, along with the need to maintain diversity and security of energy supply. Renewables have a huge amount to offer on those issues. Achieving 10 per cent. by 2010 from renewables eligible for the obligation is expected to result in carbon saving of about 2.5 million tonnes a year by 2010. That is a useful contribution to emissions savings. I do not know whether the target will increase by 1 per cent. a year or whether it will stand at 20 per cent. at 2020, but there is no need or intention to stop at 10 per cent. in 2010. We must set more ambitious targets thereafter, but I am not a believer in setting targets for the sake of it—the targets must be reachable. We must monitor closely between now and 2010, at each stage and in each part of the country, what progress has been made towards meeting targets rather than simply paying lip service to them. A wide range of technologies exists within renewables, and we heard about most of them today. They include hydro-electricity, which is my favourite.

Scotland has a higher proportion of renewables because people in the 1940s and 1950s, notably Tom Johnston, the Secretary of State for Scotland in the post-war years, had the vision to set up a great social scheme—it was ridiculed at the time and was bitterly opposed by land-owning interests in the highlands, which should be remembered in the context of other current debates—that brought power to the remotest straths and island communities decades before it would have arrived otherwise. That was real vision. If we can match it now with other renewable energy sources, we will have done a good job for future generations.

Renewable energy sources include hydro energy, onshore and offshore wind energy, energy crops and biomass, landfill gas, and wave, tidal and solar energy. We should not be picking winners at this stage. We must let them all flourish to their optimum, and then decide which has the greatest potential for use in the United Kingdom. The market will decide to some extent, but we will have a much more realistic view in a few years' time of which systems can provide significant and economic sources of power. As well as having an environmental benefit, that extra 10 per cent. of renewable electricity will add significantly to the diversity and security of our sources of supply.

I do not have the time to answer the debate fully, but I want to answer a point raised by the hon. Member for Hazel Grove and others. Renewable energy is not only about what is required in the United Kingdom. We will have a huge exporting opportunity, and I shall say more about that in the near future. If we develop the technologies and maintain our technological lead for our markets, we can create many thousands of jobs in manufacturing industries. We can also do a lot of good in the outside world by selling to developing countries the sort of technologies that they need rather than trying to flog them ones that they do not.

We intend that the energy review will be published by the end of the month, or soon after. It is now in the hands of Downing street, because my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister commissioned it, and it has yet to be decided whether a White Paper should follow. It is agreed that the energy review process is transparent, open and inclusive. I intend that what follows after publication of the review will be in the same spirit, and that it will stimulate further debate. The energy review is a report to the Government rather than by the Government, and it should stimulate further debate. It is not the end of the story, but the beginning.

As part of the energy review, a survey has been carried out to assess potential renewable energy resources in Scotland. That study suggests that as much as 60 GW of new renewable energy capacity might be available in Scotland by 2010 at less than 7p per unit, with large amounts of new capacity coming from wave and tidal energy if the technologies are successfully developed. That, too, is an interesting contribution to the wider renewables debate, and further evidence, if it were required, of the extent of the UK's vast renewable energy resources. We must now decide how much of it can be developed practicably and at affordable prices.

The Select Committee's main finding was that we are not doing enough for wave and tidal energy. It is hard to resist that criticism; the historic argument is that those energy sources have not received support proportionate to the sort of capacity that the Committee has identified

*[Mr. Brian Wilson]*

and that my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) has described. We must now look forward and ensure that they have support. I will not get into the percentages game for the reason that I will not say that these are the two horses on which we should be betting. We should be supporting—and we are—the range of renewables to explore their potential. As the potential of wave and tidal is identified, and more proposals come forward that look to be significant contributors, sufficient flexibility must be in the system to provide additional support.

It is wrong to focus on the figure of £2.3 million and say that that is what we are doing for wave and tidal energy. For example, an additional £5 million has been dedicated to wave and tidal from the Prime Minister's £100 million for renewables. Some of the £10 million that has been allocated for blue skies research can also be used for wave and tidal. Those are new budgets in addition to the £3.8 million committed from the DTI's research and development programme and the grants of more than £1 million from the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council. Significant sums of money therefore already exist, not least because of the Select Committee's report, but those have not been quoted this afternoon.

Before I make a couple of announcements that will be warmly welcomed, it is a good starting point to have had such large cross-party consensus today. We all seem to be kicking towards the same goal and I, in an unusual fit of charity, am prepared to let bygones be bygones; I will not remind the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland that that should have been happening earlier—oh, I have said it.

It will be of particular interest to the hon. Gentleman that we will be contributing more than £1 million of the total cost of the almost £1.5 million stingray project, which is aimed at demonstrating a novel concept for extracting energy from tidal currents. The stingray device prototype generates electricity from the oscillatory movement of hydro-planes driven by flowing tidal currents—I thought that the technical specialists in the audience might want to know that. The project is being developed by the Engineering Business, a Wallsend company, which plans to test its device in Shetland. It is the third demonstration project in the wave and tidal stream area to be supported by Government during the past six months.

I hope that hon. Members agree that that represents a significant Government commitment to the industry. It also answers the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) about moving beyond the research and development stage and getting something in the water. The stingray project may herald the start of an exciting new episode in tidal power but, as we have repeatedly heard, we already have a commercial wave power station operating on Islay, which is the only such power station in the world with a capacity of 500 kW. That was developed and installed by an Inverness company, Wavegen. We have announced support for the same company for the development of an offshore device—we are putting £1.7 million into the development of offshore wave—which is likely to be tested at the new centre in Orkney.

When I visited the Islay station, I was struck by the fact that something that had been talked about for decades had been built and now works. It is remiss not to build on what exists already because that gives it commercial and operational credibility. I do not want to lose the momentum for shoreline and near-shore systems, and I want to encourage the refinement of that technology. I am therefore pleased to announce that one of the UK's major electricity companies, Scottish and Southern Energy plc, is working with Wavegen to develop a proposal for a cluster of shore-based stations in the Western isles.The intention is that they will be technically innovative and act both as demonstration plants and commercial generators to supply Scottish and Southern.Wavegen is currently undertaking surveys in the Western isles to establish suitable sites for these developments and is working on outline project proposals. It hopes and intends that a key feature of the plans will be the use of the former Arnish fabrication yard for manufacturing.

Wavegen is now in touch with the owners of Arnish—the Stornoway trust. Its use for this purpose is entirely compatible with the intention of AMEC and British Energy to use the yard for manufacturing purposes related to their proposed wind farm on Lewis. My Department supports the principle of further development of shoreline and near-shore-based wave power, and I expect that we shall be asked by Wavegen to consider its proposals within the next three months. I know that these comments will be particularly welcomed by my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles, whose commitment to the development of renewable energy is well established, and also by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the Western Isles council whose initiative in creating an energy innovation zone has helped to stimulate all this activity.

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council has a substantial research and development programme on renewables, which is running at £6 million in this financial year and focuses on fundamental science and engineering issues. Of that, just over £1 million is committed to wave and tidal energy. It is important to maintain a healthy fundamental research base to generate further innovation. The chief scientific adviser has undertaken a review of Government support for research and development, and demonstration activities as a contribution to the wider energy review. We shall carefully consider its recommendations.

A host of issues has been raised during our debate and I do not have a hope of getting through them. However, I promise the hon. Member for Salisbury, who speaks for the Opposition, and other hon. members that I shall write to them responding to the points that I have not covered.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North asked about the Government's role in steering investment into the transmission and distribution system. The world has changed and it is a matter for the private sector, but that is not to say that the Government do not have a role in discussing with the industry where improvement and investment are needed. I assure my hon. Friend that we have already instigated a number of studies because the strength of the grid and its relevance to current and future needs is crucial.

I also agree that it is necessary to have a planning process that matches the country's needs, particularly when major infrastructure projects are involved. We simply cannot wait five years for decisions to be made. We need a more flexible system that respects people's right to contest proposals but does not lead to unreasonable delays. We already promote a positive approach to planning for renewables and my Department is working with colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to review the planning arrangements for renewables, particularly PPG22.

The hon. Member for Salisbury referred to the role that a Norwegian interconnecter could play in meeting renewable energy targets. The potential of such a project is interesting and there will be a meeting next week with the parties involved to discuss the matter further. It is essential that we do not rely on imports from Norway or elsewhere. The renewables obligation does not cover imports because the stimulus would not exist for our indigenous industry and we must make the most of our expertise, particularly in wave and tidal power, which the Committee identified.

I have raced through some of the many points that were raised and I shall write to hon. Members about the others. The matter is big and exciting, but there may be honourable disagreement about which renewables we should concentrate on. I do not accept the renewables versus nuclear dichotomy. It would have been at least as relevant today if we had talked about gas as much as we have talked about renewables. Do we want to be 90 per cent. dependent on imported gas by 2020? The energy review must consider that, but there is loads of room without divisive argument for progress on renewables in general and specifically. Our objective should be to maximise their potential and their contribution. If we do that, we shall not only safeguard the energy needs of this country—

*It being half-past Five o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.*

# Written Answers to Questions

*Monday 17 December 2001*

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

### Bishop of Exeter

**Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, whether the Church Commissioners have provided support to the Bishop of Exeter in connection with his role as Chairman of the South West Regional Convention; and if he will make a statement. [23627]

**Mr. Bell:** The Church Commissioners support the Bishop of Exeter in paying for his office and working costs as Bishop of the diocese. The Bishop's costs in connection with his role as Chairman of the South West Regional Convention have been reimbursed by a non-Church organisation.

### Commission of the Bishops' Conference

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, which European Community-funded bodies receive funding from the Church Commissioners, with particular reference to the Commission of the Bishops' Conference of the European Community. [22878]

**Mr. Bell:** None. The Church Commissioners' primary responsibility is to manage their assets for the financial support of the Church of England's serving and retired ministry.

The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community is a Roman Catholic body, wholly funded by that Church. It holds regular dialogue with partner ecumenical organisations, which include Anglican representatives, but there is no direct financial or structural link.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

**Peter Bottomley:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, who first briefed the media of the contents of the recent letter to the Chairman of the Commission from the Parliamentary Commissioner. [21980]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** The Speaker's Secretary was approached by the media from 3 December seeking confirmation of reports that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards had written to the Speaker informing him that she did not wish to apply for reappointment. On 4 December he confirmed to the media that these reports were correct. He made it clear that the text of the letter would not be released.

**Peter Bottomley:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when members of the Commission or the Chairman's office was informed of the Parliamentary Commissioner's intention to make her letter available in full to the media if part of its contents were communicated to the media. [21981]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** Members of the House of Commons Commission were not aware that the letter would be released, nor did the Speaker's Office understand that this course of action would be followed.

**Peter Bottomley:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if the Commission will establish an inquiry into reports of briefing against the Standards Commissioner. [22723]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** The Commission will consider the reply of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to Mr. Speaker's letter of 5 December when it is received, and will then consider what action is appropriate.

**Peter Bottomley:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the Commission was first informed of reports of campaigns against the Standards Commissioner; when a member of the Commission first raised reports of a campaign for discussion by the Commission; when the Commission was informed of *(a)* the contents, *(b)* the partial and *(c)* the total release of the contents of the Standards Commissioner's letter to the Speaker dated 28 November; and what action on the reports of a campaign against her was taken before the Speaker's statement of Wednesday 5 December. [22724]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards said in her letter of 28 November to Mr. Speaker that pressure had been applied to her. The letter was copied to members of the Commission shortly after it was received, and was considered by the Commission at its meeting on 5 December. I and, I understand, other Commissioners were made aware by journalists of the release of the letter during the evening of 4 December. At its meeting on 5 December the Commission was informed that the Speaker's Office had the previous day in response to specific inquiries confirmed reports that the Parliamentary Commissioner had decided not to seek reappointment but had indicated to the media that the text of the letter would not be released. Following the Commission's consideration of the letter, Mr. Speaker wrote to the Parliamentary Commissioner to ask her to provide details.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Kenya

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the aid that her Department is giving to Kenya; and what projects are benefiting from that aid. [22970]

**Clare Short:** In financial year 2001–02 my Department will disburse £30 million in Kenya on poverty-reducing programmes principally on health; education; enterprise

development and livelihoods; governance and public sector reform; and drought relief. The largest projects are as follows:

In health we fund: an HIV/AIDS prevention and care programme including by educating teachers and children about HIV/AIDS; malaria prevention including social marketing of insecticide treated malaria bednets; efforts to decentralise health care; and family planning and safe motherhood programmes. In education we give matching funds to a new Government budget for primary school textbooks and equipment.

In enterprise and livelihoods we help Kenya to improve its business environment; work with the finance sector and NGOs to give poor Kenyans access to credit; help smallholder farmers and pastoralists with marketing, animal health improvements, and the supply of pedal powered water pumps for irrigation.

In governance we fund the provision of civic education; are helping Kenya to develop its Poverty Reduction Strategy; fund anti-corruption activities; are helping with development of a new government financial management system and public service pay policy; support Parliament's key institutions; and through programmes in Nairobi's and Mombasa's urban slums, are helping to reform local government. Programmes in conflict prevention, drought relief and environmental governance will also reduce the threat to livelihoods.

## Sudan

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial assistance the UK is giving to Sudan. [22976]

**Clare Short:** This calendar year DFID has pledged over £6.3 million for humanitarian work in Sudan.

This includes contributions to both of the 2001 Appeals for Sudan made by the International Committee of the Red Cross and World Food Programme (£2 million and £1 million respectively); other responses, funded through non-governmental organisations (NGOs)—such as Save the Children, Medecins sans Frontieres, Action Contre la Faim, Care, the Intermediate Technology Development Group and Oxfam—have involved emergency therapeutic feeding (for children) in North Darfur; emergency medical intervention (for children) in western Darfur; water projects in North Darfur and South Kordofan; flood relief; Kala Azar treatment in Gedaref State and Upper Nile; TB treatment in Upper Nile; alleviation of malnutrition in Bentiu; assisting women's rights development associations; and the returning of abducted women and children to their homes.

We monitor the situation carefully and will make further responses as necessary.

## Somalia

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial assistance her Department has given to aid agencies working in Somalia in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; and if she will list the assistance according to type. [22689]

**Clare Short:** The information is as follows.

*2000*

Agriculture:

World Vision: agricultural rehabilitation work in Middle Juba (£198,230).

Minority Rights Group: pastoralist communities in seven countries including Somalia (£154,141[1]).

Health:

World Vision: primary health care programme in Bay region (£198,582).

Health Unlimited: Saxan Saxo Well Women Project, Somaliland (£250,000[1]).

Primary Education:

Save the Children: community based primary education project in Belet Weyn (£230,518).

Nutrition:

Action Contre la Faim: emergency nutritional intervention in Gedo (£168,722).

*2001*

General Emergency and Humanitarian:

International Committee of the Red Cross: 2001 Appeal for Somalia (£1,000,000).

Security and Co-ordination of Relief Work:

United Nations: 2001 Consolidated appeal for Somalia—for UN security and co-ordination activities (£410,850).

Health:

World Vision: primary health care projects in Middle Juba (£328,785) and Bay Region (£266,163).

Medecins sans Frontieres: health assistance projects in the Bakool Region (£207,000) and Middle Shabelle Region (£377,689).

Gender/Peace:

International Organisation for Migration: workshop to encourage Somali women's participation in the peace process (£88,969).

Water and Sanitation:

Norwegian Peoples' Aid: water rehabilitation in the Sool Region (£200,173).

Education:

Africa Educational Trust: developing community school partnerships in Somaliland (£123,863[1]).

[1] These projects were funded by the Civil Society Challenge Fund and the contribution covers three to five years operations. All other projects run for 12 months or less.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment her Department has made of the humanitarian situation in Somalia. [22685]

**Clare Short:** Last month DFID's field manager covering Somalia visited some of the most vulnerable parts of the south. The Somalia Desk also keeps in close contact with (and support) agencies working in the more at-risk areas, receiving regular reports from them.

Our current assessment of the situation, derived from these sources, is that there are pockets of urgent need, particularly in the south of the country. These needs are primarily a consequence of the continuing conflict—though the background of poor rainfall has not helped (most notably in Gedo).

## Refugees (Former Yugoslavia)

**Sue Doughty:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the humanitarian problems in the refugee

camps in Bosnia Herzegovina; if she will provide funding directly to the refugee camps; and if she will make a statement. [23196]

**Clare Short:** The UNHCR is responsible for monitoring the situation of refugees in Bosnia Herzegovina. We have not provided bilateral funds to support refugee camps. We provided £1.6 million for a refugee programme that ended earlier this year. We have also provided £582,000 to assist Serb refugees to return to Croatia, including from Bosnia Herzegovina.

We have agreed with the authorities in Bosnia Herzegovina to support social and economic reform. Our commitments are described in the DFID country strategy paper for Bosnia Herzegovina, published in September 2000.

### Commonwealth Development Corporation

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of deals completed by the Commonwealth Development Corporation in each of the last five years, stating in each case the country concerned and grouped by the OECD developing countries and territories measurement of (i) least developed countries, (ii) low income countries, (iii) lower middle income countries and territories, (iv) upper middle income countries and territories and (v) high income countries and territories; and if she will make a statement. [21520]

**Clare Short:** I have asked the Finance Director of CDC to provide information about CDC investments in the last five years where this information is centrally available and is not commercially sensitive. He will reply direct and I will arrange for a copy of his reply to be placed in the Library of the House.

### Yugoslavia

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on changes in the levels of humanitarian assistance to Serbia in the post-Milosevic era. [22692]

**Clare Short:** Following the resumption of democratic rule in Serbia in October 2000, the UK provided a £10 million immediate assistance package for Serbia. We also contributed £22 million towards the EC's euro 188 million humanitarian aid programme, and provided a further £8.4 million to help the Serbian authorities pay arrears in family welfare benefits.

Over the last year, we have developed a programme of support for economic and social reforms, as set out in the DFID Country Strategy Paper for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Other donors have also developed longer-term, strategic assistance programmes. Such support for essential reforms is key in meeting the longer-term needs of the poor and vulnerable in Serbia.

The EC Humanitarian Affairs Office (ECHO) is providing euro 47.8 million of humanitarian assistance for Serbia in 2001. DFID's share of this is £5.7 million. Other donors, including the international relief agencies, are continuing to provide humanitarian assistance.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department is doing to support *(a)* internally displaced persons and *(b)* refugees within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia during the winter. [22691]

**Clare Short:** Humanitarian assistance from the international community, including assistance for internally displaced persons and refugees, is co-ordinated by the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the European Commission Humanitarian Affairs Office (ECHO). The UK provides funds for these agencies, including 19.7 per cent. of the ECHO budget.

We are not planning to provide bilateral assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons this winter. Our bilateral programme focuses on providing technical assistance for institution and capacity building, and for economic and social reform. We aim to address the longer-term needs of poor people in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia by helping to restructure the economy, strengthen public administration and improve the delivery of social and health care services. This strategy is described in the DFID Country Strategy Paper for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

### Zimbabwe

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department is giving to civil society organisations in Zimbabwe. [22690]

**Clare Short:** In Zimbabwe we are helping church and school communities to deliver supplementary feeding to children and vulnerable adults. We are also supporting civic organisations on democratic and legal rights awareness. We are helping to build the capacity of NGOs to respond to emergency needs. We also meet regularly with UK based NGOs to discuss development policy and effectiveness, and to give advice and support on operational concerns.

## TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

### Fishing Communities

**Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by how much each regional development agency's budget was reduced to provide money for the Fishing Communities Regeneration Initiative. [18271]

**Ms Keeble:** My right hon. Friend the then Minister for Regeneration announced this initiative on 4 April 2001 *Official Report,* column 182W. The Government had previously stated that funding for RDAs' would rise from £1.45 billion in 2001–02 to £1.7 billion in 2003–04. £5.5 million (0.35 per cent.) of the RDAs' indicative 2001–02 allocation was redistributed to help fishing communities in the final allocation announced on 9 March 2001. The contribution of each was as follows.

| *RDA* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| ONE | 0.68 |
| NWDA | 1.18 |
| YF | 0.82 |
| EMDA | 0.35 |
| AWM | 0.55 |
| EEDA | 0.22 |
| SEEDA | 0.38 |
| SWRDA | 0.25 |
| LDA | 1.07 |
| Total | 5.50 |

### Regeneration

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of per capita Government public expenditure on regeneration in each of the regions of England in the present financial year. [18520]

**Ms Keeble:** The incidence of regeneration spending[1] in the English regions for 2001–02, on a per capita basis, from the regeneration programmes for which DTLR is responsible, is estimated to be:

| *English regions* | *£* |
|---|---|
| North East | 69 |
| North West | 49 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 49 |
| East Midlands | 23 |
| West Midlands | 32 |
| East | [2]8 |
| South East | 11 |
| South West | 11 |
| London | 63 |

[1] Population figures based on 1995 data. Estimated expenditure is based on a combination of budgets and forecasts. Includes figures for DTLR's Land and Property Programme, Single Regeneration Budget, Housing Action Trusts, Estate Action, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, New Deal for Communities and work undertaken by English Partnerships. Excludes £15 million from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and Coalfields Enterprise Fund whose expenditure is distributed on the basis of different regional boundaries, cross-cutting projects by other Government Departments and any local authority expenditure contributing to regeneration. Also excludes European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) money. Total projected ERDF spend for 2001–02 on regeneration in the English regions is £248 million.

[2] The Eastern Region did not receive funding from English Partnerships for physical regeneration during 2001–02. This is because there are no coalfields; collapsing land; nor, at present, any Urban Regeneration Companies (these are English Partnerships' principal regeneration functions).

### West Dorset Council (Freemasons)

**Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action was taken by the Government Office for the South West following the Southern Eye documentary, 'Anything to Declare' about the activities of Freemasons on West Dorset Council; and if he will make a statement. [19763]

**Dr. Whitehead:** I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

### SSA Methodology

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish figures showing the effect of each of the changes in SSA methodology introduced in 1998 on *(a)* SSAs for each class of authority and *(b)* each local authority in England in each year since 1998–99 (i) for each year and (ii) cumulatively, in (A) percentage terms and (B) cash terms. [20378]

**Mr. Byers:** This question could be answered only at disproportionate cost.

### Housing (Barnet)

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what will be the actual cap levels for formula rents for registered social landlords and council housing in Barnet in 2011. [20836]

**Ms Keeble:** The cap levels for formula rents for RSL and council housing will rise at RPI+1 per cent. a year from the current figures.

### Rents

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the impact of formula rents on local authority housing revenue accounts; and if he will make a statement. [20852]

**Ms Keeble:** We estimate that the impact will vary from authority to authority depending on how local authorities determine the means by which they implement rent restructuring.

### Local Government Commission

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what time scale is set for the Local Government Commission to undertake a structural review of a local authority in England. [21632]

**Dr. Whitehead:** No structural reviews are currently taking place and so no prescribed time scales have been set.

### Train Staff

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what account he will take of train operators assuming a right to require staff to work their leave days unless specifically declaring their non-availability when renewing franchises. [21439]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Staffing matters, including working hours, are the responsibility of the train operating companies and are not prescribed in franchise agreements. There are no plans to change this.

### New Deal (Young People)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21315]

**Dr. Whitehead:** New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The total number of new deal 18–24 staff currently in DTLR is 29. The Department receives a subsidy of £60 per week for six months, for each full-time new deal employee. In addition, a training allowance of £750 is provided. The cost per employee is £2,190. The total cost to public funds for the 29 new deal staff in DTLR will be £63,510.

### Local Government Association

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will outline the financial support given by his Department to the Local Government Association; and how this mechanism of funding operates. [20718]

**Dr. Whitehead** *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The Government do not provide financial support to the Local Government Association.

### National Association of Local Councils

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will outline what *(a)* financial and *(b)* other support he gives to the National Association of Local Councils. [20719]

**Dr. Whitehead** *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The Government do not give financial or other support to the National Association of Local Councils.

### Railtrack

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment was conducted by his Department into the value of *(a)* assets and *(b)* separate groups within Railtrack Group plc prior to Railtrack plc being placed into administration; and if he will place copies of the documentation in the Library. [21045]

**Mr. Jamieson:** An assessment of the cash-flows that Railtrack's assets would generate is included in the evidence presented to the High Court on 7 October, copies of which have been placed in the House Library.

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to provide funding to Railtrack from the roads budget as *(a)* loans and *(b)* other financial arrangement. [23364]

**Mr. Byers:** We are reviewing our expenditure plans, as we always intended to do, as part of the Review of the 10-Year Plan and work on Spending Review 2002.

### Rolling Stock

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to improve the arrangements by which train operating companies *(a)* purchase and *(b)* lease rolling stock from ROSCOs. [21049]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I am not aware of any specific proposals to change the arrangements for the purchase or leasing of rolling stock. However, the industry has experienced problems in getting new stock into service and the Strategic Rail Authority has therefore set up a cross-industry Working Group to develop the mechanics for ensuring rapid acceptance of reliable trains onto the network.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements are in place to assist train operating companies with the *(a)* purchase and *(b)* lease of new rolling stock in the latter years of their contracts as franchise operators. [21053]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There are provisions within the Railways Act 1993 (s27(9) and s54) and the Transport Act 2000 (s211) which, for example, enable specific undertakings to be given in respect of new rolling stock where the length of the new lease is greater than the remaining length of the franchise and which allow the SRA to ensure that specified rolling stock leases are passed from one franchisee to another in the event of a change of control.

### Light Rail

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the allocated public funds for light rail under the 10 year transport funds has not been committed. [21850]

**Ms Keeble:** Our current estimate is that some £500 million of the £2.4 billion of public capital funding assumed in the 10 Year Plan for light rail is committed to schemes already approved. The precise amount will depend on the final funding arrangements to be agreed once the procurement processes for some of these schemes have been completed.

### Motorway Service Areas

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has conducted into the relative merits of on-line and junction motorway service areas. [22064]

**Mr. Byers:** It is for the private sector rather than my Department to bring forward proposals for new motorway service areas and whether a developer opts for an on-line or junction location will depend on the circumstances of the individual case. The Department, through the Highways Agency, will invariably comment on specific proposals but it has no general policy preference between the two types of site.

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what basis he decided that the planning inquiry into motorway service areas on the M4 and M40 should be treated as six individual inquiries; and what implication this has for the budget of *(a)* his Department, and *(b)* the local authorities concerned. [22063]

**Mr. Byers:** The planning inquiry into motorway service areas on the M25, M4 and M40 is being treated as a single inquiry. No decision has been taken to treat it as six individual inquiries. It is normal practice for the local authority to provide the venue and for the Planning Inspectorate to supply the Inspector, each bearing its own costs. At the pre-inquiry meeting on 3 December the

preference at the meeting was to hold the inquiry at a single location and the local authorities concerned will be liaising on this.

### Freight Factory Grants

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what freight factory grant money has been awarded to *(a)* the Port of Tyne and *(b)* DFDS since 1979. [21786]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Port of Tyne has been awarded £977,350 through two freight facility grants, and the DFDS £2,549,922 through three freight facility grants. These awards were for improving rail facilities to allow freight traffic handled at the ports to arrive and depart by rail rather than road.

### HMOs

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the local authorities in England who operate a discretionary registration scheme for houses in multiple occupation under Part XI of the Housing Act 1985. [22451]

**Ms Keeble:** The local authorities operating such schemes are as listed:

Allerdale
Ashford
Barking and Dagenham
Barnsley
Barrow-in-Furness
Basildon
Basingstoke and Deane
Bexley
Birmingham
Blackpool
Blyth Valley
Bolton
Bolton
Bournemouth
Bracknell Forest
Brighton and Hove
Bromley
Bromsgrove
Bury
Calderdale
Cambridge
Camden
Canterbury
Carlisle
Castle Morpeth
Cheltenham
Cherwell
Chester
Chiltern
Colchester
Croydon
Dacorum
Darlington
Derby
Dover
Ealing
East Hertfordshire
East Riding of Yorkshire
Eastbourne
Enfield
Fenland
Gateshead
Gravesham
Greenwich
Guildford
Hackney
Hammersmith and Fulham
Haringey
Harlow
Harrogate
Harrow
Hastings
Hereford
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Islington
Kettering
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk
Kingston-upon-Thames
Kingston-upon-Hull
Kirklees
Lambeth
Lancaster
LB Brent
Luton
Mansfield
Melton
Mid Bedfordshire
Mid Devon
Middlesborough
Milton Keynes
NE Lincolnshire
Newark and Sherwood
Newbury
Newcastle
Newcastle
Newham
North Hertfordshire
North Lincolnshire
North Norfolk
North Somerset
North Warwickshire
Norwich
Nottingham
Oxford
Petersborough
Portsmouth
Preston
Redditch
Rochdale
Rother
Rotherham
Rushcliffe
Rushmoor
Salford
Scarborough
Sefton

Sheffield
Shepway
South Tyneside
Southampton
Southwark
St. Albans
Stockton-on-Tees
Stroud
Sunderland
Surrey Heath
Sutton
Tendring
Test Valley
Thanet
Tower Hamlets
Watford
Waveney
West Oxfordshire
Westminster
Weymouth and Portland
Wigan
Wirral
Wokingham
Wolverhampton
Worthing
Wyre Forest
York.

### Lincolnshire County Council

**Gillian Merron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the KPMG public interest report on Lincolnshire county council will be *(a)* issued to those named in the report and *(b)* published. [22218]

**Dr. Whitehead** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The publication of a public interest report into the affairs of a council is a matter entirely for that council's Auditor. I am unable to comment or offer any guide with regard to the publication of any report that may be in preparation.

### Bus Services (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of local bus services in the Buckingham constituency; and if he will list the bus routes cancelled since 1997. [22653]

**Ms Keeble:** Local authorities have the primary role in assessing whether bus service needs in their area are being met adequately by current provision. I understand that Buckinghamshire county council carried out an assessment of the bus service provision in Buckingham, by parish, when preparing their local transport plan, and that their view is that in general the bus services there have been gradually improving since 1997. No data are available on which bus services have been withdrawn in the Buckingham constituency since 1997.

### London Underground

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the changes were in the average real fare on London Underground in each year since 1990–91. [22719]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The average increase across all Underground fares in relation to inflation was as follows:

| | *Average increase across all Underground fares in relation to inflation (as RPI)* |
|---|---|
| 1990 | RPI + 3 per cent. |
| 1991 | RPI + 1 per cent. |
| 1992 | RPI + 4 per cent. |
| 1993 | RPI + 7 per cent. |
| 1994 | RPI + 4 per cent. |
| 1995 | RPI + 2 per cent. |
| 1996 | RPI + 2 per cent. |
| 1997 | RPI + 1 per cent. |
| 1998 | RPI + 1 per cent. |
| 1999 | RPI + 1 per cent. |
| 2000 | RPI + 1 per cent. |
| 2001 | RPI + 0 per cent. |

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the total cost of advisory fees in respect of the London Underground PPP. [22702]

**Mr. Spellar:** I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) on 4 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 296W.

### Local Education Authorities

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list by local education authority in England, the amounts that he has *(a)* deducted for existing statutory responsibilities taken away and *(b)* added for new statutory responsibilities imposed in the provisional settlement for 2002–03. [22747]

**Dr. Whitehead:** There were two deductions for responsibilities transferred elsewhere: £1,356 million for school sixth forms to the Learning and Skills Council and £5 million for the National College for School Leadership. I have placed the figures for individual education authorities in the Libraries of the House, together with the revised Learning and Skills Council transfer amounts notified to authorities last week.

### Mobile Phone Masts

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2000, *Official Report,* column 580W, in what way he has significantly strengthened the planning arrangements for telecommunications development in respect of the siting of mobile phone masts in PPG8. [22768]

**Ms Keeble:** On 22 August this year we introduced changes that significantly improved the planning procedures and guidance for telecommunications mast

development. The changes, which included amendments to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995:

strengthened public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 metres and below so that they are the same as for planning applications;

increased the time for a local planning authority to deal with prior approval applications to 56 days;

underlined that school governors must be consulted on all proposals for new masts on or near a school or college; and

increased fees to enable authorities to carry out full public consultation.

### Uninsured Drivers

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to assist victims of road crashes caused by drivers who are not insured; and if he will make a statement. [22713]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Motor Insurers' Bureau pays compensation from a guarantee fund to victims of uninsured and untraced drivers under long-standing agreements with Government. Motor insurers fund the Bureau pro rata to the amount of insurance they sell.

**Pete Wishart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of uninsured drivers using the roads; and what plans he has to reduce this number. [22769]

**Mr. Jamieson:** It is estimated that between 4 per cent. and 6 per cent. of motorists drive while uninsured, an offence for which 300,140 people were convicted and more than 28,000 were disqualified during 1999. The motor insurers' recently established Motor Insurance Database will lead to a significant reduction in uninsured driving as police are now able to query insurance details immediately from the roadside. Police inquiries to the database are running at 22,000 a day.

### Residential Gardens (Dumping)

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to extend the scope of the planning acts to enable local authorities to deal with residential gardens which become dumping grounds for household and other rubbish; and if he will make a statement. [22714]

**Ms Keeble:** There are powers already available to local planning authorities under section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to require landowners and occupiers to clear up sites adversely affecting amenity in their area. If nothing is done, authorities can carry out the work themselves and charge the owner the cost. These powers are in addition to those available to authorities under environmental protection legislation to tackle fly-tipping and litter.

### Cherished Number Plates

**Pete Wishart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money was collected by the sale of cherished number plates in the past five years. [22770]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The gross revenue raised over the past five years as at the end of 2000–01 was £314 million.

### Uniform Business Rate

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many businesses paid uniform business rates in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997; and what was the total amount paid. [22645]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The information requested is collected only at local authority level, so figures for the Buckingham constituency are not available. Information for the local authority covering the constituency (Aylesbury Vale district council) is given in the table:

£

| | *Number of hereditaments*[1] | *Non-domestic rates paid to Aylesbury Vale district council*[2] |
|---|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 4,092 | 26,194,000 |
| 1998–99 | 4,137 | 27,234,000 |
| 1999–2000 | 4,182 | 27,717,000 |
| 2000–01 | 4,317 | 30,981,000 |
| 2001–02 | 4,365 | 31,928,000 |

[1] The number of hereditaments is taken from the National Non-Domestic Rates Provisional Contribution to the Pool Return and is based on the rating list in place on 31 December in the previous financial year. In addition to businesses, these include properties that are liable to non-domestic rates, such as schools and advertising hoardings.

[2] The figures given relate to non-domestic properties on the local rating list which, from 1 April 2000, includes those that were previously exempt crown properties. In addition, some other non-domestic properties in the area of Aylesbury Vale district council (eg gas and electricity supply networks) are on the central list and so pay non-domestic rates direct to central Government. Figures are taken from NNDR returns to the Department. Those for 2001–02 are estimates.

### Millennium Dome

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answers of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 382W, on the Millennium Dome, for what reason the Government are committed to retaining the Dome structure; by how much the value of the site is affected by the Dome structure; if the Government will sell the Dome structure separately; what the Government's estimate is of the value of the peninsular site *(a)* with and *(b)* without the Dome structure; and when the hon. Member for Cotswold will receive an answer to his question tabled on 29 November, ref. 19849. [22790]

**Ms Keeble** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Like many others, including the London borough of Greenwich, the Government are committed to the Dome staying in Greenwich. It is an important landmark on the London skyline, which has hastened the regeneration of the Greenwich Peninsula and has added to the quality and variety of world-famous structures that were already so prominent in the area. Delivering a successful future

for the Dome will build on this, ensuring continued recognition worldwide and enabling the regeneration momentum that has been established to continue.

A pre-sale valuation of the Dome site has been undertaken in the context of this process for securing a long term use for the Dome. Any valuations and Government appraisals of the financial value of the site are commercially confidential.

The question, ref. 19849, from the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton Brown) was answered on 5 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 382W.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will (1) list each proposal to lease the Millennium Dome that has been received indicating *(a)* the date it was received, *(b)* the consideration it received, *(c)* the dates of the proposed lease and *(d)* the status of each bid; [22858]

(2) make a statement on the process by which *(a)* bids for and *(b)* proposals to lease the Millennium Dome are considered; [22855]

(3) list each bid received for the Millennium Dome, indicating *(a)* the date it was received, *(b)* the consideration it received and *(c)* the status of the bid. [22857]

**Ms Keeble** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Large numbers of proposals have been received by English Partnerships. These have varied greatly in terms of substance and detail, but full consideration is given to every proposal commensurate with its nature. To reveal details of any proposals would not be conducive to a successful conclusion of relevant discussions and would be against the public interest.

The on-going market testing is exploring all avenues in relation to the long-term future use of the Dome, and on professional advice we are in discussion with a small number of serious contenders. All proposals for short-term uses are considered on their merits.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many expressions of interest have been received by *(a)* people and *(b)* undertakings interested in holding an event at the Millennium Dome over new year's eve. [22863]

**Ms Keeble** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The Ministry of Sound were the only organisation to directly express an interest and put forward a properly worked up proposal for new year's eve. This formed the basis for contractual discussions, resulting in the event that has been announced for new year's eve at the Dome.

English Partnerships have negotiated a proper commercial return from the Ministry of Sound, including a basic hire charge of £75,000 plus a share of ticket revenue. In addition, Ministry of Sound is paying for all the costs of organising the event.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people have visited the Millennium Dome since 1 July, indicating the nature and purpose of each visit. [22856]

**Ms Keeble** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The number of visits to the Dome (including repeat and work-related visits) from 1 July 2001 to 11 December 2001, and the nature of those visits, is as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Short-term use inquiries | 404 |
| Decommissioning related | 4,743 |
| Potential purchaser inquiries | 55 |
| Civil servants | 13 |
| Court visit (Millennium Diamond case) | 47 |
| Other | 68 |

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* guests and *(b)* staff of English Partnerships have been invited to attend the Ministry of Sound's new year's eve party at the Millennium Dome. [22852]

**Ms Keeble** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* As is normal business practice in event management, Ministry of Sound has offered English Partnerships a maximum of 200 complimentary tickets to the new year's eve event. These tickets have nil face value and will be taken up by English Partnerships' staff (and their immediate families) and guests. The overall attendance at the event is expected to be 40,000 people.

## Rail Passengers

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department has taken to improve the accountability of *(a)* customer views and *(b)* customer satisfaction on the railways; and if he will make a statement. [23195]

**Mr. Jamieson:** All train operating companies are required to carry out regular Customer Satisfaction Surveys to monitor passengers' perception of the quality of service they offer. If satisfaction falls below benchmarks (based on the results of surveys carried out at the time of franchising) the companies can be required to produce an action plan to remedy the problem. The Strategic Rail Authority have initiated a new National Passenger Survey (NPS) which asks passengers nationwide the same questions about service quality. This enables the Authority to compare companies against one another. As with the existing Customer Satisfaction Surveys, benchmarks for the NPS will be set in new franchise agreements.

## Out-of-town Shopping Centres

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many out-of-town shopping centres have received planning consent since 1997. [22902]

**Ms Keeble:** Since 1997 only eight out-of-town centres have been given planning permission. Out-of-town centres have been defined by the definition used for the sustainable development indicator for the location of new retail floorspace. "Out-of-town" means outside town centres and includes sites in urban areas. Centre includes all purpose-built shopping developments and factory outlet centres over 50,000 sq ft gross lettable area.

### New Homes (Greater London)

**Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new homes were built in Greater London between 2000 and 2001; and how many are *(a)* planned and *(b)* proposed between 2001 and 2003. [22948]

**Ms Keeble:** The number of new dwellings built in London in the financial year 2000–01 was 14,200. The number built in the following six months, to September 2001, was 6,300. Information on how many dwellings will be built by March 2003 is not available.

### Worcestershire SSA

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the adequacy of Worcestershire's standard spending assessment for fire services; and if he will make a statement. [23219]

**Dr. Whitehead:** Worcestershire county council is a constituent local authority of the Hereford and Worcester fire authority. For 2002–03 the fire standard spending assessment for the constituent authorities will in total be, provisionally, £16.004 million. This represents an increase of 4.9 per cent. on the current year (for Worcestershire county council this represents an increase of 4.8 per cent). It compares with an average increase of 4 per cent. for fire authorities in England.

### Boundary Changes (Deprivation Funding)

**Gillian Merron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of boundary changes on eligibility for deprivation related funds; and what was the outcome of that assessment. [23088]

**Ms Keeble:** We are aware that there is a high level of change in ward boundaries in England. We are intending to commission a project shortly that will explore, along with other issues, the extent of such change since the Indices of Deprivation 2000 were developed.

**Gillian Merron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with other departments on the impact of boundary changes on eligibility for deprivation related funds. [23091]

**Ms Keeble:** The impact of the high level of changes in ward boundaries in England has been recognised. There is work under way, led by the Office for National Statistics, to minimise the amount of change. In the longer term the intention is to develop a new system of geography to support deprivation related data which will not be subject to such change. This will be based on Census Output Areas.

### Mobile Phones

**Ms Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to deter motor vehicle drivers from using mobile phones while driving. [23081]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Highway Code makes it clear that drivers should never use hand-held mobile phones while driving and that it is best not to use hands-free phones. The Government will continue to educate drivers about the dangers of using a mobile phone while driving. The Department produces a leaflet, "mobile phones and driving", which is used by road safety officers and the police in local campaigns. We are currently preparing a new publicity campaign for early next year.

The police will continue to use existing powers to prosecute irresponsible drivers. This includes the offence of not having proper control of a vehicle, which is contrary to regulation 104 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. If an accident should occur, drivers may be prosecuted for careless or even dangerous driving.

### Satellite Television Dishes

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the planning restrictions on the siting of satellite television dishes on residential properties, including the date upon which it came in to force; and what plans he has to change the planning restrictions to take into account the change in design of satellite television dishes. [22851]

**Ms Keeble** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Class H of Part 1 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended) allows for the installation of one satellite dish on a dwelling house without a requirement for planning permission subject to limitations on the size of the dish and the position of the dish on the building. In environmentally sensitive areas, such as Conservation Areas and National Parks, there are additional requirements relating to the position of the dish on the building and the height of the building. The permitted development right derives from the Town and Country Planning General Development (Amendment) (No 2) Order 1985 which came into force on 1 March 1986.

As indicated in our Broadband Strategy, published on 3 December 2001, we shall review planning regulations relating to satellite terminals to determine how current rules could be relaxed to facilitate broadband deployment, while continuing to minimise the environmental and visual impact of residential satellite terminals.

### Neighbourhood Renewal Unit

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what reports the neighbourhood renewal unit is planning to publish on *(a)* social exclusion and older people and *(b)* the involvement of older people in neighbourhood renewal initiatives. [23292]

**Ms Keeble:** The neighbourhood renewal unit is not planning to publish any reports on social exclusion and older people in the near future. Engaging members of the local community to take decisions on solving local problems is a central aspect of neighbourhood renewal. This involves ensuring that groups which are often hard to reach are involved in and benefit from neighbourhood renewal activity. The neighbourhood renewal unit has developed a race strategy to ensure that this is the case in relation to black and minority ethnic communities. This strategy will be used as a pathfinder for other groups, including older people. Work on this will take into

consideration the work of the Better Government for Older People programme which was launched in 1998 to improve public services for older people.

### South West Regional Assembly

**Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the South West regional assembly has provided support to the South West regional convention; and if he will make a statement. [23626]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The South West regional assembly has been established voluntarily by bodies representing the interests of the region. Its running costs are a matter for the assembly and its members. However, I understand that it has not provided any support for the South West constitutional convention.

### Planning

**Dr. Jack Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he proposes to consult on procedures for involving Parliament in speeding up the processing of major infrastructure projects in the planning system. [23909]

**Mr. Byers:** In July I announced a package of measures to streamline the handling in the planning system of major infrastructure projects, such as new airports, runways, rail links and roads. The objective was to speed up the decision-making process so as to cut the delay, cost and uncertainty of the present process, while making sure that people continue to be properly involved and have the opportunity to make their views known.

The package comprised:

up-to-date statements of Government policy before major infrastructure projects are considered in the planning system to help reduce inquiry time spent on debating the policy;

an improved regional framework which will assist consideration of individual projects (e.g. through the revised arrangements for Regional Planning Guidance);

new procedures to give Parliament the opportunity to approve projects in principle before consideration of the details at inquiry;

improved inquiry procedures for major infrastructure projects;

improved arrangements for compulsory purchase and compensation.

We are today publishing a consultation paper setting out our detailed proposals for new parliamentary procedures. Copies are being laid before both Houses. The deadline for comment is 22 March 2002.

It is right that Parliament should have the opportunity to consider infrastructure projects of major importance to the country and to the economy. Parliament's involvement will add weight and accountability to the process without reducing the opportunities for people to have their say. Parliament's endorsement of the principle of, need for and location of a project will speed up the decision-making process by removing the necessity for the subsequent planning inquiry to look at these issues. We propose to underpin this with new powers for Planning Inspectors to focus discussion at the inquiry, which will just look at the details of implementing the project on the ground. The final decision on a project will rest with the Secretary of State.

Our proposals give people a clear opportunity to make their views known before Parliament debates the issues. They provide a mechanism for people to make objections or other representations about a proposed project. Parliament would have copies of all of them and a summary. In addition, the parliamentary stage would be preceded by development of a statement of Government policy, on the content of which there would normally be prior public consultation, and people can express their views at a subsequent inquiry on the detailed aspects of the scheme.

These opportunities for people to be involved at three key stages of the process would be over and above the consultations between developers and local people on proposed projects before an application for planning consent is submitted. We want local people to be involved as early as possible in shaping proposals affecting them and the areas in which they live.

Introducing the new procedures would require primary legislation. This will be brought forward when parliamentary time allows.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the planning Green Paper will propose that spatial development strategies no longer be decided at county council level. [22391]

**Ms Keeble:** I refer the hon. Member to chapter 4 of our consultation paper entitled "Planning: delivering a fundamental change".

### Revenue Support Grant (West Sussex)

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what weighting was given in the recent provisional revenue support grant figures for West Sussex county council to *(a)* pressures on social services for the elderly, *(b)* changes in transport costs for education and social services and *(c)* flood damage in West Sussex caused by last year's heavy rains; and if he will make a statement. [23653]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Government looked at the pressures facing local government when setting the spending plans for 2001–02 to 2003–04 in the Spending Review 2000. Those spending plans provide for good increases in grant to local authorities overall. Our proposals for the funding of local authority revenue expenditure next year provide real terms increases for education, social services and environmental, protective and cultural services. The proposals include the £300 million over the SR2000 plans which the Government have provided for this year and the next to assist councils in building care capacity.

In allocating the overall level of funding between authorities, the SSA formulae recognise that pressures on social services are higher for some authorities than for others. For example, they take account of the size of the elderly population in each authority and other factors such as deprivation. General grant to West Sussex in 2002–03 under our proposals is £343 million which is an increase of £22.5 million or 7 per cent. on a like for like comparison. This is above the average for comparable authorities.

The Government have also provided £26 million in emergency financial assistance through the Bellwin scheme to councils affected by flood damage as a result of last year's heavy rains. West Sussex county council received £6 million. Revenue expenditure by West Sussex on flood defence not covered through the Bellwin scheme is taken account of in the calculation of West Sussex's flood defence SSA.

In addition, recognising the severity of last year's floods, the Environment Agency in Sussex has benefited from £1.1 million for emergency response and repair costs and £0.2 million for design and feasibility costs of river strategies. It will also receive a grant for the capital programme of £9.6 million in 2002–03.

### Remote-controlled Model Aircraft

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the use of remote-controlled model aircraft in areas used by the general public. [23402]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Department offers to local authorities standard forms of byelaws to prohibit or regulate the use of power-driven model aircraft, including those controlled by radio-signal, in pleasure grounds and open spaces. Before making this type of byelaw, local authorities are advised to bring their proposals to the notice of the British Model Flying Association and of any local model aircraft clubs, and consider their views.

### Flood Plains

**Mr. MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make an assessment of the need for special consideration where water from a site drains to a flood plain in the context of the PPG25 Guidance. [23538]

**Ms Keeble:** PPG25 already indicates that applications of such a size or nature relative to the receiving watercourse/drainage system that there could be a significant increase in surface water run-off from the area are likely to require particular consideration of flood risk issues. This applies whether a development is within the flood plain or is outside it but drains into the flood plain.

PPG25 also advises that developers should carry out an assessment of the flood-risk and run-off implications of their proposals that is appropriate to the scale and nature of the development and the risks involved. In particular it advises that the run-off implications of development for all areas are controlled, where possible, through the use of sustainable drainage systems.

### RAF Staff College, Bracknell

**Mr. MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the calculation of his inspector in the report on the Bracknell Borough Local Plan regarding the limits on the number of dwellings in the development of the RAF staff college site in Bracknell. [23540]

**Ms Keeble:** I understand that the area referred to is included in the council's draft local plan, which has been assessed by an independent inspector after a public inquiry. It is a matter for the local council to take forward the recommendations of the inspector. The Secretary of State also comments on draft plans and did so in this case, supporting the independent inspector's conclusions.

**Mr. MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will limit the built area of the site at the RAF staff college site, Bracknell, to 25 hectares. [23536]

**Ms Keeble:** The details of any site are a matter for the local authority who have primary responsibility for the planning of their area. I also understand that there is an outstanding planning application for the site, so cannot comment on the details of this application.

**Mr. MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the Inspector's report on the Bracknell Borough Local Plan, relating to the impact on local roads of the construction of housing on the site of the RAF staff college. [23537]

**Ms Keeble:** The Inspector charged with examining the Draft Local Plan's proposals had the benefit of hearing views on the traffic impacts of this proposal and recognised the need for measures to address the issue, before making his recommendations. The Council will also be able to assess transport impacts as part of their consideration of any planning application.

### Postal Votes

**Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many votes were cast by post during the 2000 Greater London Authority elections *(a)* in absolute terms, *(b)* as a percentage of all valid and non-valid votes cast and *(c)* as a percentage of the London electorate. [23367]

**Dr. Whitehead:** There is no central figure for the number of votes cast by post during the 2000 GLA elections.

### Fire Service (Shropshire)

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will *(a)* introduce a spatial factor and *(b)* increase the total for fire service funding for Shropshire and The Wrekin. [22390]

**Dr. Whitehead:** As a combined fire authority, Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority draws its revenue funding from its constituent local authorities, namely Shropshire county council and Telford and Wrekin council. As part of the provisional local government finance settlement, announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 167, the total fire standard spending assessment for those authorities would be increased from £9.267 million in the current year to £9.461 million in 2002–03.

There are no plans to make changes to SSA formula methodology for 2002–03. However, the Government are committed to funding the fire service by a means of grant distribution that is fairer, more stable, and free from perverse incentives. It is therefore working up proposals in partnership with local government for reformed grant allocation formulae to be introduced in 2003–04. One of the options, which is being considered as part of this review, is the inclusion of a sparsity indicator in the fire

funding formula. The Government are also willing to consider proposals for other spatial measures which might be included in the formula.

### Local Government (Electronic Delivery)

**Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out the allocations he intends to make available next year under the local government Online project. [23876]

**Mr. Raynsford:** We have recently published the Local Government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" setting out our vision for a stronger local government and improved public services. E-government is essential to that vision and many councils are seizing this opportunity to transform the way they deliver services and engage their communities.

To this end the Government have committed £350 million over three years to support putting local government online. So far, £25 million has been allocated to 24 pathfinder projects (with a further pathfinder being funded under the Invest to Save Budget) to develop new approaches which can be shared with the wider government community.

We expect all councils to rise to this challenge, and deliver e-enabled services by 2005. To help them achieve this the Government intend, subject to the agreement of Parliament, to provide a capital grant of £200,000 each to 398 local authorities in 2002–03 to support proposals contained in their Implementing Electronic Government (IEG). Subject to demonstrating that they have made good progress, and have used the first tranche of money to good effect, we also intend them to receive a further £200,000 each in 2003–04. We will accordingly lay a Special Grant report before the House setting out this intention, in the near future.

We have also made provision for financial support to facilitate partnerships both between local authorities, and between local authorities and other public bodies, as well as for further national projects available for use by all local authorities.

We shall be writing to leading potential partnerships between councils and with other public services seeking further evidence of how their partnership will contribute to delivering joined up, e-enabled services.

We have struck a balance between resources for individual councils to help them meet local priorities, support for partnerships, pathfinders and other national projects which provide the essential building blocks for every council to use.

The draft national local government Online strategy to be published early in the new year will set out how we will continue to support pathfinders, and seek views on new national products which can help all councils move quickly and cost effectively toward the standards of e-enabled service offered by the best. We will announce detailed plans for the remainder of the funding in the new year alongside the publication of this strategy.

### Nuclear Decommissioning

**Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate she has made of the financial costs involved in disposing of nuclear waste and decommissioning nuclear power stations over the last 20 years; and what future projections she has made for the next 10 years. [22295]

**Mr. Wilson:** I have been asked to reply.

Expenditure by the Liabilities Management Authority is expected to be approximately £1 billion a year over the next 10–15 years. The other information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

## TREASURY

### e-tendering

**Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress towards meeting the target on e-tendering for Government business. [24095]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** We are currently piloting an internet-based electronic tendering service (OGC Tendertrust) with 10 Departments. This pilot will ensure that the whole of Government have access to a service that will assure the delivery, security and integrity of tenders across the internet and authenticate all parties to the transaction. This service uses digital certificates and smartcards and has received formal Government security accreditation. The evidence from the pilot shows that further work is needed to maintain the right level of security and encourage take up of the service. We will therefore revise our target of sending and receiving 100 per cent. of tenders electronically by December 2002.

### VAT

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce the experimental reduced VAT rate scheme for labour intensive services agreed in October 1999; and if he will make a statement. [23105]

**Mr. Boateng:** The experimental scheme agreed in 1999 gave member states the option to apply a reduced VAT rate to a limited range of labour intensive services during the calendar years 2000, 2001 and 2002. The Isle of Man applies a reduced VAT rate of 5 per cent. under the scheme to renovation and repairs of domestic housing. The Chancellor has no plans for the UK to participate further.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has collated on which EU countries have elected to use the experimental reduced VAT rate scheme for labour intensive services. [23106]

**Mr. Boateng:** Belgium, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and the UK (on behalf of the Isle of Man only) apply the experimental reduced rate of VAT to certain labour-intensive services.

### Tax Credits Bill

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions concerning *(a)* rates and *(b)* tapers were used in preparing the regulatory impact assessment for the Tax Credits Bill. [22985]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The regulatory impact assessment assumes, for illustrative purposes only, that the current systems of support are replicated as closely as possible.

### Defence Expenditure

**Rachel Squire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the £100 million on defence expenditure he cited in his pre-Budget statement is the same money as the £107 million announced in the Ministry of Defence's Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2001–02. [22949]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** No. The increase in total DEL for the Ministry of Defence of £107.080 million announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 909W, arises from the winter Supplementary Estimate presented to the House on 29 November (Cm. 5303). On the resource side, it comprises primarily the take-up of DEL end-year flexibility and the consequences of Machinery of Government changes, while the minor increase in capital also arises from a Machinery of Government change.

The sum of up to £100 million that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his pre-Budget report has not yet been included in Supplementary Estimates.

### Departmental Underspending

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much underspend there was in real terms in each year between May 1997 and April 2000 in the *(a)* Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and *(b)* Home Office. [13205]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The table sets out details of cash underspends at 1999–2000 prices for spending by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Home Office. For 1999–2000 underspends are measured against final Departmental Expenditure Limits (introduced on 1 April 1999) and for 1997–98 against final cash limits within the Control Total.

*£000*[1]

| | *1999–2000* | *1998–99* | *1997–98* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions[2] | 800,690 | 226,342 | 80,195 |
| Home Office | 147,948 | 22,999 | 48,795 |

[1] 1999–2000 prices
[2] Main DEL

### National Health Service

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy to raise the level of one tax in order to pay for increased expenditure on the national health service. [22035]

**Dawn Primarolo:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 526W.

### International Tax Recoveries

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answers of 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 374W, 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 360W, and 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1217W, on international tax recoveries, how much of the £499 million recovered in tax by International Division from the taxpayers paying more than £100 million in the year ended 31 March 2000, was made up of *(a)* interest and *(b)* penalties; and what the totals paid by them were for each of these categories of payment in that year. [22124]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The £499 million included interest of £75 million. No penalty was levied.

### Taper Relief

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the cost of taper relief for financial years *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [22192]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The costs of capital gains tax taper relief for 2000–01 and 2001–02 are given in the Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs, which was published on 27 November 2001. Estimates for future years are highly dependent on assumed growth in asset values.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the reasons for the change in the cost of taper relief for financial years *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 between November 2000 and November 2001 tax ready reckoners; and if he will make a statement. [22191]

**Dawn Primarolo:** For 1999–2000, taper relief was only available in respect of disposals of business assets. For long held assets, the proportion chargeable was 85 per cent.

For 2000–01, taper relief was also available for non-business assets. The proportion chargeable was 95 per cent. for long held non-business assets and 75 per cent. for long held business assets.

For 2001–02, the proportion chargeable reduces to 50 per cent. for long held business assets and 90 per cent. for long held non-business assets.

The change in cost of taper relief between years reflects the progressive maturity of these taper relief structures as well as such factors as asset values, volumes of disposals and tax rates and allowances.

The change, between November 2000 and November 2001, in the estimates of the cost of taper relief for 2000–01, reflects changes in the underlying estimate of CGT liability for that year (liabilities for 2000–01 are mostly paid in 2001–02). This is due to new information on asset prices and disposal volumes through 2000–01 and higher than expected CGT receipts in 2000–01.

### Social Security Contributions

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the reason for the change in the seasonal pattern of social security contributions in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2000–02; and if he will make a statement. [22193]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Figures for social security contributions on an accrued basis are published in table PSF3 of the monthly National Statistics first release on the Public Sector Finances. The source of a key part of the data has changed from the Government Actuary's Department to Inland Revenue, and the new methodology, which has been implemented from the figures for 2000–01 onwards, better reflects the true quarterly pattern. Published figures on cash receipts are not affected by this change.

### R and D Tax Credit

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration the Chancellor is giving to a regional enhancement to his research and development tax credit for the assisted areas; and if he will make a statement. [22467]

**Dawn Primarolo:** A further consultation on the design of a "volume-based" R and D tax credit for large companies was launched on 4 December 2001. It aims to inform the detailed design of the scheme. There are no plans to introduce enhanced R and D tax credits for specific regions.

### Tax

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the recommendation of the Tax Law Committee's memorandum relating to the tax law on transfer of assets between spouses following separation and divorce; and what estimate he has made of the cost of extending the time period by a further two years in which assets could be transferred between separated spouses without any gain or loss of treatment as advised by the Tax Law Committee; and if he will make a statement. [22465]

**Dawn Primarolo:** We have noted the recommendation by the Tax Law Committee.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the extent to which the lower rate of income tax has achieved its objective of reducing in-work poverty; if he will place such studies in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [22468]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The introduction of the 10p rate of income tax in April 1999, together with its widening in April 2001, is worth between £100 and £188 a year to taxpayers, with the largest gains going to the low paid. Together with the cut in the basic rate of income tax and the reforms to national insurance contributions introduced during the last Parliament, the 10p rate is worth £330 a year to a single person working full-time on the minimum wage. This represents a 30 per cent. reduction in their combined income tax and national insurance bill, compared to the 1997 system.

The Government's approach to tackling poverty and making work pay has been set out in the series of reports: "The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System" published alongside Budgets and pre-Budget reports over the last four years. All of these reports are available in the House of Commons Library.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the change in tax liability for a median taxpayer if the lower rate and basic rate of tax were amalgamated at 22 per cent.; and what estimate he has made of the savings in compliance costs from such a change to the Inland Revenue and the taxpayer. [22463]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The estimates requested are not available.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the opinion of the Tax Law Committee on the impact of the number of tax rates; and if he will make a statement. [22464]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Government keep the whole tax system under review, acting where possible to change tax rules to remove complexity in line with its objective of a modern and fair tax system.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the opinion in the memorandum on tax reform by the Tax Law Committee on the taper relief system for capital gains tax and compliance costs; what estimates he has made of the costs of compliance for taper relief; and what estimate he had made of the proportion of taxpayers who benefit from the taper. [22466]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Taper relief is an intrinsically simple system: the taxpayer decides whether an asset has been a business asset or a non-business asset and then applies a percentage figure from a table to reduce the amount of gain charged to tax depending on how long the asset has been held.

Our proposal to reduce the length of the business assets taper to two years will ease that calculation in many cases, and we are currently considering suggestions for further amendments to the details of the taper relief rules which have been proposed in response to our consultation on simplifying Capital Gains Tax.

The Inland Revenue has a programme of compliance cost research and will study the taper system once it has had time to settle in and data become available. The Inland Revenue estimate that about 85 per cent. of those paying Capital Gains Tax in 2002–03 will benefit from taper relief.

### Uninsured Drivers

**Pete Wishart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the loss incurred to public funds as a result of drivers not being insured in the past five years. [22772]

**Ruth Kelly:** No such estimate has been made.

### Beer Duty

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress towards introducing a system of progressive beer duty. [22912]

**Mr. Boateng:** The Government have announced that they are minded to introduce a reduced rate of duty on the beer produced by small breweries. Customs and Excise are consulting with the main brewers' representatives. A decision will be announced in Budget 2002.

### Airline Industry

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 328W, on the airline industry, if he will extend the scheme beyond January. [23237]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The UK replacement insurance scheme for the aviation industry has been extended until 22 January 2002, in line with European guidelines. EC

guidelines say that Government schemes may run until the end of January, with a final deadline for schemes of the end of March 2002.

The Government have no intention of intervening permanently in the aviation insurance market. The temporary Government scheme was set up with the objective of encouraging the return of commercial insurance at an appropriate market rate. The scheme will be withdrawn as more commercial insurance becomes available.

### Inward Investment (US)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to assure US investors that public-private partnerships in the UK are attractive investment opportunities. [15269]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are undertaken to deliver value for money services for the taxpayer, combining the complementary skills and experience of the public and private sectors.

Extensive information on individual PPPs is made available by departments to interested parties through the *Official Journal* of the European Communities and other channels, and appropriate opportunities for public-private partnerships are promoted by Partnerships UK.

### Public Spending

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlay the decision to review the consistency of (1) incentives to budget holders with guidance to budget holders through the Green Book, as described in the Treasury document, 'Planning sustainable public spending', paragraph 61; and if he will make a statement; [22500]

(2) guidance to budget holders through the Green Book with best practice as described in the Treasury document, 'Planning sustainable public spending'; and if he will make a statement. [22499]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** As paragraph 61 of the document referred to sets out, the purpose of the review is to ensure that the project appraisal and capital approval system embodies best practice.

### Development Assistance

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what development assistance spending has been as a percentage of gross national product in each of the last 20 years. [18189]

**Mr. Boateng** *[holding answer 25 November 2001]:* The ODA/GNP ratio is an input target whose elements are set by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The Government remain committed to reaching the 0.7 target of Overseas Development Assistance as a percentage of GNP, we are steadily increasing the DfID budget—45 per cent. in real terms by 2003–04, the largest UK development assistance budget ever in real as well as cash terms. Development assistance as a percentage of GNP will rise to 0.33 per cent. in 2003–04, up from 0.26 per cent. in 1997.

DfID's publication "Statistics on International Development" (ISBN 186192397X), shows the UK's ODA/GNP ratio for the last 25 years.

### Capital Gains Tax

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the reduction in the level of capital gains tax receipts in each of the next five years as a result of the reduction in the capital gains tax rate from 40 per cent. to 10 per cent. for assets held for longer periods; and if he will make a statement. [22475]

**Dawn Primarolo** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The total costs of capital gains tax taper relief for business and non-business assets for 2000–01 and 2001–02 are given in the Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs, which was published on 27 November 2001. These are £360 million and £580 million respectively. Estimates for future years are highly dependent on assumed growth in asset values.

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the effect on the yield from the upper income tax rate of 40 per cent. as a consequence of the introduction of a capital gains tax rate of 10 per cent.; and if he will make a statement. [22476]

**Dawn Primarolo** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The proposed modifications to the taper relief rules for business assets are not expected to diminish the income tax yield to any significant extent because the effective capital gains tax rate of 10 per cent. will not be reached until the asset in question has been held for two years, and because there are rules already in place ensuring that income is charged to income tax.

We shall, however, be keeping the position under close review and will not hesitate to take action to protect the income tax yield if tax avoidance schemes for turning income into capital are introduced.

### National Insurance

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total number of (1) employees with earnings above the national insurance contribution ceiling; [22241]

(2) earnings by employees in excess of the national insurance contributions ceiling. [22240]

**Dawn Primarolo** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* It is estimated that total earnings over the Upper Earnings Limit of £500 per week for Class 1 Employee Contributions in 1999–2000 were £48.3 billion; and that the average weekly number of employees earning over £500 per week during 1999–2000 was 3.8 million.

These estimates were provided by the Government Actuary's Department and are the latest available figures.

### War-risk Insurance (Airline)

**John Barrett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money has been given to each airline to underwrite their third party war risk insurance. [22964]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Government have not given money to UK airlines to underwrite their third party war risk insurance. The scheme set up by the Government on

24 September provides cover to fill the gap in the market; airlines are offered insurance above that which is currently available in the market up to the level at which they were insured before the terrorist attacks on the US.

Airlines and aviation service providers are charged a commercially based premium for cover under the scheme, although for the first month of the scheme charges were waived for airlines in recognition of the particular financial difficulties they faced in the immediate aftermath of 11 September. Premiums charged to airlines and service providers are in line with European guidelines.

Before 11 September, war and terrorism insurance was included in the premium for the airlines' primary policy. The airlines still hold this: the premiums charged for Government insurance are over and above the premiums for the primary policy.

### Working Families Tax Credit

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 203W, on working families tax credit, how many people are in receipt of the various components of working families tax credit with a final income of *(a)* 20 to 30 per cent., *(b)* 30 to 40 per cent., *(c)* 40 to 50 per cent., *(d)* 50 to 60 per cent., *(e)* 60 to 70 per cent., *(f)* 70 to 80 per cent., *(g)* 80 to 90 per cent. and *(h)* 90 to 100 per cent. more than initial income. [22667]

**Dawn Primarolo:** It is estimated from the Family Resources Survey that, under the working families' tax credit (WFTC) regime applying to awards starting from June 2001, the numbers of such families are in the following table:

*Estimated number of families for which WFTC increases net income by between 20 and 100 per cent. under the June 2001 WFTC regime*

| *Percentage increase in final net income[1] over initial net income[1]* | *Families (Thousands)* |
|---|---|
| *(a)* 20 to less than 30 | 180 |
| *(b)* 30 to less than 40 | 120 |
| *(c)* 40 to less than 50 | 90 |
| *(d)* 50 to less than 60 | 50 |
| *(e)* 60 to less than 70 | 30 |
| *(f)* 70 to less than 80 | 40 |
| *(g, h)*[2] 80 to less than 100 | 30 |

[1] Final net income is as projected, including estimated entitlement to WFTC, housing benefit (HB) and council tax benefit (CTB). Initial net income if this less the estimated entitlement to WFTC, plus any consequent increase in estimated entitlement to HB and CTB.

[2] The sample size is too small to yield separate reliable estimates for *(g)* and *(h)*.

*Notes:*

1. Estimates are derived from 1999–2000 FRS with incomes projected forward to 2001–02 and assuming the 2001–02 regimes for income tax and national insurance contributions. They are subject to sampling error.

2. Survey results are calibrated to the number of families on maximum WFTC awards yielded by administrative data.

### Business Administration

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses in the Buckingham constituency are *(a)* administering working families tax credit, *(b)* providing access to stakeholder pensions and *(c)* administering repayment of student loans. [22639]

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses in the Epsom and Ewell constituency are *(a)* administering working families tax credit, *(b)* providing access to stakeholder pensions and *(c)* administering repayment of student loans. [23425]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The information is either not available, or could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Exchange Rate

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the 2001 IMF Article IV, consultation Concluding Statement, assessment of the impact of the level of the pound on the manufacturing sector; and if he will make a statement. [23758]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Government's latest forecast for manufacturing output was published in the pre-Budget Report (Cm 5318) and takes account of all relevant factors, while Annex A, Box A5 discusses recent developments in the manufacturing sector.

### Benefits (Fareham)

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the Fareham constituency *(a)* received and *(b)* were entitled to (i) WFTC, (ii) DPTC and (iii) child tax credit in (A) 2000–01 and (B) 2001–02. [22983]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Estimates of the numbers in the Fareham constituency receiving the working families tax credit (WFTC) and the disabled person's tax credit are published in the respective Quarterly Inquiries, copies of which are in the Library. The estimates for WFTC are however based on 5 per cent. samples of awards, and are therefore subject to sampling error. No estimates are available of the numbers in Fareham who are eligible for those tax credits.

It is estimated that about five million families will benefit from the children's tax credit for 2001–02. Figures for each constituency are not available, but it is estimated that about 675,000 of these families are in the south-east (excluding London).

### Journalists

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what EU funds are available to *(a)* train and *(b)* facilitate the activities of journalists; and what representations he has made on them. [22935]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Community budget is implemented by the European Commission in accordance with the Treaty, EC legislative decisions and the amounts agreed annually by the budgetary authority (Council and European Parliament). Any individual or organisation may make a case to the Commission for support from the budget; for example there is an EC subsidy available for the "Journalists in Europe" association.

### Annuities

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will amend the rules governing annuities so that it is not compulsory for pensioners to translate all relevant funds into an annuity at the age of 75. [22738]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Government's policy on annuities and proposals for reform will be set out in a consultation document which will be published shortly.

### Carbon Trust

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the forecast cost of the Carbon Trust over *(a)* the present and *(b)* the subsequent three financial years. [20471]

**Mr. Meacher:** I have been asked to reply.

The Carbon Trust's first year funding from Government and the devolved Administrations is expected to be around £50 million, from Climate Change Levy receipts and the Government's Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme.

For the following two years it is anticipated that the Trust will continue to receive funding of around £50 million per year from the Government and devolved Administrations subject to relevant parliamentary approvals. The forecast funding of the Carbon Trust beyond this time is subject to the outcome of forthcoming Spending Reviews.

## PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

### Staff Numbers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the President of the Council how many people were employed in his Department in each of the last four years. [23792]

**Mr. Robin Cook:** The information requested is as follows:

| *Year* | *Number of staff*[1] |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 33 |
| 1998–99 | 31 |
| 1999–2000 | 29 |
| 2000–01 | 41 |

[1] As published in The Departmental Report 2001, Cm 5199, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

### Departmental Sickness

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the President of the Council how many days were lost owing to sickness absence by staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [23377]

**Mr. Robin Cook:** The information requested is as follows:

| *Year ending 31 December* | *Number of days lost to sick absence* |
|---|---|
| 1997 | 265 |
| 1998 | 295 |
| 1999 | 178 |
| 2000 | 363 |

As a small Department the Privy Council Office is not included in the published annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service" but it is fully committed to working to the overall target to reduce the level of sick absence to five days per person by 2003. The Privy Council Office Service Delivery Agreement confirms this commitment and our requirement to monitor sickness levels quarterly.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Regulations

**Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many regulations her Department has proposed to Parliament since June; what regulatory impact assessments have been made for those regulations her Department has implemented in 2001; and what plans her Department has to reduce the number of regulations affecting small businesses. [21970]

**Dr. Howells:** My Department has proposed the following regulations since June 2001:

The Broadcasting (Subtitling) Order 2001

The European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2001

The Football Spectators (Seating) Order 2001

The Gaming Act (Variation of Monetary Limits) Order 2001

The Gaming Machines (Maximum Prizes) Regulations 2001

The National Lottery (Licence Fees) Order 2001

The Protection of Wrecks (Designation) Order 2001

The draft Regulatory Reform (Golden Jubilee Licensing) Order 2002

The Regulatory Reform (Special Occasions Licensing) Order 2001

The Safety of Sports Grounds (Designation) Order 2001.

Regulatory impact assessments were published in respect of the eighth and ninth items on this list. The Department also published a regulatory impact assessment on 5 December 2001 on the National Heritage Bill, which is currently before Parliament. In addition, a regulatory impact assessment previously published by the Home Office, on four sets of regulations to do with increases in gaming and lotteries fees, was re-published on my Department's internet site on 28 November 2001.

My Department's contribution to the Government's forthcoming Regulatory Reform Action Plan will reaffirm our commitment to important regulatory reforms, such as modernising regulation of the converging telecommunications and broadcasting sectors, reforming alcohol and entertainment licensing law and reforming gambling law and regulation.

### BBC3

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what date she received the revised proposals from the BBC for BBC3; by what process she will determine her decision on the new proposals; and on what date she will announce her decision on the new proposals. [22362]

**Dr. Howells** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State received a new proposal from the BBC for BBC3 on 4 December. My

right hon. Friend will consider the proposal against my published guidelines for assessing BBC public services approvals. In accordance with these guidelines, my right hon. Friend has invited comments on the proposals from interested parties. The consultation period will end on 25 January 2002. Having given proper consideration to all the information and responses received, my right hon. Friend will announce my decision as soon as possible thereafter.

### Ecotourism

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps the Government have taken to participate in the International Year of Ecotourism 2002; and if she will make a statement. [22496]

**Dr. Howells:** The Government have made no plans to participate in the United Nations International Year of Ecotourism.

### Free TV Licences

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pensioners over 75 in the Buckingham constituency receive a free television licence. [22637]

**Dr. Howells:** Everyone aged 75 or over is entitled to benefit from a free television licence. TV Licensing, which administers this concession for the BBC as Licensing Authority, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 4,300 people aged 75 or over in the Buckingham constituency.

### Digitally Originated Graphics

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 502W, on digitally originated graphics, what assessment she has made of the *(a)* benefits and *(b)* disadvantages to television viewers of the use of on screen digitally originated graphics, other than electronic programme guides, to identify and promote (i) television channels, (ii) programme strands, (iii) internet links and (iv) other programmes. [22797]

**Dr. Howells** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The Government have made no such assessment.

### Culture Online

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will make an announcement on the funding arrangements for Culture Online; and when it will open. [22843]

**Dr. Howells** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* We are currently considering a number of options for Culture Online. We hope to make an announcement in the near future.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Kaufman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she intends to reply to the letter to her dated 6 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Ms Pamela Flynn. [23807]

**Tessa Jowell:** I replied to my right hon. Friend on 22 November 2001 and I have sent him another copy of my reply.

### Pirate Tapes

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the costs (1) to *(a)* the television industry and *(b)* the Exchequer of illegal copying in each of the last five years; [22988]

(2) to *(a)* the music industry and *(b)* the Exchequer of illegal copying of music in each of the last five years; [22986]

(3) to *(a)* the film industry and *(b)* the Exchequer of illegal copying of films in each of the last five years; [22987]

(4) to *(a)* the arts industry and *(b)* the Exchequer of illegal copying in each of the last five years. [22989]

**Dr. Howells:** The Government recognise the importance of combating counterfeiting and piracy for all the creative industries, and are working with the industries concerned towards achieving this objective. My Department does not collect independent figures for the financial impact piracy has on these industries and the Exchequer. Figures from a survey carried out by the Alliance Against Counterfeiting and Piracy indicate, however, that the cost of counterfeiting and piracy to UK industry as a whole was almost £9 billion in 2000, an increase of 8.36 per cent. on the figure for 1999. This is estimated to be equivalent to approximately £1.55 billion in lost revenue to the Exchequer. Within this total, it is estimated that the loss to the music industry in 2000 was £20 million and to cinema and home entertainment £180 million. There are no separate sectoral figures for the arts and television industries.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Human Rights Commission

**Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Government intend to respond to the recommendations made in the report on its effectiveness submitted by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to the Secretary of State in February in accordance with section 69(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and if he will make a statement. [22457]

**Jane Kennedy:** We are pleased to have received the report from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and are currently considering the Commission's recommendations.

The report is 78 pages and contains 25 recommendations. Detailed consideration is at present being given to the recommendations, all of which recommend changes to primary legislation. Given the importance and complexity of the proposals, the Government intend to publish its report in the new year.

### Departmental Sickness

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many days were lost owing to sickness absence by staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [23376]

**Jane Kennedy:** The Northern Ireland Office is committed to the effective management of sick absence and our current Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) sets out our proposal to reduce average sickness absence rates for Home Civil Servants (HCS) during the planning period as follows:

*Average sick absence targets (HCS staff)*

| | *Target* |
|---|---|
| Baseline (1998) | 6.5 absences per staff year |
| 2001–02 | [1]5.2 absences per staff year |
| 2002–03 | [2]4.9 absences per staff year |
| 2003–04 | [3]4.6 absences per staff year |

[1] 20 per cent. saving
[2] 25 per cent. saving
[3] 30 per cent. saving

It will seek reductions of a similar order for the larger Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) group in the Department in conjunction with other Northern Ireland Departments.

Within the last four years sick absence data are available only for 1998 and 1999. The figures are as follows:

1999: 8.0 absences per staff year

1998: 6.5 absences per staff year.

Figures are not available in a comparable format for the NICS staff group.

### Electoral Fraud

**Lady Hermon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to use national insurance numbers to help eliminate electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. [21819]

**Mr. Browne:** I have noted the arguments pressing for the inclusion of national insurance numbers as one of the items of personal information required of an elector in Northern Ireland on registration. I am looking closely at how national insurance numbers might be used in the electoral process and whether their use would help our efforts to combat fraud.

### European Court Judgments

**Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Government intend to change the law to comply with the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights delivered on 4 May in the cases of Jordan *v.* UK, Kelly *v.* UK, McKerr *v.* UK and Shanaghan *v.* UK; and if he will make a statement. [22458]

**Jane Kennedy:** As a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights, the Government take very seriously the findings of the European Court of Human Rights. The Court's 4 May judgments identified a procedural breach of Article 2 of the Convention with respect to the regimes in place at the time to investigate deaths caused by the security forces. However, the Court was not prescriptive about the mechanisms the Government should put in place in order to comply with their obligations under Article 2. This is a matter for the Government to determine in consultation with the Committee of Ministers (the Council of Europe body that oversees the implementation of European Court judgments) in Strasbourg.

The Government are giving active consideration to a package of measures necessary to satisfy our Article 2 obligations and have already been in contact with the Committee of Ministers. Finalising the package of measures has proved a detailed exercise, requiring wide-ranging consultation across Government Departments, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on such discussions.

I should point out that some areas that caused the Court concern have already been addressed, notably through the establishment of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. The Government have also indicated the strong likelihood that they will remove Rule 9(2) of the Coroners Rules (Northern Ireland) 1963, dealing with compellability, and the Belfast Coroner was so advised on 14 September.

The Government are committed publicly to finalising their response in time for the next meeting of the Committee of Ministers, expected in February 2002. Our final decision with respect to the changes that we intend to make to comply with Article 2 will therefore be a matter of public knowledge very shortly.

### Saville Inquiry

**Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost of the Saville inquiry is to date; and what estimate he has made of the cost of the whole inquiry. [19773]

**Mr. Browne:** The cost of the Bloody Sunday inquiry to the Northern Ireland Office, as at 4 December 2001, is £52 million. The current estimated cost to the Northern Ireland Office for the whole inquiry is £100 million. This figure assumes that the rates of payment to lawyers remain as at present for the remainder of the inquiry, and makes no allowance for any change of venue which may follow the divisional court's judgment of 16 November 2001, currently subject to appeal. Neither of these figures includes cost to other Departments such as the Ministry of Defence.

## SOLICITOR-GENERAL

### Departmental Sickness

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Solicitor-General how many days were lost due to sickness absence by staff in her Department in each of the last four years. [23378]

**The Solicitor-General:** The Crown Prosecution Service has lost days due to sickness absence in the last four years for which data have been published, as follows:

1996—10.2 per member of staff

1997—10.4 per member of staff

1998—9.7 per member of staff

1999—9.4 per member of staff.

The CPS has issued guidance to managers to assist them in managing attendance proactively, and we are working towards achieving the challenging targets set to reduce the level of sickness absence by 20 per cent. on the 1998 average by December 2001.

The Serious Fraud Squad ('the SFO') has lost the following days due to sickness:

1998—9.9 days per member of staff

1999—10.8 days per member of staff

2000—8.6 days per member of staff

2001—8.3 days per member of staff (projected figures).

The SFO is continuing in its commitment to reduce sick absence through careful monitoring and regular management reporting. The annual figures have shown a reduction in absence over the past two years, and the SFO is on course to meet its target of reducing sick absence by 20 per cent. (8.8 days) by the end of 2001. The aim is for absence to be reduced by 30 per cent. (7.7 days) by the end of 2003.

In the Treasury Solicitor's Department the average days lost was:

1996—6.5 days per member of staff

1997—7.2 days per member of staff

1998—11.8 days per member of staff

1999—9.7 days per member of staff.

A specific target to reduce sick absence days by 30 per cent. is included in the Treasury Solicitor's Department's Service Delivery Agreement. The Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers is included in the figures for the Treasury Solicitor's Department.

The Law Officer's Departments are fully committed to managing sick absence effectively.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Council of Ministers (UK Delegation)

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at which Council of Ministers' meetings since May 1999 National Assembly Ministers have *(a)* been present and *(b)* led the United Kingdom delegation. [20595]

**Peter Hain:** The information is as follows:

*Welsh Ministers' attendance at Council*

May 1999 to December 2001

9 November 2000—Jane Davidson (Education and Lifelong Learning): Attended Education and Youth Council (led for UK on part of the agenda).

20–21 November 2000—Carwyn Jones (Rural Affairs): Attended Agriculture Council.

13 December 2000—Jane Hutt (Health and Social Services): Attended Health Council.

26–27 February 2001—Carwyn Jones (Rural Affairs): Attended Agriculture Council.

28 May 2001—Jane Davidson (Education and Lifelong Learning): Attended Education and Youth Council.

21 June 2001—Jenny Randerson (Culture, Sport and Welsh Language): Attended Culture Council.

23 July 2001—Carwyn Jones (Rural Affairs): Attended Agriculture Council.

20 November 2001—Carwyn Jones (Rural Affairs): Attended Agriculture Council.

29 November 2001—Jane Davidson (Education and Lifelong Learning): Attended Education and Youth Council.

### Afghanistan

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of European involvement in dealing with the flow of illicit narcotics from post-Taliban Afghanistan; what assessment has been made of the role of the restructuring of Afghanistan in curtailing drug production; and if he will make a statement. [22356]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We and our European partners are committed to preventing the flow of illegal drugs from Afghanistan. The Central Asian Drugs Action Plan, which may be formally signed later this month, is an EU initiative to provide a framework for tackling the flow of Afghan opiates to and through the central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. We and our EU partners also give assistance to other countries that lie on the drug transit route to Europe, such as Iran, Pakistan and Turkey.

The Afghan interim administration fully understand that there can be no place for illegal drug production in Afghanistan in the future and that they have a responsibility to root out that problem. One objective of the international reconstruction effort will be to promote economic and law enforcement policies in Afghanistan which encourage and support former opium poppy farmers in pursuing other livelihoods.

### Gibraltar

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes to the constitution of Gibraltar will be subject to primary legislation in the United Kingdom. [21744]

**Peter Hain** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Should a comprehensive agreement affecting sovereignty emerge from the current Brussels Process discussions, changes to the Gibraltar constitution which flowed from such an agreement would trigger primary legislation in the United Kingdom.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target to prepare an overseas estate rationalisation programme. [22549]

**Mr. MacShane:** We are making progress in estate modernisation.

Properties that are surplus, not operationally effective, or not providing value for money, are being sold. Under an agreement with the Treasury, the proceeds are then reinvested. In financial year 1999–2000 we recycled £30 million for investment, and in financial year 2000–01 some £19 million. This financial year, we are aiming to

achieve sales worth over £40 million, thus meeting our target of £90 million for the CSR triennium financial year 1999–2000 to financial year 2001–02. In the period financial year 2001–02 to financial year 2003–04 we aim to sell property worth £100 million.

The proceeds of estate sales have enabled us to fund a range of estate improvement projects, including in Accra, Algiers, Baku, Bucharest, Caracas, Dar es Salaam, Lima, London, Moscow, Tunis and Yerevan.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for the British Council to keep overheads as a proportion of turnover below 5 per cent. over the period 2001–02. [22583]

**Mr. MacShane:** Since 1997 the British Council has reported corporate overheads as less than 5 per cent. of turnover. The current estimate for the financial year 2001–02 is 4.8 per cent.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target performance indicator for the percentage of passports issued within five working days. [22514]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** In 2000, 92 per cent. of posts issued passports within the PSA target of five working days.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for making savings through improved procurement procedures. [22590]

**Mr. MacShane:** Savings of over £9.1 million had been achieved by 30 September.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for securing alignment of financial legislation in the UK's Overseas Territories with international standards. [22511]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** In the year following publication of the KPMG review of financial regulation in the Caribbean Overseas Territories and Bermuda in October 2000, the Overseas Territories have made good progress in strengthening their financial regulatory frameworks in line with international standards and good practice, particularly in the priority areas of money laundering, regulatory co-operation and the establishment of independent regulatory authorities. All the Overseas Territories reviewed now have comprehensive anti-money laundering frameworks fully in place. The HM Treasury/FCO press release of 3 December, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House, provides further details of the progress that has been made in other areas and where further work is required.

The Overseas Territories have agreed to publish further progress reports in February 2002 to explain how implementation of the KPMG recommendations are progressing. The UK will continue to work closely with the Overseas Territories to enable them to meet international standards in full.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in 2000–01 towards meeting the Public Service Agreement target performance indicator for the percentage of posts meeting target times for decisions on non-settlement visa applications. [22512]

**Mr. MacShane:** In financial year 2000–01 89 per cent. of posts met the target time for resolving straightforward non-settlement visa applications within 24 hours, against the Public Service Agreement target of 90 per cent.

This answer is based on monthly statistical reports from the 112 posts where 98 per cent. of applications were received.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for the consolidation of business units that supply services within his Department into a service organisation to yield efficiency gains. [22509]

**Mr. MacShane:** FCO Services was set up in April 1999 by the FCO as a single service providing organisation in order to maximise efficiencies and create an internal market. By April 2002 FCO Services will have realised efficiency gains of approximately £7 million. As part of the process to develop the internal market, to enable the FCO to secure best value for money from its support services, FCO Services opened to external competition services worth £21 million annually in April 2001 with more scheduled to be opened to competition in April 2002.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for the proportion of business undertaken electronically. [22538]

**Mr. MacShane:** The FCO's continued progress towards the Prime Minister's goal of making all services available electronically by 2005 is detailed in the most recent electronic service delivery report which was published by the Cabinet Office on the Office of the e-Envoy's website.

Seventy nine per cent. of the FCO's services are now available electronically. We are on track to have 93 per cent. available by the end of 2002, and to meet the PSA target of 100 per cent. by the end of 2005.

Consular, passport and immigration information, forms and assistance are all available electronically from the FCO. We offer users of our website the chance to communicate with us electronically, provide information about foreign embassies in London and detailed information on a host of foreign policy issues. Our award winning website www.fco.gov.uk has been recognised by *The Sunday Times* as one of Britain's best websites.

We aim to have 99 per cent. of the FCO's worldwide staff on the same IT network by June 2002.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for progress towards implementation of the White Paper on Overseas Territories. [22510]

**Mr. MacShane:** Considerable progress has been made in key areas covered by the White Paper. The Bill giving effect to the offer of British citizenship has been introduced into Parliament. Structured political dialogue

between the political leaders of the territories and HMG has been strengthened by three meetings of the annual Consultative Council and visits by the Minister for the Overseas Territories. Constitutional modernisation reviews are in progress in most territories. A number of good governance programmes have been supported in areas of law enforcement, drugs interdiction, prison monitoring and electoral process in Montserrat. Environment Charters were adopted by the UK and territory governments in September. Progress has been made in strengthening territory financial regulatory frameworks in line with international standards and good practice in the UK; human rights programmes to support compliance with international convention obligations with regard to children and families and excluded groups have been supported in all territories, economic studies have been undertaken in Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands. A Caribbean regional drugs strategy has been prepared. A study on institutional arrangements for aviation safety and security has been supported and regional conferences on disaster preparedness and aviation safety held.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in 2000–01 towards meeting the Public Service Agreement target performance indicator for the percentage of posts meeting target times for interviewing applicants for non-settlement visas. [22513]

**Mr. MacShane:** In financial year 2000–01, 72 per cent. of posts met the target of dealing with non-straightforward non-settlement visa applications within 10 working days, against the Public Service Agreement target of 90 percent. The shortfall was due to increased demand and staffing supply difficulties.

*Note:*

This answer is based on monthly statistical reports from the 112 posts where 98 per cent. of applications were received.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for BBC World Service efficiency savings in 2000–01 following restructuring of the BBC supplier directorate. [22584]

**Mr. MacShane:** The Public Service Agreement target for BBC World Service cumulative efficiency savings over the period April 1999 to March 2002 is £25 million (i.e. a little over £4 million per annum new savings). New savings of £4 million were achieved in 2000–01. By the end of 2000–01 the BBC World Service was on track against target having achieved cumulative savings of £14 million.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the use of a scorecard approach for monitoring progress with the Public Service Agreement target for increasing public support for European Union activities. [22518]

**Peter Hain:** The FCO sets public and internal objectives for each financial year, and allocates resources according to these objectives. Our Public Service Agreement commits us to promoting increased support for and better understanding of the merits of EU membership. We review progress against our objectives on a regular basis.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for reducing accommodation running costs in London. [22508]

**Mr. MacShane:** We have made good progress. The number of properties occupied by the FCO in London has been reduced from 10 in 1997–98 to five (soon to be four) at present. These are shown in the list. Annual expenditure on rent, rates and service charges has consequently been reduced by 70 per cent., from £12 million to the current figure of £3.7 million.

*1997–98*

Main building
Old Admiralty building
1 Carlton Gardens
Cromwell house
1 Palace street
4 Matthew Parker street
20 Victoria street
22–24 Whitehall
8 Cleveland Row
Clive house.

*2001–02*

Main building
Old Admiralty building
1 Carlton Gardens
St. Christopher house (to be surrendered in August 2002)
Space at 89 Albert Embankment, SE1 (Joint Entry Clearance Unit operated jointly with Home Office).

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the performance indicator of posts fulfilling consular action plan targets based on the Citizen's Charter. [22515]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** In calendar year 2000, most of our overseas posts met or exceeded consular action plan targets (set for the year ending March 2000). Details are:

| *Function* | *Timeframe set* | *PSA target (percentage)* | *Performance by posts (percentage)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Birth registrations | Five working days to issue | 92.0 | 93.6 |
| Death registrations | Five working days to issue | 94.0 | 98.4 |
| Notarial acts | One working day to produce document | 93.0 | 97.8 |
| Customer satisfaction | In response to questionnaires | 97.2 | 99.1 |
| Prison visits | Contact within 24 hours of notification | 92.0 | 99.9 |
| Hospital visits | Contact within 24 hours of notification | 98.0 | 100.0 |

Passport issuing performance is covered in my answer to the hon. Member's question UIN 22514.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target performance indicator for the percentage of his Department's internal services to be reviewed under Better Quality Services guidelines by 2001–02. [22588]

**Mr. MacShane:** The PSA performance target

"regularly and systematically to review services in line with Government policy"

stems from the Whitehall-wide requirement under the Better Quality Services (BQS) initiative to institute a five-year rolling programme of reviews. These are aimed at ensuring that better quality services are provided at the optimum cost to the taxpayer.

The FCO's BQS programme, agreed with the Cabinet Office in 1999, is broadly on target. Two major reviews, of consular services and security, were due to commence in the early autumn, but had to be put on hold following the events of 11 September. These have now been rescheduled for completion during the first half of 2002. The Department will not be in a position until the end of the financial year to say whether the performance indicator of 60 per cent. of internal services reviewed by end 2001–02 has been met.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. [22516]

**Peter Hain:** There is no specific FCO Public Service Agreement target on reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, for which the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is the lead Department. But we are working with DEFRA towards the common Government objective of the reform of the CAP under FCO PSA target 6: a

"modern, reformed and enlarged EU . . . whose policies reflect UK political, social and economic priorities . . .".

We want to reduce the overall burden of the CAP, align EU and world prices more closely, and target support measures on the rural economy and the environment. These are also important for our ambitions for international trade and development and for an enlarged EU. The Government's objective is to secure changes that benefit consumers, taxpayers, the rural economy, the farming community and the environment. There is increasing recognition within the European Union of the need for reform.

There has been progress. In the 1980s spending on the CAP was over 60 per cent. of the European Community budget. In 2001 it will be around 45 per cent. As a result of the Agenda 2000 package agreed at the 1999 Berlin European Council, spending on the CAP will decline in real terms from 2002. Mid-term reviews of certain CAP regimes are scheduled for 2002–03.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for prompt payment for goods and services. [22539]

**Mr. MacShane:** In 2000–01 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office paid 97.8 per cent. of invoices within 30 days of receipt or the agreed contract terms were these to differ. Calculations are in accordance with HM Treasury's approved method.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what practical benefits have resulted from achieving the Public Service Agreement target for obtaining commitments from other countries to co-operate with the UK in combating drugs, crime, abuse of human rights and environmental degradation. [22585]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The fight against drugs and crime requires political commitment and practical co-operation. In 2001, nine more ratifications of the three UN drugs conventions have been recorded, including from Turkey, Albania and Ukraine. The FCO's Drugs and Crime Fund (£7.3 million in 2001–02), supports bi- and multilateral project work to combat drug production and trafficking, organised crime, paedophilia, child pornography and money-laundering in more than 40 countries committed to working with the UK and others on these issues. FCO-funded training for overseas law enforcement agencies and operational co-operation with them has led to some notable drug seizures, removing some of the heroin and cocaine consignments destined for the UK and Europe. The UK was a leading player in the negotiation of the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime, which already has more than 120 signatory states, and will provide a new framework for international co-operation to fight serious organised crime world-wide. The UK is currently negotiating law enforcement memoranda of understanding with 14 countries as the basis for further practical co-operation with them.

On the environment, FCO engagement helped secure successful outcomes at international climate change conferences this year in Bonn and Marrakech; in particular, by maintaining the commitment of key countries to the Kyoto Protocol following its rejection by the US. The FCO's contribution to the UK's work in the International Whaling Commission (IWC) has been instrumental in maintaining the international commercial moratorium on whaling which came under heavy pressure but emerged intact from the IWC meeting in July 2001. FCO environmental project funds have helped leverage co-operation with other countries (and with UK's Overseas Territories) to directly address restoration of degraded habitats and the control or removal of invasive species of animals and plants.

As a result of our achieving our targets on human rights, a number of people who would otherwise have faced the death penalty no longer do so; there is a stronger world-wide coalition against torture and improved mechanisms for exposing it and, more generally, growing recognition of the importance of human rights. Of course, there is still a great deal to be done—including on child rights, where we have not been so successful in meeting our target (on reducing extreme forms of child labour). The Government remain committed to promoting human rights at the heart of foreign policy and to backing up action in international forums with practical support from our Human Rights Project Fund.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target to achieve full cost recovery by the Government Hospitality Fund by 2000–01. [22589]

**Mr. MacShane:** The Government Hospitality Fund has been dissolved and the equivalent budget is now held by Conference and Visits Group (CVG), a new business unit that forms part of FCO Services. CVG are working towards full cost recovery and have installed a computerised business information system to capture the necessary information. Full cost recovery is now likely to be achieved during the 2002-03 financial year.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for reform of the EU's structural funds. [22517]

**Peter Hain:** The FCO's current Public Service Agreement commits the Government to pursue a modern, reformed and enlarged EU whose policies reflect UK political, social and economic priorities.

Lead responsibility for EU structural funds lies with the Department for Trade and Industry. The UK benefits substantially from the Structural Funds: UK regions will receive some £10 billion between 2000–06. The Structural Funds will be reviewed in the context of the next Financial Perspective.

### Diplomatic Staff

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 485W, on diplomatic staff, what reference is made in setting pay levels of locally engaged civilian staff to the local poverty datum line; whether the pay levels can fall below local poverty datum lines; and if he will make a statement. [22778]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Pay scales and other conditions of service for our locally engaged staff in each country are set in comparison with the generality of responsible employers in that country. Typically the comparators are other western diplomatic missions, international agencies and major private companies. Our missions pay what is required to recruit, retain and motivate suitable staff. Normally we expect to be in the middle range of rates of pay: neither leading the market nor poor payers. We also meet the requirements of local employment law. Accordingly we are confident that pay levels for our local staff will be above poverty datum lines.

### Zimbabwe

**Mrs. Browning:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations the Government have made to the South African Government in respect of the situation in Zimbabwe. [23596]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Ministers and officials have regular contact with all levels of the South African Government on the full range of international concerns about the situation in Zimbabwe.

### Middle East

**Richard Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU General Affairs Council with respect to the middle east. [23116]

**Peter Hain:** There was intensive discussion of the middle east at the 10 December General Affairs Council. The Council adopted the following conclusions:

At a time when the situation in the middle east is extremely serious, we cannot be inactive.

We are convinced that only determined and concerted action by the European Union, the United Nations, the United States and the Russian Federation can help the parties to break the cycle of violence and commit themselves once again to the search for peace. This requires:

the reaffirmation and full recognition of Israel's irrevocable right to live in peace and security within internationally recognised borders;

the establishment of a viable and democratic Palestinian state and an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories.

As a first step, the following pledges must be given:

by the Palestinian authority: the dismantling of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorist networks, including the arrest and prosecution of all suspects; a public appeal in Arabic for an end to the armed intifada;

by the Israeli Government: the withdrawal of their military forces and stop to extrajudicial executions; the lifting of closures and of all restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people; a freeze on settlements.

On the basis of this EU position and in the light of the discussions which took place on 10 December in Brussels with Mr. Shimon Peres and Mr. Nabil Shaath, we have asked Javier Solana, SG High Representative for the CFSP, to go to the region and report back to the Laeken European Council.

The aim is to contribute, in concertation with the United Nations, the United States and Russia, to a speedy resumption of negotiations, without preliminaries.

### Greece

**Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will issue fresh advice to UK citizens travelling to Greece on the activities that may lead to arrest. [23317]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The FCO travel advice for Greece was updated on 30 November 2001 to include the following advice:

"Do not take photographs near military or official installations. Seek permission before photographing individuals".

### Scottish Executive

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on how arrangements are made between the Scotland Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Scottish Executive to facilitate Scottish Executive officers working internationally. [23604]

**Mr. Straw:** The conditions for arrangements are detailed in the Memorandum of Understanding and concordat on International Relations between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations.

### Correspondence

**Mrs. Shephard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will reply to the letter of 18 June from the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk concerning Manwai Ahmed. [23104]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The right hon. Member's correspondence did not reach the Joint Entry Clearance Unit until 11 December 2001.

I will send a reply as soon as we have consulted the overseas Post.

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS

### Teacher Numbers

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers there are, broken down by age, school results and local education authorities. [9883]

**Mr. Timms:** The information is not available in the form requested. The percentage of full-time regular teachers in the maintained schools sector in each age band in March 2000, and the total of all regular full and part-time teachers in the maintained schools sector January 2001[1,2], were as follows:

*Percentage of full-time regular teachers March 2000*

| | *Under 25* | *25–29* | *30–34* | *35–39* | *40–44* | *45–49* | *50–54* | *55–59* | *60 and over* | *All full-time regular* | *All regular teachers January 2001 fte* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Darlington | 3.6 | 13.3 | 10.1 | 9.4 | 12.4 | 25.7 | 19.1 | 5.3 | 1.0 | 100 | 780 |
| Hartlepool | 5.6 | 13.6 | 10.7 | 8.1 | 15.4 | 23.5 | 18.8 | 3.9 | 0.3 | 100 | 840 |
| Middlesbrough | 3.1 | 13.1 | 9.4 | 8.1 | 15.2 | 22.6 | 21.4 | 5.9 | 1.3 | 100 | 1,270 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 4.8 | 14.3 | 9.9 | 6.8 | 14.1 | 24.0 | 19.4 | 6.1 | 0.6 | 100 | 1,280 |
| Stockton on Tees | 4.4 | 13.0 | 9.7 | 9.0 | 14.1 | 20.7 | 21.5 | 6.9 | 0.7 | 100 | 1,740 |
| Durham | 4.9 | 11.7 | 9.4 | 9.1 | 14.5 | 24.0 | 19.1 | 6.3 | 1.0 | 100 | 4,240 |
| Northumberland | 3.5 | 11.8 | 9.9 | 9.5 | 15.2 | 24.1 | 20.4 | 4.7 | 0.9 | 100 | 2,620 |
| Gateshead | 4.9 | 14.7 | 11.9 | 9.8 | 11.9 | 24.5 | 16.6 | 4.9 | 0.6 | 100 | 1,670 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 4.2 | 12.3 | 9.0 | 10.6 | 14.2 | 25.5 | 18.4 | 5.1 | 0.7 | 100 | 2,180 |
| North Tyneside | 3.9 | 13.9 | 8.8 | 10.2 | 14.5 | 23.6 | 18.1 | 6.1 | 0.8 | 100 | 1,820 |
| South Tyneside | 3.1 | 11.5 | 9.5 | 9.2 | 15.0 | 23.3 | 18.2 | 8.8 | 1.3 | 100 | 1,440 |
| Sunderland | 3.8 | 12.3 | 10.0 | 9.1 | 15.4 | 22.8 | 19.3 | 6.7 | 0.6 | 100 | 2,670 |
| Blackburn and Darwen | 4.2 | 10.6 | 10.9 | 11.7 | 16.5 | 20.8 | 18.6 | 6.0 | 0.7 | 100 | 1,310 |
| Blackpool | 6.2 | 16.2 | 11.4 | 9.8 | 13.4 | 23.5 | 14.5 | 4.7 | 0.3 | 100 | 1,100 |
| Halton | 4.8 | 14.3 | 13.0 | 11.6 | 13.9 | 20.6 | 16.8 | 4.6 | 0.5 | 100 | 1,140 |
| Warrington | 4.7 | 18.7 | 11.9 | 10.2 | 13.3 | 20.3 | 16.6 | 3.7 | 0.6 | 100 | 1,680 |
| Cheshire | 4.3 | 15.0 | 11.6 | 9.0 | 14.1 | 21.0 | 18.4 | 5.9 | 0.8 | 100 | 5,600 |
| Cumbria | 3.0 | 12.7 | 11.4 | 8.6 | 15.3 | 23.4 | 20.0 | 5.2 | 0.5 | 100 | 4,180 |
| Bolton | 5.3 | 13.5 | 14.0 | 10.0 | 13.3 | 19.7 | 17.9 | 5.4 | 0.9 | 100 | 2,500 |
| Bury | 4.5 | 13.4 | 11.1 | 10.7 | 13.4 | 22.1 | 19.0 | 5.0 | 0.7 | 100 | 1,480 |
| Manchester | 3.8 | 14.0 | 14.0 | 11.7 | 11.5 | 19.7 | 18.0 | 6.0 | 1.2 | 100 | 3,790 |
| Oldham | 4.4 | 14.4 | 12.9 | 11.5 | 13.5 | 21.5 | 15.9 | 5.3 | 0.7 | 100 | 2,280 |
| Rochdale | 5.3 | 15.7 | 10.9 | 8.8 | 15.1 | 22.7 | 16.1 | 4.9 | 0.6 | 100 | 1,870 |
| Salford | 4.9 | 16.7 | 12.7 | 9.6 | 13.0 | 22.6 | 15.2 | 4.6 | 0.7 | 100 | 1,920 |
| Stockport | 3.7 | 14.1 | 12.8 | 10.0 | 13.3 | 19.6 | 18.8 | 7.0 | 0.7 | 100 | 2,330 |
| Tameside | 3.9 | 15.3 | 10.0 | 9.8 | 12.0 | 23.0 | 18.8 | 6.7 | 0.7 | 100 | 1,930 |
| Trafford | 4.2 | 14.3 | 13.6 | 9.6 | 11.7 | 21.7 | 17.6 | 6.9 | 0.6 | 100 | 1,900 |
| Wigan | 3.8 | 11.8 | 9.2 | 8.6 | 17.2 | 23.3 | 19.2 | 6.2 | 0.6 | 100 | 2,590 |
| Lancashire | 3.6 | 12.8 | 10.3 | 10.1 | 15.0 | 22.1 | 19.7 | 5.6 | 0.7 | 100 | 9,710 |
| Knowsley | 5.2 | 15.9 | 11.9 | 11.6 | 12.3 | 21.5 | 16.0 | 5.0 | 0.6 | 100 | 1,530 |
| Liverpool | 2.4 | 12.2 | 10.5 | 9.5 | 13.4 | 25.8 | 19.4 | 5.9 | 1.0 | 100 | 4,320 |
| Sefton | 3.7 | 13.9 | 11.6 | 10.3 | 13.2 | 21.7 | 16.8 | 7.9 | 0.8 | 100 | 2,520 |
| St. Helens | 3.2 | 13.0 | 12.4 | 11.6 | 11.6 | 25.1 | 17.0 | 5.8 | 0.4 | 100 | 1,670 |
| Wirral | 3.3 | 11.0 | 10.6 | 11.4 | 14.2 | 24.0 | 18.4 | 6.6 | 0.7 | 100 | 3,020 |
| East Riding of Yorkshire | 4.6 | 12.2 | 9.4 | 8.4 | 14.6 | 24.2 | 20.4 | 5.6 | 0.5 | 100 | 2,530 |
| Kingston-Upon-Hull | 5.5 | 11.9 | 8.1 | 6.8 | 15.8 | 25.9 | 19.5 | 5.9 | 0.8 | 100 | 2,110 |
| North East Lincolnshire | 5.0 | 11.9 | 7.9 | 8.7 | 14.4 | 27.8 | 18.5 | 5.7 | 0.3 | 100 | 1,360 |
| North Lincolnshire | 3.8 | 12.5 | 8.5 | 7.2 | 15.5 | 27.8 | 18.7 | 5.5 | 0.4 | 100 | 1,340 |
| York | 4.5 | 13.0 | 13.4 | 9.4 | 12.6 | 19.7 | 20.9 | 6.2 | 0.4 | 100 | 1,380 |
| North Yorkshire | 3.5 | 13.4 | 10.8 | 10.2 | 14.2 | 20.3 | 19.6 | 7.2 | 0.9 | 100 | 4,940 |
| Barnsley | 4.0 | 13.3 | 8.9 | 10.2 | 16.5 | 24.0 | 17.1 | 5.1 | 0.9 | 100 | 1,640 |
| Doncaster | 4.4 | 13.3 | 10.2 | 8.1 | 13.4 | 23.4 | 21.0 | 5.6 | 0.5 | 100 | 2,690 |
| Rotherham | 3.5 | 12.1 | 9.6 | 10.0 | 14.6 | 23.9 | 18.6 | 6.4 | 1.3 | 100 | 2,500 |
| Sheffield | 2.6 | 11.0 | 10.1 | 9.3 | 13.4 | 25.4 | 21.0 | 6.7 | 0.5 | 100 | 4,190 |
| Bradford | 2.5 | 10.2 | 10.9 | 11.3 | 16.7 | 23.9 | 18.9 | 4.6 | 1.1 | 100 | 4,400 |
| Calderdale | 3.9 | 14.6 | 11.9 | 10.1 | 14.6 | 20.9 | 18.3 | 5.2 | 0.4 | 100 | 1,840 |
| Kirklees | 3.4 | 11.8 | 10.1 | 11.0 | 15.5 | 23.9 | 18.5 | 5.1 | 0.7 | 100 | 3,370 |
| Leeds | 4.2 | 13.8 | 10.7 | 10.7 | 12.6 | 21.6 | 19.6 | 5.9 | 0.9 | 100 | 6,040 |
| Wakefield | 4.1 | 14.7 | 11.0 | 8.7 | 15.3 | 22.2 | 18.1 | 5.5 | 0.5 | 100 | 2,700 |
| City of Derby | 4.4 | 12.7 | 10.0 | 11.3 | 16.2 | 21.8 | 17.9 | 4.7 | 0.8 | 100 | 1,980 |
| Leicester City | 4.3 | 14.1 | 11.3 | 10.8 | 15.0 | 19.3 | 18.7 | 5.9 | 0.5 | 100 | 2,760 |
| City of Nottingham | 3.8 | 13.7 | 12.0 | 11.1 | 13.1 | 22.1 | 18.4 | 5.2 | 0.6 | 100 | 2,110 |
| Rutland | 1.7 | 13.7 | 7.7 | 9.4 | 12.4 | 23.5 | 21.8 | 8.1 | 1.7 | 100 | 240 |
| Derbyshire | 4.4 | 11.9 | 8.6 | 9.7 | 14.9 | 22.6 | 21.0 | 6.3 | 0.6 | 100 | 5,760 |

*Percentage of full-time regular teachers March 2000*

| | *Under 25* | *25–29* | *30–34* | *35–39* | *40–44* | *45–49* | *50–54* | *55–59* | *60 and over* | *All full-time regular* | *All regular teachers January 2001 fte* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Leicestershire | 3.7 | 14.1 | 10.5 | 9.0 | 14.1 | 22.3 | 18.6 | 7.1 | 0.7 | 100 | 5,020 |
| Lincolnshire | 5.3 | 15.3 | 9.9 | 9.3 | 12.9 | 21.2 | 19.0 | 6.3 | 0.8 | 100 | 5,300 |
| Northamptonshire | 5.2 | 15.6 | 10.8 | 10.3 | 13.8 | 21.1 | 16.9 | 5.6 | 0.6 | 100 | 5,330 |
| Nottinghamshire | 3.6 | 12.0 | 11.0 | 9.8 | 13.6 | 24.9 | 19.5 | 5.2 | 0.5 | 100 | 5,970 |
| Herefordshire | 3.4 | 12.7 | 9.0 | 8.1 | 16.3 | 20.3 | 21.9 | 6.9 | 1.3 | 100 | 1,300 |
| Stoke-on-Trent | 4.7 | 13.9 | 9.5 | 9.2 | 13.9 | 24.8 | 17.5 | 5.8 | 0.6 | 100 | 1,920 |
| Telford and Wrekin | 3.9 | 13.8 | 10.9 | 10.6 | 15.3 | 21.1 | 19.6 | 4.4 | 0.4 | 100 | 1,410 |
| Shropshire | 3.3 | 13.4 | 11.4 | 10.3 | 14.6 | 23.3 | 17.7 | 5.2 | 0.8 | 100 | 2,110 |
| Staffordshire | 4.3 | 14.0 | 9.6 | 8.7 | 15.2 | 22.7 | 18.6 | 6.5 | 0.5 | 100 | 6,800 |
| Warwickshire | 5.1 | 15.9 | 9.8 | 8.3 | 12.6 | 22.5 | 19.0 | 6.1 | 0.8 | 100 | 4,150 |
| Birmingham | 4.4 | 15.7 | 13.0 | 9.5 | 13.3 | 20.8 | 16.6 | 5.9 | 0.8 | 100 | 10,220 |
| Coventry | 3.9 | 13.4 | 9.8 | 9.3 | 13.4 | 24.2 | 17.8 | 7.1 | 1.0 | 100 | 2,870 |
| Dudley | 4.7 | 15.1 | 10.9 | 10.2 | 15.2 | 21.2 | 15.8 | 6.2 | 0.7 | 100 | 2,780 |
| Sandwell | 4.7 | 16.6 | 10.0 | 9.7 | 16.7 | 22.6 | 15.0 | 3.9 | 0.7 | 100 | 2,620 |
| Solihull | 6.5 | 16.5 | 11.9 | 9.2 | 13.0 | 20.7 | 16.9 | 4.8 | 0.5 | 100 | 2,050 |
| Walsall | 3.6 | 13.0 | 9.8 | 9.9 | 16.2 | 23.7 | 17.9 | 5.1 | 0.9 | 100 | 2,570 |
| Wolverhampton | 4.0 | 12.0 | 10.9 | 9.1 | 17.8 | 23.8 | 15.8 | 5.6 | 1.0 | 100 | 2,290 |
| Worcestershire | 4.2 | 13.3 | 10.9 | 9.0 | 14.3 | 23.4 | 18.7 | 5.6 | 0.7 | 100 | 4,270 |
| Luton | 4.4 | 14.5 | 10.1 | 10.4 | 13.3 | 20.6 | 18.5 | 6.6 | 1.6 | 100 | 1,660 |
| City of Peterborough | 6.9 | 16.8 | 12.5 | 8.9 | 12.2 | 20.9 | 15.9 | 5.3 | 0.6 | 100 | 1,510 |
| Southend | 5.3 | 15.9 | 9.4 | 10.8 | 14.1 | 21.1 | 15.8 | 6.2 | 1.3 | 100 | 1,410 |
| Thurrock | 8.2 | 17.0 | 11.0 | 9.1 | 12.0 | 18.3 | 17.4 | 6.3 | 0.9 | 100 | 1,180 |
| Bedfordshire | 3.5 | 12.3 | 9.3 | 9.5 | 14.6 | 22.2 | 19.7 | 8.0 | 0.9 | 100 | 3,250 |
| Cambridgeshire | 5.3 | 15.9 | 11.3 | 9.1 | 13.6 | 20.9 | 17.8 | 5.5 | 0.6 | 100 | 4,040 |
| Essex | 5.4 | 16.2 | 10.4 | 9.6 | 14.5 | 20.1 | 16.6 | 6.2 | 0.9 | 100 | 10,520 |
| Hertfordshire | 6.4 | 18.5 | 11.4 | 9.0 | 12.4 | 17.9 | 17.1 | 6.4 | 0.9 | 100 | 9,170 |
| Norfolk | 3.5 | 12.1 | 8.7 | 9.2 | 13.7 | 23.4 | 20.6 | 7.8 | 1.1 | 100 | 6,050 |
| Suffolk | 4.5 | 13.6 | 9.1 | 8.2 | 15.2 | 22.3 | 19.3 | 6.9 | 0.9 | 100 | 5,490 |
| Camden | 3.4 | 20.9 | 19.3 | 14.4 | 10.7 | 12.0 | 12.0 | 5.2 | 2.0 | 100 | 1,430 |
| City of London | 0.0 | 28.6 | 21.4 | 21.4 | 0.0 | 14.3 | 14.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100 | 20 |
| Hackney | 0.3 | 4.6 | 8.4 | 10.2 | 18.4 | 25.5 | 21.2 | 9.2 | 2.2 | 100 | 1,480 |
| Hammersmith | 4.9 | 23.7 | 16.5 | 11.9 | 10.8 | 14.3 | 12.1 | 4.6 | 1.2 | 100 | 1,000 |
| Haringey | 2.8 | 14.7 | 17.0 | 16.4 | 14.8 | 14.3 | 12.7 | 5.8 | 1.4 | 100 | 1,850 |
| Islington | 3.2 | 17.5 | 19.0 | 16.7 | 12.2 | 14.0 | 10.8 | 5.6 | 1.0 | 100 | 1,300 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 0.8 | 10.2 | 18.6 | 13.4 | 12.9 | 15.2 | 18.4 | 8.7 | 1.8 | 100 | 660 |
| Lambeth | 2.9 | 14.0 | 17.0 | 15.3 | 13.9 | 17.9 | 13.5 | 3.8 | 1.6 | 100 | 1,580 |
| Lewisham | 3.4 | 14.3 | 15.2 | 13.6 | 13.6 | 18.8 | 14.8 | 5.6 | 0.7 | 100 | 1,980 |
| Newham | 7.4 | 23.3 | 16.8 | 11.6 | 12.1 | 13.8 | 11.1 | 3.4 | 0.6 | 100 | 2,420 |
| Southwark | 3.5 | 17.2 | 15.3 | 13.5 | 13.8 | 17.3 | 13.3 | 4.1 | 1.8 | 100 | 1,960 |
| Tower Hamlets | 3.4 | 14.6 | 15.8 | 16.0 | 14.9 | 16.1 | 13.2 | 4.8 | 1.2 | 100 | 2,180 |
| Wandsworth | 4.6 | 21.2 | 17.9 | 11.4 | 11.1 | 15.8 | 11.8 | 4.9 | 1.3 | 100 | 1,730 |
| Westminster | 4.2 | 25.1 | 18.1 | 11.9 | 10.1 | 11.4 | 11.7 | 5.6 | 2.0 | 100 | 1,250 |
| Barking | 8.1 | 20.4 | 14.8 | 11.0 | 12.9 | 14.8 | 13.4 | 3.6 | 0.9 | 100 | 1,480 |
| Barnet | 5.5 | 19.7 | 15.7 | 12.4 | 11.6 | 14.5 | 13.8 | 5.4 | 1.5 | 100 | 2,740 |
| Bexley | 5.9 | 16.4 | 12.2 | 9.8 | 14.4 | 17.8 | 16.2 | 6.2 | 1.1 | 100 | 2,030 |
| Brent | 4.4 | 15.4 | 13.1 | 11.7 | 14.2 | 17.0 | 15.1 | 7.0 | 2.0 | 100 | 2,110 |
| Bromley | 4.9 | 17.3 | 13.7 | 10.2 | 12.5 | 16.9 | 17.9 | 5.8 | 0.9 | 100 | 2,540 |
| Croydon | 4.9 | 17.7 | 13.0 | 9.9 | 12.5 | 17.9 | 15.6 | 7.2 | 1.3 | 100 | 2,820 |
| Ealing | 6.4 | 21.2 | 16.7 | 10.0 | 11.7 | 13.6 | 13.8 | 5.5 | 1.0 | 100 | 2,220 |
| Enfield | 5.2 | 19.9 | 13.3 | 11.9 | 14.3 | 16.5 | 13.3 | 4.7 | 0.8 | 100 | 2,670 |
| Greenwich | 4.8 | 16.0 | 14.3 | 10.7 | 13.0 | 20.3 | 14.4 | 5.4 | 1.2 | 100 | 2,030 |
| Harrow | 5.5 | 17.1 | 14.2 | 10.1 | 12.6 | 16.9 | 15.0 | 7.3 | 1.2 | 100 | 1,490 |
| Havering | 6.1 | 14.6 | 12.4 | 10.8 | 14.3 | 19.4 | 14.4 | 6.7 | 1.2 | 100 | 1,950 |
| Hillingdon | 7.6 | 23.0 | 14.7 | 9.6 | 12.2 | 15.0 | 12.8 | 4.4 | 0.7 | 100 | 2,180 |
| Hounslow | 6.1 | 20.1 | 17.5 | 11.1 | 10.5 | 14.5 | 13.0 | 6.2 | 1.1 | 100 | 2,020 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 6.2 | 22.2 | 12.8 | 10.4 | 10.5 | 17.7 | 14.1 | 4.9 | 1.2 | 100 | 1,070 |
| Merton | 4.7 | 19.6 | 14.0 | 10.6 | 13.1 | 16.7 | 13.7 | 6.6 | 1.1 | 100 | 1,210 |
| Redbridge | 7.1 | 21.2 | 13.4 | 10.3 | 13.9 | 15.0 | 13.3 | 4.8 | 0.8 | 100 | 2,370 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 5.1 | 20.4 | 15.4 | 9.2 | 12.0 | 19.4 | 12.3 | 5.3 | 0.8 | 100 | 1,040 |
| Sutton | 4.8 | 21.3 | 13.0 | 8.3 | 10.0 | 19.2 | 16.0 | 6.1 | 1.3 | 100 | 1,530 |
| Waltham Forest | 3.2 | 14.6 | 14.3 | 13.7 | 14.3 | 19.2 | 13.5 | 5.7 | 1.6 | 100 | 1,940 |
| Bracknell Forest | 5.7 | 17.9 | 10.5 | 7.6 | 13.0 | 19.4 | 19.1 | 6.0 | 1.0 | 100 | 760 |
| Brighton and Hove | 2.4 | 14.4 | 16.2 | 12.4 | 13.8 | 20.1 | 15.5 | 4.6 | 0.8 | 100 | 1,730 |
| Isle of Wight | 2.8 | 12.5 | 10.1 | 9.4 | 14.1 | 23.3 | 20.6 | 6.4 | 0.8 | 100 | 1,100 |
| Medway | 3.8 | 16.4 | 10.5 | 9.9 | 13.7 | 19.6 | 18.3 | 7.1 | 0.6 | 100 | 2,180 |
| Milton Keynes | 5.2 | 15.6 | 12.6 | 11.7 | 15.0 | 21.2 | 13.6 | 4.4 | 0.7 | 100 | 1,760 |
| Portsmouth | 3.8 | 16.3 | 11.9 | 9.9 | 13.2 | 21.2 | 15.9 | 7.1 | 0.8 | 100 | 1,480 |
| Reading | 6.8 | 17.1 | 11.9 | 7.8 | 12.3 | 20.1 | 16.0 | 6.9 | 1.2 | 100 | 990 |
| Slough | 6.1 | 17.7 | 13.7 | 8.3 | 13.4 | 16.6 | 16.4 | 6.4 | 1.4 | 100 | 1,090 |
| Southampton | 5.8 | 17.1 | 12.8 | 9.8 | 12.3 | 19.3 | 16.5 | 5.1 | 1.2 | 100 | 1,640 |
| West Berkshire | 5.1 | 19.1 | 12.7 | 9.1 | 13.1 | 18.7 | 14.7 | 6.5 | 1.0 | 100 | 1,330 |
| Windsor and Maidenhead | 5.3 | 15.6 | 11.2 | 9.6 | 12.1 | 19.9 | 16.8 | 8.4 | 1.1 | 100 | 990 |
| Wokingham | 3.6 | 16.6 | 9.7 | 8.2 | 13.6 | 20.6 | 19.3 | 6.3 | 2.1 | 100 | 1,280 |
| Buckinghamshire | 5.6 | 17.8 | 10.4 | 8.2 | 11.9 | 20.9 | 18.2 | 6.0 | 0.9 | 100 | 3,900 |
| East Sussex | 4.6 | 13.8 | 13.1 | 11.1 | 15.0 | 20.5 | 16.3 | 4.6 | 0.9 | 100 | 3,610 |

*Percentage of full-time regular teachers March 2000*

| | *Under 25* | *25–29* | *30–34* | *35–39* | *40–44* | *45–49* | *50–54* | *55–59* | *60 and over* | *All full-time regular* | *All regular teachers January 2001 fte* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hampshire | 5.8 | 16.8 | 11.4 | 8.9 | 12.5 | 20.4 | 17.1 | 6.3 | 0.7 | 100 | 8,970 |
| Kent | 5.3 | 15.0 | 10.1 | 9.1 | 14.9 | 21.2 | 16.9 | 6.4 | 1.0 | 100 | 11,320 |
| Oxfordshire | 4.4 | 16.1 | 12.8 | 10.6 | 12.3 | 18.4 | 18.2 | 6.2 | 1.0 | 100 | 4,790 |
| Surrey | 6.7 | 20.5 | 15.0 | 8.6 | 10.8 | 16.6 | 14.8 | 6.1 | 1.0 | 100 | 7,310 |
| West Sussex | 3.7 | 15.8 | 11.7 | 10.5 | 14.7 | 20.3 | 16.9 | 5.5 | 0.9 | 100 | 5,610 |
| Bath and NE Somerset | 3.6 | 17.7 | 12.0 | 9.8 | 12.9 | 19.8 | 17.3 | 6.0 | 0.9 | 100 | 1,390 |
| Bournemouth | 3.3 | 14.8 | 9.7 | 9.3 | 13.1 | 23.9 | 18.2 | 6.4 | 1.4 | 100 | 1,110 |
| City of Bristol | 4.9 | 15.8 | 13.7 | 11.2 | 12.3 | 19.8 | 17.0 | 4.7 | 0.6 | 100 | 2,790 |
| North Somerset | 4.0 | 14.6 | 11.8 | 10.4 | 14.1 | 19.3 | 18.9 | 6.0 | 0.9 | 100 | 1,420 |
| City of Plymouth | 3.1 | 13.5 | 12.2 | 12.8 | 14.8 | 19.2 | 17.2 | 6.5 | 0.5 | 100 | 2,210 |
| Poole | 4.5 | 14.4 | 11.1 | 8.9 | 14.4 | 20.9 | 19.5 | 5.9 | 0.4 | 100 | 1,030 |
| South Gloucestershire | 4.6 | 16.4 | 12.4 | 10.6 | 13.4 | 19.0 | 16.9 | 5.9 | 0.8 | 100 | 2,120 |
| Swindon | 6.9 | 16.7 | 11.9 | 9.1 | 12.1 | 19.7 | 15.7 | 7.2 | 0.7 | 100 | 1,440 |
| Torbay | 4.2 | 14.1 | 11.5 | 9.2 | 12.4 | 20.6 | 20.8 | 6.3 | 0.8 | 100 | 970 |
| Cornwall | 2.2 | 10.9 | 9.7 | 10.5 | 15.3 | 23.4 | 20.4 | 6.6 | 1.2 | 100 | 3,800 |
| Isles of Scilly | 0.0 | 0.0 | 15.8 | 15.8 | 15.8 | 26.3 | 15.8 | 5.3 | 5.3 | 100 | 20 |
| Devon | 3.4 | 11.8 | 11.4 | 9.9 | 14.0 | 23.1 | 19.1 | 6.5 | 0.9 | 100 | 5,030 |
| Dorset | 4.5 | 15.3 | 10.8 | 10.1 | 15.0 | 20.5 | 17.8 | 5.3 | 0.7 | 100 | 2,880 |
| Gloucestershire | 4.3 | 15.6 | 12.3 | 9.8 | 12.6 | 21.3 | 18.3 | 5.2 | 0.6 | 100 | 4,680 |
| Somerset | 3.7 | 12.6 | 9.0 | 10.0 | 15.9 | 22.4 | 19.9 | 5.9 | 0.6 | 100 | 3,770 |
| Wiltshire | 4.2 | 16.5 | 11.2 | 11.0 | 12.9 | 21.5 | 16.8 | 5.5 | 0.5 | 100 | 3,340 |
| England | 4.5 | 14.9 | 11.5 | 9.9 | 13.8 | 21.0 | 17.6 | 5.9 | 0.9 | 100 | 410,170 |

[1] Totals may not appear to equal the sum of their component parts due to rounding.
[2] Estimates of part-time teachers by age have not been given because about 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-time teachers are not recorded on the Teachers Pension Scheme, from which the data are obtained.

### Head Teacher Vacancies (London)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many vacancies there are for head teachers at schools in each of the London education authorities. [10265]

**Mr. Timms:** Full-time vacancies for head teachers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in London at January 2001 is as follow:

| | *Vacancies* |
|---|---|
| Camden | 0 |
| City of London | 0 |
| Hackney | 1 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 2 |
| Haringey | 1 |
| Islington | 2 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 0 |
| Lambeth | 5 |
| Lewisham | 2 |
| Newham | 3 |
| Southwark | 4 |
| Tower Hamlets | 2 |
| Wandsworth | 1 |
| City of Westminster | 2 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 0 |
| Barnet | 5 |
| Bexley | 0 |
| Brent | 0 |
| Bromley | 0 |
| Croydon | 3 |
| Ealing | 0 |
| Enfield | 2 |
| Greenwich | 0 |
| Harrow | 0 |
| Havering | 0 |
| Hillingdon | 0 |
| Hounslow | 0 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 0 |
| Merton | 0 |
| Redbridge | 0 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 2 |
| Sutton | 0 |
| Waltham Forest | 0 |

### Teachers (East Yorkshire)

**David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the shortfall in the number of supply teachers is in the East Riding of Yorkshire *(a)* for the current academic year and *(b)* for each year since 1996; [10726]

(2) how many foreign nationals were employed as *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school teachers in the East Riding of Yorkshire during the (i) 2000–01 academic year and (ii) previous four academic years. [10728]

**Mr. Timms:** The information is not collected centrally.

### Teaching Qualifications

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of teachers in maintained secondary schools did not have an appropriate subject qualification for the subject which they teach in each of the last five years. [13040]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The most recent figures available show that, in 1996–97, 18 per cent. of secondary school teachers did not hold an appropriate qualification in the subject that they were teaching, including teachers of subjects for which qualifications are not commonly held.

### Pupil Spending (Bassetlaw)

**John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the change in spending per *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school pupil in Bassetlaw since 1997; [21212]

(2) what the average spending per pupil is in Bassetlaw in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education compared to the national average. [21304]

**Mr. Timms:** The information requested is submitted to the Department according to local education authority areas, rather than districts within an area. Bassetlaw is a district of Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority. The information for Nottinghamshire LEA is as follows:

| | *Nursery/primary* | *Secondary* |
|---|---|---|
| *Nottinghamshire* | | |
| 1998–99 | 1,910 | 2,470 |
| 1999–2000 | 2,010 | 2,560 |
| *England* | | |
| 1997–98 | 1,860 | 2,530 |
| 1998–99 | 1,960 | 2,550 |
| 1999–2000 | 2,070 | 2,640 |

The figures are based on net institutional expenditure per pupil and are expressed in real terms and at 2000–01 prices. The SSA increase for Nottinghamshire for 2002–03 is 5.9 per cent. 1998–99 was the last year for Nottinghamshire with its current boundaries.

### Individual Learning Accounts

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she plans to take in respect of individuals who have been defrauded of their individual learning accounts when they have applied for courses with genuine learning providers. [21059]

**John Healey:** The ILA programme is now closed and we shall not be accepting further bookings of learning. We are continuing to log details of complaints and will follow these up.

Our commitment to adult learning remains cast iron and the Secretary of State has already said that this is not the end of Government funding for adult learning, or of Government support for those who find a lack of money a barrier to returning to education, learning or training. We are developing future plans for a successor ILA-style scheme which build on the successful elements of the ILA programme.

**Alistair Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of learning providers who have ceased business as a result of the ending of the individual learning account scheme; and if she will make a statement. [22158]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Department has made no estimate of the number of learning providers who may have ceased business as a result of the closure of the individual learning account programme.

### Teachers Earnings

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will estimate the average weekly earnings of *(a)* a fully qualified teacher, *(b)* a primary school head teacher and *(c)* a secondary school head teacher in 2001–02. [21102]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The estimated average weekly gross pay of full-time teachers in England and Wales from April 2001 is as follows.

| *Teachers in England and Wales* | *£* |
|---|---|
| Qualified teacher in the maintained schools sector[1] | 550 |
| Head teacher in maintained nursery and primary | 750 |
| Head teacher in maintained secondary | 1,020 |

[1] Including staff on the leadership scale.

### Departmental Staff (Home Working)

**Mr. Challen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps her Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21836]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The Department of Education and Skills believes everyone should be allowed to balance their work and home commitments and that home working should be available to all staff, not just those with caring responsibilities. We encourage a culture of trust where people feel comfortable working from home and do not feel tied to working a fixed 9–5 pattern and try to discourage long hours working among staff. Staff can work at home on a full-time basis or for part of the week on a regular or occasional basis. Business needs remain at the top of our agenda. However, managers are encouraged to be sympathetic to all requests and grant them whenever possible.

The Department publicises its policy on flexible working to all staff and people working wholly or partly from home have access to our remote working system, which currently has 1,175 registered users, 27 per cent. of our total work force.

### New Schools

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new schools were opened in each of the last 10 years. [21957]

**John Healey:** The following table shows the numbers of new maintained schools opened each year since 1996. The figures exclude new schools opened as a result of an amalgamation or reorganisation of schools or fresh start proposals. Reliable information is not available on the number of new schools opened prior to 1996.

| *Year* | *Primary* | *Secondary* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1996 | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| 1997 | 15 | 8 | 23 |
| 1998 | 18 | 3 | 21 |
| 1999 | 22 | 6 | 28 |
| 2000 | 13 | 3 | 16 |
| 2001 | 21 | 7 | 28 |

### Education Standard Spending Assessment

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for each of the years 1995–96 to 2001–02 *(a)* the total amount of education SSA provided to local education authorities, *(b)* the final education budget agreed by local education authorities and *(c)* the amount by which the education budget exceeded SSA. [22370]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The information is set out in the following table.

£ million

| Year | Total education standard spending assessment | Total education budget | Surplus or deficit |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1995–96 | 17,024.1 | 17,821.1 | 797.0 |
| 1996–97 | 17,764.2 | 18,411.3 | 647.1 |
| 1997–98 | 17,853.8 | 18,399.2 | 545.4 |
| 1998–99 | 19,383.7 | 19,809.5 | 425.8 |
| 1999–2000 | 20,414.1 | 20,802.0 | 387.9 |
| 2000–01 | 21,478.6 | 21,812.0 | 333.3 |
| 2001–02 | 22,512.9 | 22,713.7 | 200.8 |

*Notes:*
Total education budget for 1995–96 to 2000–01 is taken from local authorities' revenue account returns.
For 2001–02 the education budget is total education revenue expenditure recorded at line five on local education authorities' section 52 budget statements, less income from grants recorded at lines 6a and 6b.

### Schools (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have operated four day weeks in the constituency of Buckingham in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [22652]

**Mr. Timms:** My Department is not aware of any schools in the Buckingham constituency which have operated a four day week in the years in question.

### Teachers (South Tyneside)

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school teachers were working in South Tyneside local education authorities on 1 May; and what are the projected figures for 1 May 2002. [22665]

**Mr. Timms:** The information is not available for the dates requested. The full-time equivalent numbers of regular teachers in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in the South Tyneside local education authority in January 2001 were as follows:

| | Number |
|---|---|
| Nursery and primary | 675 |
| Secondary | 655 |

My Department does not project teacher numbers for individual local authorities.

### Standards Fund

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list by local education authority in England the amount per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education paid out of the Standards Fund in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02 to date. [22682]

**Mr. Timms:** The following table shows allocations for the Standards Fund, shown as an amount per pupil, for 2000–01 and 2001–02, for each local education authority. The figures cannot be disaggregated between primary and secondary as most Standards Fund grants cover both phases and the precise distribution will be determined at local level. The figures include recurrent and capital Standards Fund grants excluding those that are specifically for nursery education, further education and adult education. The Standards Fund includes Government grant and local authority contributions, which have both been included in the calculations.

*Standards Fund per pupil*

£ per pupil

| Local education authority | 2000–01 | 2001–02 |
|---|---|---|
| Corporation of London | 1,762 | 1,786 |
| Camden | 549 | 656 |
| Greenwich | 485 | 683 |
| Hackney | 607 | 810 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 467 | 720 |
| Islington | 524 | 754 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 562 | 691 |
| Lambeth | 509 | 700 |
| Lewisham | 435 | 634 |
| Southwark | 490 | 667 |
| Tower Hamlets | 660 | 847 |
| Wandsworth | 496 | 665 |
| Westminster | 479 | 614 |
| Barking | 302 | 477 |
| Barnet | 178 | 364 |
| Bexley | 200 | 315 |
| Brent | 281 | 523 |
| Bromley | 236 | 317 |
| Croydon | 268 | 359 |
| Ealing | 358 | 561 |
| Enfield | 271 | 416 |
| Haringey | 490 | 719 |
| Harrow | 236 | 362 |
| Havering | 207 | 341 |
| Hillingdon | 248 | 328 |
| Hounslow | 307 | 448 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 369 | 502 |
| Merton | 343 | 533 |
| Newham | 426 | 579 |
| Redbridge | 260 | 351 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 386 | 357 |
| Sutton | 219 | 334 |
| Waltham Forest | 412 | 617 |
| Birmingham | 389 | 530 |
| Coventry | 321 | 434 |
| Dudley | 268 | 347 |
| Sandwell | 274 | 449 |
| Solihull | 243 | 341 |
| Walsall | 307 | 427 |
| Wolverhampton | 360 | 528 |
| Knowsley | 430 | 702 |
| Liverpool | 390 | 573 |
| St. Helens | 263 | 489 |
| Sefton | 261 | 410 |
| Wirral | 272 | 460 |
| Bolton | 295 | 385 |
| Bury | 248 | 332 |
| Manchester | 513 | 657 |
| Oldham | 321 | 455 |
| Rochdale | 320 | 548 |
| Salford | 553 | 551 |
| Stockport | 279 | 351 |
| Tameside | 281 | 377 |
| Trafford | 250 | 336 |
| Wigan | 262 | 347 |
| Barnsley | 284 | 419 |
| Doncaster | 277 | 369 |
| Rotherham | 425 | 532 |
| Sheffield | 401 | 556 |
| Bradford | 452 | 607 |
| Calderdale | 319 | 354 |
| Kirklees | 352 | 482 |
| Leeds | 344 | 497 |
| Wakefield | 287 | 410 |
| Gateshead | 336 | 551 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 335 | 532 |
| North Tyneside | 288 | 465 |

*Standards Fund per pupil*

£ per pupil

| *Local education authority* | *2000–01* | *2001–02* |
|---|---|---|
| South Tyneside | 312 | 488 |
| Sunderland | 292 | 487 |
| Isles of Scilly | 1,781 | 1,725 |
| Bath and North East Somerset | 290 | 385 |
| City of Bristol | 303 | 463 |
| North Somerset | 278 | 360 |
| South Gloucestershire | 279 | 360 |
| Hartlepool | 292 | 555 |
| Middlesbrough | 314 | 511 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 272 | 450 |
| Stockton-on-Tees | 315 | 506 |
| City of Kingston-upon-Hull | 306 | 479 |
| East Riding of Yorkshire | 294 | 387 |
| North East Lincolnshire | 318 | 386 |
| North Lincolnshire | 346 | 400 |
| North Yorkshire | 316 | 389 |
| York | 316 | 369 |
| Bedfordshire | 310 | 419 |
| Luton | 362 | 481 |
| Buckinghamshire | 295 | 377 |
| Milton Keynes | 285 | 393 |
| Derbyshire | 306 | 366 |
| Derby City | 307 | 431 |
| Dorset | 269 | 365 |
| Poole | 240 | 289 |
| Bournemouth | 351 | 503 |
| Durham | 305 | 443 |
| Darlington | 314 | 425 |
| East Sussex | 271 | 342 |
| Brighton and Hove | 305 | 390 |
| Hampshire | 237 | 353 |
| Portsmouth | 273 | 382 |
| Southampton | 276 | 364 |
| Leicestershire | 270 | 306 |
| Leicester City | 362 | 493 |
| Rutland | 340 | 497 |
| Staffordshire | 245 | 307 |
| Stoke-on-Trent | 333 | 546 |
| Wiltshire | 296 | 344 |
| Swindon | 291 | 330 |
| Bracknell Forest borough council | 258 | 361 |
| RB of Windsor and Maidenhead | 283 | 376 |
| West Berkshire district council | 338 | 365 |
| Reading | 354 | 442 |
| Slough borough council | 364 | 424 |
| Wokingham district council | 281 | 407 |
| Cambridgeshire county council | 284 | 364 |
| Peterborough city council | 308 | 391 |
| Cheshire county council | 252 | 336 |
| Halton borough council | 334 | 573 |
| Warrington borough council | 244 | 325 |
| Devon county council | 266 | 367 |
| City of Plymouth | 248 | 336 |
| Torbay borough council | 260 | 334 |
| Essex county council | 256 | 345 |
| Southend-on-Sea borough council | 242 | 326 |
| Thurrock council | 302 | 398 |
| Herefordshire council | 327 | 364 |
| Worcestershire county council | 265 | 326 |
| Kent county council | 266 | 344 |
| Medway council | 253 | 336 |
| Lancashire county council | 311 | 392 |
| Blackburn with Darwen | 435 | 528 |
| Blackpool borough council | 293 | 384 |
| Nottinghamshire county council | 278 | 327 |
| City of Nottingham | 384 | 662 |
| Shropshire county council | 266 | 341 |
| Telford and Wrekin | 358 | 417 |
| Cornwall | 295 | 361 |
| Cumbria | 308 | 406 |
| Gloucestershire | 285 | 375 |

*Standards Fund per pupil*

£ per pupil

| *Local education authority* | *2000–01* | *2001–02* |
|---|---|---|
| Hertfordshire | 255 | 315 |
| Isle of Wight | 329 | 406 |
| Lincolnshire | 288 | 400 |
| Norfolk | 290 | 412 |
| Northamptonshire | 270 | 387 |
| Northumberland | 250 | 385 |
| Oxfordshire | 300 | 362 |
| Somerset | 360 | 356 |
| Suffolk | 259 | 325 |
| Surrey | 233 | 324 |
| Warwickshire | 274 | 367 |
| West Sussex | 240 | 320 |

*Notes:*

1. Figures include Standard Fund grants relating to five to 16 pupils only. Grants for under-fives and post 16-provision have not been included.
2. Figures include both Government grant and local authority contributions to the Standards Fund.
3. Figures include recurrent and capital grants.

## Formula-funded Allocations

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list by local education authority in England, the amount per pupil for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education of the formula-funded allocations in the provisional settlement for 2002–03. [22743]

**Mr. Timms:** The information requested is shown in the following table.

*Provisional education SSAs per pupil 2002–03*

£

| *LEA* | *Primary per 5–10 pupil* | *Secondary per 11–15 pupil* |
|---|---|---|
| City of London | 3,816 | 7,607 |
| Camden | 3,888 | 4,767 |
| Greenwich | 3,622 | 4,650 |
| Hackney | 4,034 | 5,382 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 3,871 | 4,858 |
| Islington | 3,937 | 5,177 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 4,075 | 4,813 |
| Lambeth | 4,058 | 5,624 |
| Lewisham | 3,765 | 4,913 |
| Southwark | 3,898 | 5,030 |
| Tower Hamlets | 4,143 | 5,320 |
| Wandsworth | 3,516 | 4,459 |
| Westminster | 3,774 | 4,508 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 3,125 | 4,050 |
| Barnet | 2,992 | 3,755 |
| Bexley | 2,824 | 3,589 |
| Brent | 3,423 | 4,400 |
| Bromley | 2,790 | 3,521 |
| Croydon | 3,042 | 3,946 |
| Ealing | 3,227 | 4,186 |
| Enfield | 3,106 | 3,937 |
| Haringey | 3,555 | 4,587 |
| Harrow | 2,943 | 3,823 |
| Havering | 2,778 | 3,562 |
| Hillingdon | 2,926 | 3,742 |
| Hounslow | 3,154 | 3,946 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 2,793 | 3,555 |
| Merton | 2,994 | 3,838 |
| Newham | 3,531 | 4,521 |
| Redbridge | 2,972 | 3,801 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 2,753 | 3,475 |
| Sutton | 2,830 | 3,534 |
| Waltham Forest | 3,292 | 4,211 |
| Birmingham | 2,891 | 3,721 |

*Provisional education SSAs per pupil 2002–03*

£

| LEA | Primary per 5–10 pupil | Secondary per 11–15 pupil |
|---|---|---|
| Coventry | 2,702 | 3,457 |
| Dudley | 2,490 | 3,183 |
| Sandwell | 2,745 | 3,531 |
| Solihull | 2,461 | 3,119 |
| Walsall | 2,622 | 3,335 |
| Wolverhampton | 2,758 | 3,534 |
| Knowsley | 3,005 | 3,924 |
| Liverpool | 2,972 | 3,817 |
| St. Helens | 2,612 | 3,357 |
| Sefton | 2,601 | 3,304 |
| Wirral | 2,682 | 3,454 |
| Bolton | 2,607 | 3,316 |
| Bury | 2,522 | 3,222 |
| Manchester | 3,087 | 4,016 |
| Oldham | 2,683 | 3,424 |
| Rochdale | 2,721 | 3,472 |
| Salford | 2,732 | 3,542 |
| Stockport | 2,458 | 3,164 |
| Tameside | 2,596 | 3,310 |
| Trafford | 2,523 | 3,232 |
| Wigan | 2,499 | 3,186 |
| Barnsley | 2,609 | 3,371 |
| Doncaster | 2,674 | 3,442 |
| Rotherham | 2,582 | 3,274 |
| Sheffield | 2,648 | 3,392 |
| Bradford | 2,770 | 3,575 |
| Calderdale | 2,618 | 3,351 |
| Kirklees | 2,639 | 3,389 |
| Leeds | 2,612 | 3,347 |
| Wakefield | 2,535 | 3,250 |
| Gateshead | 2,657 | 3,405 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 2,801 | 3,606 |
| North Tyneside | 2,576 | 3,318 |
| South Tyneside | 2,716 | 3,482 |
| Sunderland | 2,659 | 3,414 |
| Isles of Scilly | 4,775 | 6,165 |
| Bath and North East Somerset | 2,437 | 3,064 |
| City of Bristol | 2,687 | 3,466 |
| North Somerset | 2,462 | 3,169 |
| South Gloucestershire | 2,390 | 3,087 |
| Hartlepool | 2,678 | 3,438 |
| Middlesbrough | 2,849 | 3,722 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 2,686 | 3,417 |
| Stockton-on-Tees | 2,620 | 3,375 |
| City of Kingston-upon-Hull | 2,785 | 3,564 |
| East Riding of Yorkshire | 2,485 | 3,197 |
| North East Lincolnshire | 2,673 | 3,424 |
| North Lincolnshire | 2,593 | 3,352 |
| North Yorkshire | 2,557 | 3,244 |
| York | 2,478 | 3,192 |
| Bedfordshire | 2,663 | 3,408 |
| Luton | 2,893 | 3,708 |
| Buckinghamshire | 2,656 | 3,411 |
| Milton Keynes | 2,745 | 3,527 |
| Derbyshire | 2,492 | 3,197 |
| Derby | 2,671 | 3,429 |
| Dorset | 2,494 | 3,179 |
| Poole | 2,452 | 3,133 |
| Bournemouth | 2,574 | 3,275 |
| Durham | 2,628 | 3,378 |
| Darlington | 2,602 | 3,338 |
| East Sussex | 2,713 | 3,498 |
| Brighton and Hove | 2,813 | 3,596 |
| Hampshire | 2,582 | 3,322 |
| Portsmouth | 2,779 | 3,532 |
| Southampton | 2,829 | 3,650 |
| Leicestershire | 2,411 | 3,094 |
| Leicester | 3,850 | 3,647 |
| Rutland | 2,466 | 3,039 |
| Staffordshire | 2,451 | 3,146 |

*Provisional education SSAs per pupil 2002–03*

£

| LEA | Primary per 5–10 pupil | Secondary per 11–15 pupil |
|---|---|---|
| Stoke-on-Trent | 2,658 | 3,407 |
| Wiltshire | 2,509 | 3,220 |
| Swindon | 2,495 | 3,200 |
| Bracknell Forest | 2,711 | 3,498 |
| Windsor and Maidenhead | 2,724 | 3,432 |
| West Berkshire | 2,587 | 3,280 |
| Reading | 2,792 | 3,643 |
| Slough | 3,157 | 4,148 |
| Wokingham | 2,465 | 3,177 |
| Cambridgeshire | 2,533 | 3,225 |
| Peterborough | 2,710 | 3,481 |
| Cheshire | 2,469 | 3,149 |
| Halton | 2,739 | 3,546 |
| Warrington | 2,449 | 3,147 |
| Devon | 2,559 | 3,290 |
| Plymouth | 2,610 | 3,314 |
| Torbay | 2,578 | 3,316 |
| Essex | 2,710 | 3,465 |
| Southend | 2,760 | 3,520 |
| Thurrock | 2,880 | 3,681 |
| Herefordshire | 2,588 | 3,314 |
| Worcestershire | 2,472 | 3,157 |
| Kent | 2,708 | 3,470 |
| Medway | 2,688 | 3,440 |
| Lancashire | 2,589 | 3,319 |
| Blackburn | 2,776 | 3,574 |
| Blackpool | 2,634 | 3,394 |
| Nottinghamshire | 2,506 | 3,219 |
| Nottingham City | 2,897 | 3,744 |
| Shropshire | 2,534 | 3,228 |
| The Wrekin | 2,616 | 3,363 |
| Cornwall | 2,594 | 3,335 |
| Cumbria | 2,581 | 3,299 |
| Gloucestershire | 2,497 | 3,186 |
| Hertfordshire | 2,750 | 3,503 |
| Isle of Wight council | 2,792 | 3,600 |
| Lincolnshire | 2,586 | 3,311 |
| Norfolk | 2,606 | 3,325 |
| Northamptonshire | 2,529 | 3,232 |
| Northumberland | 2,562 | 3,288 |
| Oxfordshire | 2,671 | 3,399 |
| Somerset | 2,529 | 3,245 |
| Suffolk | 2,526 | 3,221 |
| Surrey | 2,718 | 3,466 |
| Warwickshire | 2,489 | 3,173 |
| West Sussex | 2,638 | 3,365 |

## Schools Revenue Budget

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportions of her Department's Schools Revenue Budget for 2002–03 are *(a)* special grant, *(b)* standards fund and *(c)* formula-funded allocations. [22744]

**Mr. Timms:** The Department does not hold a single Schools Recurrent Budget. Recurrent funding for schools is made up of Education Standard Spending, the Standards Fund and Special Grants. For 2002–03, these three elements break down as follows:

| Funding source | Amount (£ million) | Proportion (Percentage) |
|---|---|---|
| Education Standard Spending (ESS) | 23,858 | 89.2 |
| Standards Fund | 1,711 | 6.4 |
| Special Grants | 1,168 | 4.4 |

Education Standard Spending is the amount the Government consider appropriate for local authorities to spend on education from their total budgets. Local authorities receive about three quarters of their funding from central Government, through the Revenue Support Grant and business rates, and about a quarter through council tax. The figure for the Standards Fund includes Government grant only as the local authority contributions are included in the ESS figure.

### Teachers' Superannuation Scheme

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what contributions local education authorities have been required to make to the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme in each of the last three years; and what contributions they will be required to make in 2002–03. [22745]

**Mr. Timms:** The rate of contribution payable by all employers to the teachers' pension scheme is determined through actuarial valuations. The percentages of salary payable for the years 1999–2000 through to 2002–03 are:

| | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| 2001–02 | 7.2 |
| 2001–03 | 7.4 |
| 2001–04 | 7.4 |
| 2002–03 | 8.35 |

### Children's Fund Budget

**Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the Children's Fund budget for 2001–02 will be spent on, broken down into categories. [22493]

**Mr. Denham:** The Children's Fund consists of two distinct elements: local partnerships of public agencies and the voluntary sector to provide preventive services for children at risk aged 5–13; and the Local Network Fund which provides small grants to local voluntary organisations to address child poverty at all ages, 0–19.

The Children's Fund budget of £100 million for 2001–02 has been allocated as follows:

Preventive services through local partnerships, including evaluation costs: £80 million

Local Network Fund, including evaluation: £10 million

National support, including partnership support and development, initiatives for children and young people and the costs of the Children and Young People's Unit: £10 million.

It is for local partnerships to determine their expenditure on individual services from their allocation in accordance with their local strategies for preventive services for children based on guidelines issued by the Children and Young People's Unit.

### Landscape Contracting

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with the British Association of Landscape Industries about training and certification of qualifications; and if she will make a statement. [22906]

**John Healey:** No discussions have been held with the British Association of Landscape Industries about training and certification of qualifications.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the arrangements for training in the landscape contracting sector. [22907]

**John Healey:** Arrangements for training in the landscape contracting sector are a matter for the employers in that sector, as in any other. A network of national training organisations (NTOs), set up by employers and formally recognised by the Government, provides strategic leadership and practical guidance about the learning, skills and qualification needs for a defined sector.

The Construction Industry Training Board is the NTO for the building and civil engineering sector, which includes "hard" landscaping, that is laying driveways; constructing walls; constructing or repairing swimming pools, playing fields and grounds for sporting or recreational purposes.

Lantra is the NTO for land-based industries, including "soft" landscaping, that is horticultural activities such as the landscaping of gardens and parks.

The Government recently announced plans to build a stronger sector network that will engage employers more fully in the planning and delivery of learning and skills. Sector skills councils will be set up which build on the achievements secured by NTOs.

### Construction Industry Training Board

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what responsibility the Construction Industry Training Board has for the landscape contracting sector; and if she will make a statement. [22908]

**John Healey:** The Construction Industry Training Board is responsible for the provision of practical guidance on the learning, skills and qualification needs related to the following landscaping activities:

Laying driveways.

Constructing walls.

Constructing or repairing swimming pools; playing fields; grounds for sporting or recreational purposes.

Restoring land affected by the working of coal by opencast operations.

Site preparation in connection with all of these.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the eligibility of the landscape contracting sector for payment of the Construction Industry Training Board Levy; and if she will make a statement. [22910]

**John Healey:** Employers fall within the scope of the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) if their main activity is one of the following:

Laying driveways.

Constructing walls.

Constructing or repairing swimming pools; playing fields; grounds for sporting or recreational purposes.

Restoring land affected by the working of coal by opencast operations.

Site preparation in connection with all of these.

Such employers would be assessed to levy in respect of their work force except for any employees engaged in "soft" landscaping operations where those activities fall within the definition of agriculture.

Employers whose main activity is "soft" landscaping do not fall within the CITB's scope.

### Local Education Authorities (West Midlands)

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which local education authorities in the West Midlands have access to sources of European funding to supplement the grants they receive from the Government. [22980]

**Margaret Hodge:** All local education authorities have access to the European Commission's education, training and youth programmes, as well as the European social fund. Funding under each of these programmes is awarded on a competitive basis following a bidding round. Local authorities are well placed to encourage institutions and schools in their areas to take advantage of the opportunities the programmes offer, and can also apply for project funding themselves.

The Socrates programme aims to promote the European dimension in the field of education, and covers all phases of education from primary schools to higher education, including activities focused on adult education and ICT and distance learning; the Leonardo da Vinci programme funds vocational training, and the youth programme focuses on non-formal learning. The European social fund supports the development education and training systems as part of lifelong learning policy in the wider context of strengthening economic and social cohesion.

Further details of the bidding procedures and activities covered can be found at the Commission website http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/educationculture/ and on the ESF at http://www.dti.gov.uk/europe/mf1.htm.

### Pupil Funding

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the per pupil standard spending assessment is for *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary pupils of (i) shire counties, (ii) other local education authorities and (iii) the average English education authority for (A) 2000–01, (B) 2001–02 and (C) 2002–3. [23082]

**Mr. Timms:** The information requested is in the following table:

£

| | *2000–01* | *2001–02* | *2002–03*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Secondary (pupils aged 11–15)* | | | |
| Shire | 3,024 | 3,157 | 3,310 |
| Non-shire | 3,304 | 3,447 | 3,620 |
| National | 3,175 | 3,313 | 3,476 |
| *Primary (pupils aged 5–10)* | | | |
| Shire | 2,348 | 2,456 | 2,587 |
| Non-shire | 2,577 | 2,697 | 2,846 |
| National | 2,474 | 2,588 | 2,728 |

[1] The amounts for 2002–03 are provisional

### Education Funding (Worcestershire)

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy to bring spending per pupil in Worcestershire closer to the average for the shire counties; and if she will make a statement. [23085]

**Mr. Timms:** The Government are currently working up proposals, in partnership with local government and other education interests, for the introduction of a new funding system in 2003–04. We are taking a fresh and objective look at what provision is needed, and at the additional costs some authorities undoubtedly face. We want a system that is both fair and clear. The element of the proposals set out in the Green Paper most relevant to Worcestershire's position is that LEAs should receive a basic entitlement per primary or secondary school pupil, with enhancements only for authorities where significant deprivation adds to costs, or schools need to pay more to recruit and retain staff. This would mean that a number of LEAs would get the same funding per pupil, rather than those like Worcestershire getting less than almost all others.

### Sex Education

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria the Government follow in determining the suitability of *(a)* publications and *(b)* materials to be used in the teaching of sex education. [22881]

**Margaret Hodge:** Our sex and relationship education guidance published last year, and underpinned by the Learning and Skills Act 2000, gives heads and governors a statutory responsibility to have regard to the guidance in ensuring that young people are protected from inappropriate teaching and materials.

### Education Funding (South Gloucestershire)

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason South Gloucestershire has a negative SSA for post-16 education in 2002–03; how many other authorities are in the same position; and if she will make a statement. [22604]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* South Gloucestershire has a negative net post-16 SSA because the deduction in respect of its Learning and Skills funding allocation for post-16 education is greater than its gross post-16 SSA for 2002–03. There are a further six authorities in this position. We will be making a special grant available, to guarantee that no authority will have a net post-16 SSA which is less than 7.5 per cent. of its gross post-16 SSA. Allocations of this special grant will be announced once the Local Government Finance Settlement is finalised at the end of January.

### Returnees Bonus

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers have *(a)* applied for, *(b)* been rejected for and *(c)* received the returnees bonus for teachers; and if she will make a statement on the numbers and nature of those applicants who have been disqualified from teaching in the interim since their last full-time post. [23114]

**Mr. Timms:** Information on the total number of applications for the bonus received by local education authorities, and the number of those to have been assessed as ineligible, is not collected centrally. To date, four local education authorities have submitted claims to my Department for the reimbursement of bonus payments made to seven teachers in their areas, but the bulk of claims will not be made until the new year. Any teacher who has been disqualified from the profession would be barred from working in a school and therefore ineligible to apply for the bonus.

### Special Education Grant (Worcestershire)

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to pay a special education grant to Worcestershire for 2002–03 financial year; and if she will make a statement. [23495]

**Mr. Timms:** We propose to pay a grant to those authorities where there is a significant impact from the transfer of funding from Education Standard Spending to the Learning and Skills Council. The grant will guarantee:

all LEAs a post-16 SSA after their LSC allocation has been deducted of at least 7.5 per cent. of their post-16 SSA before the LSC deduction; and

all LEAs at least 85 per cent. of the increase in their education SSA to be available for purposes other than sixth forms.

Allocations of this grant will be finalised in January, after the consultation on the Local Government Finance settlement has been completed, and final figures for LSC allocations and Education SSAs are available. We have no other plans for special grants to support LEA budgets for 2002–03, because increases in funding mean there is less need for special grant support from Government than there was in 2001–02: over £1.3 billion extra in Education Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs); a further increase in Standards Fund grant of almost £160 million; and an increase in the direct grant for schools of 2.75 per cent.

### Student Support

**Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to consult with Universities UK on the new system of student support. [23549]

**Margaret Hodge:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has written to Prof. Roderick Floud, President of Universities UK, to inform him that a review is under way. We plan to consult on any proposals for change and would expect Universities UK to contribute.

### Specialist Schools

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what advice she has received from Ofsted on the performance of specialist schools; and when the advice was received. [22322]

**Mr. Timms:** Ofsted's report, "Specialist Schools: An evaluation of progress", was published on 9 October 2001. An initial draft of the report was received within the Department for Education and Skills at the beginning of July. Ofsted's report confirms that four out of five of the schools surveyed are achieving the aims of the specialist schools programme and are making good use of the advantages it brings. The report's first main finding states that: "For these schools specialist status has often been a catalyst for innovation and helped to sustain or accelerate the momentum of school improvement." Technology, language and arts colleges are improving attainment at a faster rate than is the case nationally and in GCSE examinations in 2000 the combined average points score for each pupil for specialist subjects was higher in all four categories of specialist school than the average for all other maintained secondary schools. Ofsted also found that, with few exceptions, the community dimension was the weakest part of the school's work. However, sports colleges had responded well to this challenge and the report found that about half of the technology and language colleges visited had developed good examples of community support. We expect all specialist schools to benefit from the findings in the Ofsted report.

## DEFENCE

### Procurement

**Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much new equipment has been purchased in the last financial year. [17203]

**Dr. Moonie:** This information is contained within the Defence Procurement Agency's "Annual Report and Accounts for 2000–01" (Pages 8 and 11) which was published on 28 November and laid before the House. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

### Fair Trade Goods

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what fairly traded products, other than tea and coffee, have been purchased by his Department in each of the last five years; and what the value was. [18161]

**Dr. Moonie:** We do not keep records of purchases that fall into the fair trade category.

### Defence Aviation Repair Agency

**Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the cost of repairing the sewerage and water systems of RAF St. Athan. [19422]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ministry of Defence is currently engaged in a GB-wide public private partnership project, Project Aquatrine, which will involve the transfer of responsibility for delivering water and wastewater services to a private sector service provider over a 25 year contract period. RAF St. Athan is within the scope of Project Aquatrine. The bidders are responsible for assessing both the priority and level of investment in the waste and wastewater infrastructure, and pricing accordingly in their bids.

### Defence Jobs, Ilford

**Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of jobs that are dependent on defence spending in the Ilford, North constituency. [22293]

**Dr. Moonie:** There were 24 regular armed forces personnel employed at 1 July 2000 within the local area authority of Redbridge, of which the Ilford, North constituency is a part. In addition to these there are a number of Territorial Army personnel, and within Ilford there were fewer than 10 Ministry of Defence (MOD) civilians at the same date.

In addition to this direct employment, the MOD supports a significant number of defence related jobs in industry throughout the UK.

### Troop Deployment (Christmas and New Year)

**Mr. Keetch:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the *(a)* RAF, *(b)* Army and *(c)* Royal Navy he expects to be (i) serving abroad and (ii) deployed on front-line duties between 24 December and 2 January 2002; what percentage of trained strength of each force this represents; what provisions he has made to ensure family contact over that period; and if he will make a statement. [18932]

**Mr. Ingram** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The current estimate of the number of personnel who will be serving abroad and deployed on operations overseas over the Christmas and new year period is shown in the table.

| | *Royal Navy* | *Army* | *Royal Air Force* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Estimated number serving abroad | 6,300 | 22,300 | 6,300 |
| As a percentage of trained strength | 17 | 22 | 13 |
| Estimated number of those serving abroad deployed on operations | 3,000 | 9,350 | 3,200 |
| As a percentage of trained strength | 8 | 9 | 6 |

We attach great importance to ensuring service personnel deployed overseas are able to keep in touch with their families, especially over Christmas and new year. It is for this reason that personnel on operations over Christmas are, as last year, being given a further 20 minutes free phone call home in addition to the standard 20 minutes free weekly phone call. Free 'blueys' (aerogrammes), 'e-blueys' and concessionary parcel rates as well as internet and e-mail access are also available as part of the standard Operational Welfare Package.

### Armed Forces Pension Scheme

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the review of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme; what restrictions have been placed on the review in respect of its potential cost; and if he will make a statement. [22800]

**Mr. Ingram:** With regard to progress on the review of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 319W, to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne).

With regard to the potential cost of the proposed new scheme, it is Government policy that improvements in public service pensions should generally be paid for either by savings elsewhere in the scheme, or by scheme members through contributions. In addition, the review took account of the fact that the current Armed Forces Pension Scheme is one of the most expensive in the public sector. In the proposals issued for public consultation in March of this year, we sought to re-balance the benefits to reflect the needs of the modern armed forces, with regard both to those who can expect to serve a full career and those who we require to leave earlier. These proposals were cost neutral. We will, of course, consider carefully the views submitted in response to the consultation.

### C-17 Globemaster

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many C-17 Globemasters are owned by the British armed forces; if Globemasters are deployed in Afghanistan; what plans his Department has for further purchase of the Globemaster; and if he will make a statement. [23223]

**Mr. Ingram:** We have leased four C-17 Globemasters from the US, but currently do not plan to purchase these, or any additional C-17s. The four RAF Globemasters have not been deployed in Afghanistan but have been used in support of the on-going campaign against international terrorism.

### Smart Procurement

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much Smart Procurement has saved his Department since its inception; how much it is projected to save over the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [23225]

**Dr. Moonie:** Since the introduction of Smart Acquisition, the Ministry of Defence has identified £2.4 billion of savings in equipment procurement in the 10-year planning period between 1998 and 2008. The savings are set out in more detail in the Comptroller and Auditor General's Major Projects Report 2001 which was published on 23 November. Some £1.5 billion of these savings were made against planned expenditure between 2002 and 2007. Over the last three financial years, savings on the costs of in-service support of equipment attributable to Smart Acquisition, have totalled some £350 million. It is anticipated there will be on-going savings of £250 million per annum over the next few years.

Work is also under way to develop broader metrics and targets for assessing the benefits of Smart Acquisition.

### Porton Down

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 823W, on Porton Down, if further staff from his Department are to be assigned to work full-time to conduct the comprehensive survey of the service volunteer programme at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down. [22874]

**Dr. Moonie:** We currently have no plans to do so.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 10W, on Porton Down, on what dates the in-depth searches of his Department's archives were conducted. [22876]

**Dr. Moonie:** Searches of the Ministry of Defence archives have been carried out over the past two years since allegations emerged that participants in the Service

Volunteer programme were recruited under the pretext of common cold research. The precise dates on which such searches have been carried out are not recorded.

### Tactical Training Areas

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions his Department has made a formal objection to the siting of wind turbines in tactical training areas; which sitings were objected to; and on what grounds. [23136]

**Dr. Moonie:** Over the last two years, the Ministry of Defence has objected to 26 proposals to site wind farms within the tactical training areas (TTA). The details of these are withheld for reasons of commercial confidentiality in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The objections relate to the physical obstruction that would be caused by the wind farms within areas where fixed wing aircraft are engaged in operational low flying (OLF) training down to 100 ft minimum separation distance (MSD). Outside the TTA low flying fixed wing aircraft are not permitted to fly below 250 feet MSD. In order to preserve the tactical freedom to practise OLF it is important that the number of tall obstacles, such as wind turbines, is minimised within those areas. For this reason an objection is often, but not always, raised to proposals to locate turbines in any of the TTA.

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's policy is regarding the siting of wind turbines in tactical training areas. [23138]

**Dr. Moonie:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 22 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 297W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman).

### Territorial Army

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Territorial Army were involved in assisting the regular Army with operations during the foot and mouth outbreak in Scotland. [23205]

**Mr. Ingram:** Some 90 members of the Territorial Army were involved in assisting the Regular Army with operations during the foot and mouth outbreak in Scotland.

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Territorial Army from Scottish bases have been called upon to assist the Army in overseas operations in each of the last five years; and on how many occasions. [23357]

**Dr. Moonie:** I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Afghanistan

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on coalition plans for the removal of unexploded ordnance from Afghanistan. [23046]

**Mr. Ingram:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 343–44W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) and the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling).

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many children have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* maimed by cluster bombs in Afghanistan since 11 September. [23044]

**Mr. Ingram:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 860W, to my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) and for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham).

### RAF Staff College Site, Bracknell

**Mr. MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the timescale for disposal of the RAF staff college site, Bracknell. [23539]

**Dr. Moonie:** Defence Estates had planned to market the former RAF Staff College site with the benefit of planning permission early in 2002. However, delays in the adoption of the Local Plan, and obtaining planning permission, means this timetable may slip to late 2002, with completion expected in 2003. The site is available for development with the current Local Plan period to 2006.

### Lynx Helicopters

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to convert further Lynx helicopters from Mark 3 to Mark 8 standard; and if he will make a statement. [23624]

**Mr. Ingram:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 351W, to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws).

### Aircrew Retention

**Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the comprehensive review of aircrew retention. [23809]

**Mr. Ingram:** The Ministry of Defence has conducted a Comprehensive Review of Aircrew Retention this summer. We sought to identify why we have a shortfall in this highly trained group of personnel and how that shortfall might best be addressed. A study team including representatives from the three Services, HM Treasury and external consultancy have reviewed aircrew requirements and have looked at employment patterns, career structures, training systems and remuneration as well as the recruitment and financial policies of the commercial sector.

The Working Group collated the views of over 1,000 aircrew (probably the largest such survey the armed forces has undertaken) as well as those of managers. They examined and identified why people leave service life, as well as the attraction of the commercial sector.

The main cause of the shortage of aircrew was a failure of the training system to deliver against challenging targets. That has already been addressed, but it will take time to deliver. We intend, therefore, further to improve the retention of our current aircrew.

The Working Group identified a series of issues impacting on retention. Many of the quality of life issues emerging from the Review of Aircrew Retention were already being tackled. For example, the very significant programmes introduced to spend an additional £1 billion over the next 10 years on modernising single living accommodation and to spend £650 million by November 2005 on upgrading married quarters. We recognise that accommodation problems spread beyond housing and action is needed to address sub-standard working and technical accommodation as well. Senior service officers have also set in hand work to address a number of key concerns raised by aircrew—for example on operational tempo, career management, frequency of moves, and more. The impact of resolving these concerns will also be of benefit to personnel beyond the aircrew community. Some of the issues raised by aircrew are misperceptions, and to address this better communication is being developed across the services.

There are some remuneration aspects arising from the review and, as is usual, we have made proposals to the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB). The outcome will be reported to the House in due course—probably early February.

We are monitoring closely developments in the commercial sector. But, even if the pull to the private sector decreases as a result of a contraction in the civil sector, we still have a responsibility to deal with the natural factors which cause personnel to leave, and which are preventing us reaching aircrew manning balance.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Antisocial Behaviour

13. **Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to *(a)* assess and *(b)* publish the variation in applying for antisocial behaviour orders between different police forces. [21156]

**Mr. Denham:** Figures to 30 September this year show that 466 Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) have been issued. I am placing a copy of the force by force breakdown in the Library. I am pleased to say that 16 Antisocial Behaviour Orders have been issued to Lancashire Constabulary.

There are areas of good practice throughout England and Wales, but we are not complacent about the position. The White Paper on police reform, published on 5 December, makes it clear that the Government are seeking still more effective use of Antisocial Behaviour Orders.

**Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the measures he has taken to encourage parents to take greater responsibility for the anti-social behaviour of their children. [21164]

**Mr. Denham:** We introduced the parenting order on 1 June 2000, and its progress is promising. We are also launching youth offender panels, linked to referral orders which have a key role for parents. We are taking a number of wider steps to support families and assist parenting.

The White Paper on policing set out steps to encourage the use of Antisocial Behaviour Orders and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts.

23. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of antisocial behaviour orders made in the last year in *(a)* Dyfed Powys and *(b)* Wales. [21127]

**Mr. Denham:** For the period 1 June 2000 to 30 September 2001, there were no Antisocial Behaviour Orders made in Dfyed-Powys. There were four made in total in Wales. Much more use has been made of Antisocial Behaviour Orders in other areas, a total of 466 in England and Wales.

25. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many magistrates courts have used antisocial behaviour orders. [21129]

**Mr. Denham:** We now have information relating to the use of Antisocial Behaviour Orders in all magistrate court committee areas. I have placed the breakdown in the Library of the House: it shows that Orders are being used in 38 of the 42 Magistrates Court Committee Areas. As I said in response to a Question earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Mr. Marsden), the White Paper "Policing a New Millennium" makes clear that we intend to take action to promote their use still more widely.

36. **Mr. Pond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to tackle persistent youth disorder. [21140]

**Mr. Denham:** The Government have introduced a range of measures to tackle disorder and antisocial behaviour. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced crime and disorder partnerships, anti-social behaviour orders, child curfews and changes to the youth justice system. We have also introduced new community sentences for youth offenders including reparation orders, final warnings, child safety orders and parenting orders.

The White Paper "Policing the Next Century" proposes:

A new capacity for support staff to contribute to community safety in public places;

A much greater organised presence of other agencies accredited by the police;

New powers available to enable accredited organisations to tackle lower level antisocial behaviour; and

Firmer action on antisocial behaviour.

### Active Citizenship

15. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to promote *(a)* community engagement and *(b)* active citizenship. [21158]

**Mr. Blunkett:** Community engagement and active citizenship are fundamental to the fabric of our society. I aim to ensure that they underpin all aspects of policy development in the Home Office and across Government.

### Asylum System

16. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reform the asylum system. [21159]

**Angela Eagle:** My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced the steps being taken to reform the asylum system in his statement to the House on 29 October. We are determined radically to overhaul the asylum system.

Further details will be published in the forthcoming White Paper.

### Police Pensions

17. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reform police pensions. [21160]

18. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the funding of police pensions. [21162]

**Mr. Denham:** We are looking at ways of modernising police pensions to make them more flexible and affordable for future entrants and to reflect modern lifestyle patterns. The Government aim to complete this work as quickly as possible.

We are aware of police authorities' concern over the increasing burden of the funding of pensions. The Home Office and Treasury are reviewing the options for a revised system of funding which would give police authorities and chief officers greater certainty about pensions obligations on individual forces.

### Special Constables

19. **Patrick Mercer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers to discuss funding for special constables. [21163]

**Mr. Denham:** The Home Secretary formally met the President of Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) on Monday 3 December to discuss a range of matters in respect of the police reform programme.

The Government are committed to increasing the strength of Special Constabulary. We are considering a number of options for achieving substantial improvements in the conditions of service, management and deployment of Special Constables, to ensure that they are deployed effectively and provide an increased visible presence in our communities.

### Police (Upminster)

21. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of police resources in Upminster. [21125]

**Mr. Denham:** The Commissioner tells me that at the end of October Havering division had 323 police officers. This is 26 more than in December 2000. The Havering division also had 83 civilian support staff at the end of October.

In addition, the borough benefits from central and specialist services such as the territorial support group, traffic officers and specialist crime units, which are not budgeted for at borough level.

### Asylum Seekers

22. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy not to extend the asylum seekers' identity cards to the population as a whole. [21126]

**Angela Eagle:** The Government have no plans to extend to the population as a whole the Application Registration Card which will shortly be issued to asylum seekers.

31. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made on his targets for the *(a)* deportation and *(b)* removal of failed asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. [21135]

**Angela Eagle:** The current Service Delivery Agreement target relating to the removal of failed asylum seekers from the United Kingdom is to remove 30,000 in 2001–02; 33,000 in 2003–04; and 37,000 in 2003–04. The totals include dependants.

The 30,000 target for this year has always been ambitious and high risk. To enable us to reach and exceed 30,000 removals a year by 2003, we need to remove about 2,500 people a month. It remains our aim to achieve this monthly total by March 2002.

Published figures are not yet available for non asylum removals but there have been 5,330 asylum removals from April to September including 570 dependants.

35. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum applicants have been removed from the country in the last 12 months. [21139]

**Angela Eagle:** There have been 5,330 asylum removals[1] from April to September including 570 dependants[2].

Information on the number of asylum removals is published on a quarterly basis. The next set of data will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration 1.html.

[1] Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest five. Figures may not sum due to rounding. Removals includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action has been initiated against them and persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

[2] Data on dependants of asylum seekers removed have only been collected since April 2001.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he has granted permission to the Angel Development Corporation to house asylum seekers at the Centrex site at High Ercall, Shropshire; [19747]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Angel Development Corporation about the future of the Centrex site at High Ercall, Shropshire; [19749]

(3) if a feasibility study has been carried out on the suitability of the Centrex site at High Ercall, Shropshire, for the housing of asylum seekers; [19748]

(4) what the Government's intentions are with respect to the Centrex site, at High Ercall, Shropshire. [19746]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The Angel Group is under contract to the National Asylum Support Service to provide accommodation for asylum seekers. Any discussions that have taken place have related to the services provided under that contract.

My officials are currently looking at a number of potential sites for use as accommodation centres but no decisions have yet been made on individual sites to be used.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many places are being sought to accommodate asylum seekers around the country; and how many have so far been filled; [19743]

(2) what conditions must be fulfilled before permission is granted to those organising sites for the accommodation of asylum seekers; [19744]

(3) what the planned maximum number of asylum seekers is for each centre accommodating them in remote rural areas of the United Kingdom. [19745]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* It is intended to establish a number of accommodation centres for asylum seekers, with a total capacity of 3,000, in order to trial the new approach set out in the Home Secretary's statement of 29 October. No decisions have yet been made about the location of the centres.

In 2002 the Home Office will run competitions for the development and operation of sites to be used as accommodation centres for asylum seekers. The criteria for the award of any contracts that might result from the competitions have yet to be determined.

No maximum capacity for individual accommodation centres has been set. The capacity of individual sites will depend on a number of issues, including the availability of existing accommodation and the availability of land for development.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department's policy is towards asylum seekers from Zimbabwe in spring 2002. [22474]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* All asylum claims made by Zimbabwean nationals are considered under the terms of the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees. The Home Office, in conjunction with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, closely monitors the situation in Zimbabwe. A country assessment on Zimbabwe is produced by the Home Office and published on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's website. The assessment was revised in October 2001 and will be revised again in April 2002, taking into account the latest situation in Zimbabwe, particularly the presidential election that is due to be held there by April 2002.

**Julie Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what locations the asylum seekers who left Cardiff prison last month were dispersed. [22184]

**Angela Eagle:** During the week commencing 12 November the remaining 20 immigration detainees held at Her Majesty's Prison Cardiff were transferred to Immigration Service detention facilities: 18 were transferred to Harmondsworth Detention Centre and two were transferred to Campsfield House Detention Centre.

## Legal Migration

24. **Mr. Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide controlled legal migration routes into the UK. [21128]

**Angela Eagle:** My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made reference to his plans for sensible, controlled legal migration routes into the United Kingdom in his statement to the House of Commons on 29 October. Details of an entry programme for highly skilled migrants were announced in a reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) on 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1010–11W. Further details of specific managed migration policy proposals will be included in a White Paper to be published early in the new year.

## Prison Service

26. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the quality of management in the prison service. [21130]

**Beverley Hughes:** Evidence shows that performance in the Prison Service has been increasing year upon year. A key factor in this improvement is the overall quality of management in the Prison Service.

## Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act

27. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision he has made for the internment without trial of persons covered by the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [21131]

**Mr. Blunkett:** None. No one is being interned. The provisions are allowing extended detention for suspected international terrorists who threaten national security and for whom there is no immediate prospect of removal requiring a limited derogation from European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) article 5 providing protection for the public and sending a strong signal to others.

## Banning Order Appeals

28. **Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals have been held against banning orders under existing anti-terrorist legislation in the last six months. [21132]

**Mr. Blunkett:** Since the Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations)(Amendment) Order 2001 came into force on 29 March, there have been five applications to the Home Secretary for deproscription.

Four of those applications have so far been refused:

Lashkar e Tayyaba (LT)

Mujaheddin e Khalq (MEK)

International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF)

Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

One application is still under consideration:

Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C).

Three organisations have appealed to the Proscribed Organisations Appeal Commission (POAC):

Lashkar e Tayyaba (IT)

Mujaheddin e Khalq (MEK)

International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF).

### Remand Prisoners

29. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with the installation of safe cells for remand prisoners. [21133]

**Beverley Hughes:** Progress with the installation of safer cells was summarised in my written replies to the hon. Member on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 229–30W. A total of 681 safer cells will be installed in prisons in 2001–02. These cells will be used for all categories of prisoners, including those on remand.

### Prison Health Service

30. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in improving links between the prison health service and the NHS. [21134]

**Beverley Hughes:** The first annual report of the Prison Health Policy Unit and Task Force, which was published last month, records the progress made during the first year of the partnership between the prison and national health services. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library. The text of the report is also available on the prison health section website of the Department of Health www.doh.gov.uk/prisonhealth.

### Drug Testing and Treatment Orders

32. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the introduction of drug testing and treatment orders. [21136]

**Beverley Hughes:** Between 1 October 2000, when the Drug Treatment and Testing Order was rolled out to courts in England and Wales, and 31 October 2001, 3,956 orders were made, of which 1,089 were revoked. Implementation of the order is being closely monitored by the National Probation Service and consideration is being given to how research can assist us to understand the longer-term effectiveness of this new court disposal. It is, however, still too early for any independently evaluated information on the effectiveness of the order since roll-out.

The order had previously been piloted for 18 months in three areas. An independent evaluation of the pilot schemes found that on average there were significant reductions in the spending on illegal drugs and number of crimes committed by offenders subject to Drug Treatment and Testing Orders.

### Crime (Christmas Holiday)

33. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to reduce crime over the Christmas period. [21137]

**Mr. Denham:** The Government's £1 million advertising campaign to cut drink driving was launched on 4 December and features new radio adverts to complement a major television offensive. Guidance has been issued to the police which will better co-ordinate the response of the emergency services to domestic violence. Publicity material has also been sent to police forces to assist local campaigns warning the public not to leave valuables on display in their home or cars.

### Police Auxiliaries

34. **Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to appoint *(a)* police auxiliaries and *(b)* neighbourhood wardens in the Metropolitan police area. [21138]

**Mr. Denham:** The White Paper "Policing a New Century" outlines our proposals for developing the "Extended Police Family". This represents a major increase in the capacity of the police and others to provide an effective public presence giving reassurance and support for decent civil communities.

The appointment of Community Support Officers is an operational matter for the Chief Officer and neighbourhood wardens are usually employed by a local authority.

### Police Numbers

37. **Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the number of police officers. [21141]

**Mr. Denham:** By next spring police strength will have reached the all time record of 128,290 officers. I have set a target for police strength to reach 130,000 officers by spring 2003.

To help forces reach these targets, the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) is funding the recruitment of 9,000 officers over and above forces previous recruitment plans in the three years to March 2003. In addition, the first ever national recruitment campaign for the police service was launched in August 2000. By early December 2001 over 45,000 expressions of interest generated by the campaign had been forwarded to forces.

### Rehabilitation

38. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on training and into work schemes undertaken by the correctional services to help rehabilitate offenders. [21142]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** The Prison Service and National Probation Service (NPS) are committed to improving the employability and employment of offenders.

The Prison Service has a target of doubling the number of released prisoners getting jobs or training places by 2004, and pathfinder schemes in employment and resettlement are being developed by NPS in conjunction with the Employment Service and Prison Service respectively.

### Victims of Crime

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his oral answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 7, on victims of crime, if he will publish figures on the time it takes the police forces of the United Kingdom to answer telephone queries from the public; and if he will make a statement. [21157]

**Beverley Hughes:** The most recent information on call handling in forces in England and Wales was published on 16 October, Command Paper 230, in the "Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary 2000–01", a copy of which is placed in the Library. This covers 999

calls only. Information on response times for non-emergency calls to the police is not collected centrally. Information on Scottish forces is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive and, for the Police Service of Northern Ireland, of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

## Re-offending Rates

**Mrs. Brooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has collated on re-offending rates of discharged prisoners who have served sentences of more than two years, broken down by *(a)* prisons and *(b)* type of programmes provided within prisons in (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 1998–99. [22443]

**Beverley Hughes** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* Information on re-offending rates for discharged prisoners is not collected. However information on two-year reconviction rates is collected and published annually in Prison Statistics England and Wales. The latest reconviction rates cover prisoners discharged during 1997 and the first quarter of 1998 and are contained in chapter 9 of Prison Statistics England and Wales 2000 (Cm. 5250) a copy of which is available in the Library. Prisoners who have served sentences of two years or more will often have spent time in a number of prisons. It is therefore difficult to attribute reconviction rates to the impact of a particular prison.

Two offending behaviour programmes within prisons have been evaluated using offenders' reconvictions following discharge. The following tables show the percentage of offenders (both treated and similar untreated offenders) who have been reconvicted of an offence within two years of discharge by risk category. Comparison group offenders were matched to those who had participated in treatment on factors which are known to increase the likelihood of reconviction eg age at discharge, number of previous offences etc. This is to ensure, as far as possible, that the evaluation was comparing like with like offenders.

Table 1 refers to offenders who participated in two pre-accredited cognitive skills programmes (Thinking Skills and Reasoning and Rehabilitation). These offenders were treated between 1994 and 1996 and had been sentenced to two years or more. Table 2 refers to offenders who completed the pre-accredited Sex Offender Treatment Programme between 1992 and 1996 and had been sentenced to four years or more.

Overall, the results illustrate that offenders who have participated in offending behaviour programmes have consistently lower reconviction rates, two years after discharge, than similar untreated offenders.

Table 1. Evaluation of Prison Service Cognitive Skills Programmes.

*Table 1—Evaluation of Prison Service cognitive skills programmes*

*Percentage*

| *Offender risk level* | *Treatment group reconviction rate* | *Comparison group reconviction rate* | *Difference between reconviction rates*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Low | 5 | 8 | 3 |
| Medium-low | 18 | 32 | 14 |
| Medium-high | 43 | 54 | 11 |
| High | 75 | 80 | 5 |
| Adjusted overall | 44 | 52 | 8 |

[1] Percentage point reduction

*Note:*

1. Reconviction rates reflect the proportion of offenders reconvicted after two years. Offenders were treated between 1994 and 1996 before the accreditation process was introduced. The treatment group consists of 667 offenders and the comparison group consists of 1,801 offenders.
2. The adjusted overall figure takes account of the different number of offenders in the treatment and comparison group.

*Table 2—Evaluation of Prison Service sex offender treatment programme*

*Percentage*

| *Offender risk level* | *Treatment group reconviction rate* | *Comparison group reconviction rate* | *Difference between reconviction rates*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Low | 1.9 | 2.6 | 0.7 |
| Medium-low | 2.7 | 12.7 | 10.0 |
| Medium-high | 5.5 | 13.5 | 8.0 |
| High | 26.0 | 28.1 | 2.1 |
| Adjusted overall | 4.6 | 9.9 | 5.3 |

[1] Percentage point reduction

*Note:*

Reconviction rates reflect the proportion of offenders reconvicted of a sexual and/or violent offence after two years. Offenders were treated between 1992 and 1996 before the accreditation process was introduced. The treatment group consists of 647 offenders and the comparison group consists of 1,910 offenders. The adjusted overall figure takes account of the different number of offenders in the treatment and comparison group.

## Rape Victims

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he has in place to provide support to victims of rape; and what funding he provides to support rape victims. [22449]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** The Government are fully committed to meeting the needs of all victims of crime, particularly victims of serious crimes such as rape.

The Government grant to victim support, which offers support to victims of all crime, including rape and other sexual crimes, has doubled from £11.7 million in May 1997 to £25 million in April 2001. In 2000–01, victim support offered help to almost 5,000 victims of rape.

A first time grant, of £406,000, has been made available this financial year to the Rape Crisis Federation. The Federation provides training, support and consultancy services to the network of rape crisis groups across the country.

From April 2001, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme has increased the minimum award paid to victims of rape by almost 50 per cent. (from £7,500 to £14,000).

The 1998 Speaking Up for Justice report led to special measures being included in the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 to help rape victims face the ordeal of a court case. These measures included prohibiting the cross-examination of rape victims by the defendant in court, and further restrictions to limit the questions that rape victims can be asked under cross-examination about their previous sexual history.

## Schengen Information System

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on United Kingdom participation in the second generation Schengen information system. [14808]

**Angela Eagle:** In accordance with Council decision 2000/365/EC on the United Kingdom's partial participation in the Schengen acquis, the United Kingdom will participate in those aspects of the Schengen Information System (SIS) which relate to police and judicial co-operation, excluding Article 96 data on persons for immigration purposes. The United Kingdom is in the process of implementing the present system (SIS 1+) as part of its overall partial implementation of the Schengen acquis in the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom will participate in development of the second generation SIS(SIS II) for the same purposes.

The Justice and Home Affairs Council adopted, at its meeting on 6–7 December, a regulation under the treaty establishing the European Community and a decision under the treaty on European Union on funding of the development of SIS II from the community budget; the United Kingdom has opted in to the adoption of the regulation in accordance with its title IV Protocol. A recital to both decisions makes it clear that the United Kingdom's participation is without prejudice to the arrangements set out in Council decision 2000/365/EC.

While the primary aim of the next generation system (SIS II) is to increase its capacity for the new member state upon enlargement, the Council is also examining the scope for SIS II to have an increased range of functions and for a wider range of authorities to have access to SIS data.

### Foreign Nationals

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals are waiting to be extradited from the UK; and what is the longest period such a person has been waiting. [22482]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** 117 persons are currently the subject of extradition proceedings in the United Kingdom. The figure includes those who may be United Kingdom nationals. The oldest case has been outstanding since July 1995.

### Correspondence

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Twickenham of 7 August regarding Mrs. Muriel Mason and family (ref. GV 100/52417); and when he will make a decision regarding the matter. [18007]

**Angela Eagle:** I wrote to the hon. Member on 14 December. I am sorry I did not reply sooner.

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 10 September from the hon. Member for Putney with regard to his constituent Mrs. Marva Corrodus (Ref. C494223). [20350]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 14 December. I am sorry I did not send an earlier reply.

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters of 11 and 25 October from the hon. Member for Putney with regard to his constituent Ms Megen Muller (Ref. M1002596). [20349]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 17 December. I am sorry I did not send an earlier reply.

**Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reply to the letters of 18 September and 17 October from the hon. Member for Manchester, Central regarding his constituent Mrs. S. B. A (reference A377560). [17474]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 14 December. I am sorry he did not receive an earlier reply.

### Dr. Dizaei

**Mr. Boris Johnson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the officers monitoring Dr Dizaei's telephone conversations on the police telephone network between September 1999 and January 2001 were part of the team investigating him. [21687]

**Mr. Denham:** The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the staff monitoring Superintendent Dizaei's telephone conversations on the police telephone network were not part of the team investigating him.

### Forced Marriages

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what help is available in the Government's action plan to those who do not wish to make public the fact that they are being forced into marriage. [21616]

**Angela Eagle:** We have introduced a package of care to support victims of forced marriage, which includes help in escaping from the situation for those who want to.

Information can be accessed and obtained in schools via the welfare officer, police stations, GP's surgeries, via the internet and the Community Liaison Unit at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office have re-examined and identified ways in which staff in key posts overseas, handle forced marriage cases. Developing links and funding a number of women's refuges to provide support and accommodation to victims abroad. Further links are continuing to be developed with social services and other statutory agencies to ensure victims receive the support they need once they return to the United Kingdom.

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures in the immigration rules protect British Muslims from being sent abroad to marry against their will. [21617]

**Angela Eagle:** The Immigration Rules are there to regulate the grant to overseas nationals of leave to enter and remain in the United Kingdom. They do not seek to regulate the control of British Nationals, entering or leaving the United Kingdom. However, the Government are tackling the problem of forced marriage in a number of ways.

Included in the recent forced marriage progress report by the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office are some of the steps being taken to provide help, advice and support to victims and potential victims of forced marriage.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office have also published a leaflet, "Forced Marriages Abroad". This gives advice and guidance on what to do if someone fears they may be forced into a marriage, while abroad.

## War Crimes

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards the establishment of a European Network of Contact Points in Respect of Persons Responsible for Genocide, Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes; which will be the UK contact point; what nature of information will be forwarded to other EU member states; if material relating to cases occurring prior to UK legislation being passed pertaining to the accused's crime will be passed on to the states where retrospectivity is in force for those offences; and in which instances spontaneous transmission will occur under Article 5. [22883]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** The Government support the establishment of such a network, which is the subject of a draft European Union (EU) Council decision being considered by member states. An explanatory memorandum was submitted for parliamentary scrutiny on 24 October. The network would exchange information relevant to the investigation and prosecution of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The Government want to see the fullest possible exchange of such information, in respect of both formal requests and spontaneous transmission, and without limits on when events took place. Options for the UK contact point include National Criminal Intelligence Service and the UK Central Authority.

## Departmental Expenditure Limit

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [20675]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The level of wage costs within departmental budgets this year and in future years will be dependent upon negotiations. Departmental reports published next spring will give full retrospective costs.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the total unallocated funds within his departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against his departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19446]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The Home Office Departmental Annual Report for 2000–01 [C5106] contains the Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP) set for the present year in Table 6, page 109. There has been no draw-down of the Department's DUP to date.

Outturn against six month forecast for each request for resources will be published in the winter supplementary estimates summary request for supply as usual.

## Competitive Bidding

**Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the schemes administered by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies where funds are allocated by a competitive bidding process; and what was the amount of money allocated to each scheme. [19734]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Grant schemes administered by the Home Office, where a competitive bidding process has taken place, were allocated a total of approximately £340 million during this financial year. This has funded 226 projects under 17 schemes. The main grant schemes are as listed.

£

| *Grant scheme* | *Allocation* |
|---|---|
| Active Community Grants | 17,042,532 |
| ACU Grants funded by Capital Modernisation Fund | 8,226,017 |
| Race Equality Unit—Summer Activities | 7,000,000 |
| Race Equality Unit—Connecting Communities | 5,000,000 |
| Family Support Grants (for voluntary organisations) | 2,000,000 |
| Research Challenge Fund | 260,000 |
| Refugee Integration Challenge Fund | 500,000 |
| Crime Reduction Programme | 51,500,000 |
| Crime Reduction Programme—CCTV Capital Grants | 70,000,000 |
| Partnership Development Fund | 2,100,000 |
| Electronic Chipping Initiative | 2,300,000 |
| Confiscated Assets Fund | 7,000,000 |
| Drug Prevention Advisory Service Grants | 1,907,000 |
| Crime Fighting Fund | 151,000,000 |

The following grants schemes were approved by ministers during 2001, and will run until 2004:

£

| *Grant scheme* | *Allocation* |
|---|---|
| Mentoring Fund Grants | 3,448,691 |
| Infrastructure Grants | 7,719,500 |

## Immigration and Nationality Directorate

**Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the application from Mrs. Susan Crwys-Williams, a constituent of Cheltenham, sent by recorded delivery (Ref: RB13663205GB) on 15 October, for indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom as a spouse of a UK citizen, will be logged on the system of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate; when he expects a decision to be made on her application; and what compensation is payable by his Department to those applicants who have purchased air tickets in advance to travel abroad at Christmas on the expectation that applications will be dealt with in the time period advertised. [22141]

**Angela Eagle:** The application has been decided. Mrs. Crwys-Williams' passport and other documents were returned by recorded delivery on 7 December.

Compensation will not normally be offered to applicants who have made travel plans in the expectation that their application would be completed within any particular time scale. Information on the application form and the Immigration and Nationality Directorate website about the likely time scales for processing applications is intended for guidance only and should not be taken to imply that any application will necessarily be completed within that time scale. The website currently advises

applicants not to make non-urgent travel plans such as holidays until the outcome of the application is known and their documents have been returned. If an applicant wishes to travel their documents will be returned but applications will not normally be considered out of turn.

### Conviction Statistics

**Mr. Lilley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what definitions are used for *(a)* convicted after trial rate in Crown courts in quarterly Business Information and *(b)* percentage of those pleading not guilty convicted for persons tried at the Crown court in Table 6C of Criminal Statistics. [22281]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** The "Convicted after contested trial rate" in the Criminal Justice Business Quarterly Report focuses on those defendants, from Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) records, who pleaded not guilty in the Crown court, no guilty pleas being entered, and a jury was sworn in. The resultant contested hearings include those resulting in a judge directed acquittal as well as those convicted or acquitted on the verdict of the jury.

The "Percentage of those pleading not guilty convicted" given in Table 6C of Criminal Statistics England and Wales is derived from Crown court records and focuses on a larger group of defendants. Non-CPS prosecutions are included as well as some defendants who pleaded not guilty to the principal offence and guilty to other charges. A jury trial may not have occurred and those not convicted include judge-ordered acquittals, judge-directed acquittals and jury acquittals.

### Corporate Manslaughter

**Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the criminal justice system as it relates to corporate manslaughter. [22291]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** We have considered responses to our consultation paper "Reforming the Law on Involuntary Manslaughter" which included our proposals in relation to corporate manslaughter. We will legislate on this issue as soon as parliamentary time allows.

### Resource Allocation

**Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give *(a)* the reasons for the projected change in net provision of money for fire and emergency planning in 2001–02, *(b)* details of those areas of action which have received less funding than was provided for at the commencement of financial year 2001–02 and *(c)* examples of measures which are funded under Request for Resources 1-H. [22132]

**Mr. Blunkett** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* As a result of Machinery of Government changes announced by the Prime Minister on 8 June 2001, resources were transferred to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for the Fire Service, and to the Lord Chancellor's Department for Remembrance Day in line with the transfer of responsibilities.

No areas have received less funding than was provided for at the start of the financial year. The reduction in resources is wholly attributable to the Machinery of Government transfer.

The remaining resources under Request for Resources 1-H fund the Emergency Planning function. These resources are also subject to the Machinery of Government changes and will be transferred to the Cabinet Office in the spring.

### Explosives Offences

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions have been recorded for offences under the Explosives Acts in each of the last five years. [22349]

**Beverley Hughes:** The information held centrally on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database relating to England and Wales for the years 1996–2000 is given in the table.

*Offenders convicted under the Explosives Acts, England and Wales, 1996 to 2000*

| *Principal statute* | *Offence description* | *Total number convicted* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000*[1] |
| Explosives Act 1875 (except sec. 80) and Orders in Council and rules thereunder[2] | Manufacture and keeping of gunpowder and other explosives | | | | | |
| Explosives Act 1923 and Orders in Council and rules thereunder[2] | Offences in relation to explosives, firearms etc. | 24 | 28 | 16 | 21 | 17 |
| Fireworks Act 1951[2] | Offences in relation to dangerous fireworks and making of fireworks etc. | | | | | |
| Explosives Act 1875 sec. 80 | Throwing, casting or firing any fireworks in or into any highway, street, etc. public place | 34 | 49 | 36 | 27 | 40 |
| Total | | 58 | 77 | 52 | 48 | 57 |

[1] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for convictions at magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table
[2] Data for these offences are not separately identifiable on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database
*Note:*
All data are given on a principal offence basis

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Public Service Agreement target to plan and meet electronic Government needs was achieved. [21288]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The proportion of my Department's services capable of electronic delivery is currently 47 per cent. By the end of 2002, this should have risen to about 70 per cent. This compares with the Government's target of 25 per cent. by 2002.

My Department's e-Business Strategy is published on the internet. The body of the strategy can be found at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/ebusiness/stratmain.pdf. The appendixes are at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/ebusiness/stratapp.pdf.

Appendix A lists Home Office services and progress towards their e-enablement.

### Departmental Sickness

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many days were lost due to sickness absence in his Department in each of the last four years. [21346]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The average number of working days lost due to sickness absence in the Home Office is as follows:

1998: 10.4

1999: 11.1.

Figures for 2000 and 2001 are not currently available.

The Home Office and its agencies have introduced new guidelines, policies and procedures with a view to meeting its target to reducing sickness absence, published in its Service Delivery Agreements for April 2001 to March 2004.

### Crime and Disorder

**Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce the budget allocations for local crime and disorder reduction partnerships under the safer communities initiative. [21667]

**Mr. Denham:** We are working on plans for a safer communities initiative (SCI) as a coherent and consistent framework for delivering crime reduction funding to local crime and disorder partnerships, to help them tackle crime and disorder in their areas, to meet local and national crime reduction priorities.

We aim to announce detailed arrangements for the safer communities initiative soon.

### Joint Entry Clearance Unit

**Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next plans to visit the Joint Entry Clearance Unit. [18748]

**Angela Eagle:** My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has not yet visited the Joint Entry Clearance Unit and has no immediate plans to do so. However, I visited on 12 November and my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Rooker, Minister for Immigration and Asylum, visited on 4 July.

### Alcohol

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the trend in the incidence of youth disturbance involving the intake of alcohol in the last three years. [20984]

**Mr. Denham:** The information requested is not routinely collected by police forces or held centrally. Youth disturbance may vary from nuisance behaviour through to more serious disorder and criminal activity.

Tackling the problems associated with underage drinking is a key objective of the Home Office action plan on alcohol-related crime, disorder and nuisance. The most recent Youth Lifestyles Survey, published in October 2000, showed that 15 per cent. of young people aged 12 to 17 admitted to committing some form of antisocial behaviour during or after drinking—most often getting into a heated argument. Frequent drinkers were also more likely to have behaved antisocially.

We have strengthened the law, from 1 December, to go further in tackling the sale of alcohol to underage drinkers. Section 30 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 now places a positive duty on staff in licensed premises to check the age of young customers before selling alcohol, and section 31 provides a power for the police and local authorities to enforce the law by using under-18s to make test purchases. We expect these important new measures to assist in our determination to tackle under-age drinking as part of our wider programme to reduce youth crime and antisocial behaviour.

### Illegal Immigration

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his meeting with the French Minister for the Interior at the United Kingdom-France summit held on 29 November in relation to cross-channel illegal immigration and the effectiveness of checks conducted on persons and vehicles. [22399]

**Angela Eagle:** The Home Secretary and Daniel Vaillant did not meet at the UK-French summit on 29 November. Interior Minister Vaillant was forced to cancel his participation at the last minute due to his involvement in detailed negotiations with the French Police Unions.

However, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and Monsieur Lionel Jospin the French Prime Minister had an hour long bilateral during which they discussed among other issues the Red Cross Centre at Sangatte and the Civil Penalty. Discussions also took place between my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe and his French counterpart M. Moscovici. In addition to formal meetings at ministerial level, officials on both sides meet regularly to discuss proposals to combat illegal immigration between our two countries.

### Victim Support

**Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the victim support scheme. [21147]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** The National Audit Office is currently conducting a study of Victim Support, which is an independent organisation and the principal supplier, on behalf of the Home Office, of services for victims of crime and witnesses.

### Contingency Planning

**Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representatives from *(a)* devolved Administrations, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* London have been invited to sit on the (i) Civil Contingencies Committee and (ii) the Sub-Committee on UK Resilience. [19591]

**Mr. Blunkett:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 6–8W, about the terms of reference and composition of the Civil Contingencies Committee (CCC) and its Sub-committees. The hon. Member will also be aware of the letter I wrote to individual Members of this House on 9 November explaining how the Civil Contingencies Secretariat is exercising its support responsibilities.

## WALES

### Public Bodies

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those local bodies which were set up under legislation which is the responsibility of his Department since May 1997. [17617]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** This information is not held centrally.

### Heart Operations

**Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Health Secretary in the National Assembly about steps to reduce the waiting time for a heart operation similar to those announced for England on 6 December. [23493]

**Mr. Touhig:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet regularly with the National Assembly First Minister and Health Minister to discuss the NHS in Wales.

The Assembly is exploring with the Department for Health a range of options including some outside the Welsh NHS. At present, where it is appropriate, cardiac patients are offered the opportunity to receive their treatment in England, notably at the Hammersmith Hospital, co-ordinated by the Specialised Health Services Commission for Wales.

The target by the end of March 2002 is that no patient needing routine cardiac surgery should wait more than 12 months for treatment. By 2003–04 the target is that cardiac waiting time will have further reduced to six months and then down to three months by 2006–07.

### Absence

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21333]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** In conjunction with the National Assembly for Wales, which manages my Department's personnel functions under the terms of a service level agreement, we are committed to achieving substantial reductions in the number of days lost through sickness.

The average number of working days sickness absence per staff year were as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1996 | 9.0 |
| 1997 | 8.3 |
| 1998 | 7.6 |
| 1999 | 7.6 |

*Notes:*

1. Details cover the most recent four years for which data are available.
2. Figures for 1996–98 relate to Welsh Office, Cadw and Estyn (formerly OHMCI).
3. 1999 figures relate to Welsh Office, Cadw and Estyn up to 30 June, and to Wales Office: National Assembly for Wales, Cadw and Estyn from 1 July.

### New Deal (Young People)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21318]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** None at present. The Wales Office is staffed entirely by secondees from other organisations and so does not undertake its own external recruitment. But I should be delighted if people employed through new deal were to offer themselves for secondment to my Department.

### Departmental Expenditure Limits

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [21237]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** The departmental expenditure limit which is available for the Wales Office's own expenditure, after payment of block grant to the National Assembly for Wales, is not set to increase between 2001–02 and 2003–04.

### Departmental Staff (Home Working)

**Mr. Challen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps his Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21831]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** My Department is staffed entirely by secondees, predominantly from the National Assembly for Wales. We adopt the same approach to home working as does the Assembly; currently one member works regularly from home.

### Regulations

**Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many regulations his Department has been consulted by other Government Departments since June; what regulatory impact assessments have been made by his Department of the cost of UK Government regulations to business in Wales over the last 12 months; and what representations his Department has made to other Government Departments seeking to reduce the burden of regulations on small businesses in Wales. [21968]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues, and my Department is routinely consulted, about the impact of Government policies on business in Wales. The Wales Office has itself undertaken no regulatory impact assessments during the past 12 months.

## SCOTLAND

### Ferry Services

**Mr. Alan Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which businesses were consulted by Steer Davies Gleave while they were compiling, on her behalf, the feasibility study for a ferry service between Campbeltown and Ballycastle; what questions were asked of the businesses; by what means Steer Davies Gleave advertised to businesses the fact that they were compiling the study; what fee was charged by Steer Davies Gleave; and when and where she will make the report available to the public. [17299]

**Mr. Foulkes** *[holding answer 22 November 2001]:* The Scotland Office appointed Steer Davies Gleave to undertake a transport and economic appraisal of the Campbeltown-Ballycastle ferry in consultation with the Scottish and Northern Irish Executives and after a competitive tendering process. The fee paid to the consultants was £18,600. In the course of their work on this study, I understand that the consultants questioned a number of companies within the local areas of Kintyre and Moyle and beyond to assist them in evaluating the likely usage and benefits from a new ferry service.

A copy of the final report will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Scottish Parliament

**Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what weight will be given to public opinion in Scotland in completing her consultation on MSP numbers; [23390]

(2) when she intends to conclude her consultation period on considering the number of Members of the Scottish Parliament; and how soon thereafter she will publish the results. [23391]

**Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she plans to publish her consultation document of the number of Members of the Scottish Parliament. [23808]

**Mrs. Liddell:** I expect to make an announcement shortly about the consultation on the size of the Scottish Parliament.

### Scottish Executive Officers (International Arrangements)

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Government give direct financial support to fund Scottish Executive officers working internationally under arrangements made with the Scotland Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office. [23606]

**Mrs. Liddell:** Scottish Executive officers working overseas are funded by the Scottish Executive. However, the full resources of the British embassies overseas are available to assist the executive as well as the other devolved Administrations.

### Friends of Scotland

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people outside the United Kingdom have signed up to the Friends of Scotland initiative since it was launched. [23605]

**Mrs. Liddell:** There is no requirement for people abroad to "sign up" to the Friends of Scotland initiative. I have contacted diplomatic missions to inform them of the initiative and to seek their assistance in taking it forward.

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Scotland Office staff members are working full-time in the Friends of Scotland unit. [23602]

**Mrs. Liddell:** Currently there are two full-time officials working on the Friends of Scotland initiative. Recruitment of further staff is under way and secondments from the private sector are being explored.

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many target overseas participants the Scotland Office has for the Friends of Scotland initiative in the first *(a)* six months and *(b)* 12 months of operation. [23601]

**Mrs. Liddell:** The first meeting of the advisory committee will take place on Tuesday 18 December, at which the issues and targets will be discussed.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Capital Punishment (USA)

**Vera Baird:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has made to the state of Georgia, USA, regarding the proposed execution of British national Tracey Housel; and if he will make a statement. [23392]

**The Prime Minister:** The Government are taking what steps we properly can. The Consul General in Atlanta has recently written to the Governor of Georgia underlining the Government's opposition to the death penalty and asking the Georgia authorities to commute Mr. Housel's sentence to a term of imprisonment.

### Project for the Successor Generations

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on contacts since 1 May 1997 between Ministers and the British/American project for the successor generations. [23184]

**The Prime Minister:** The British/American project aims to strengthen the vital and longstanding relationship between the US and UK. As part of that process, it arranges meetings, including with Ministers, for young leaders from the business, economic, professional, cultural, artistic, governmental, academic, scientific, medical, military and social life of the two countries.

### Policy Announcements

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister if his undertaking that announcements of Government policy should be made in the first instance in Parliament prevents *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* civil servants briefing the media before such an announcement. [23181]

**The Prime Minister:** In their response to the report from the Public Administration Select Committee on the Ministerial Code, the Government made clear that when the House is sitting announcements of Government policy should be made, in the first instance, to Parliament. Contacts between civil servants, including special

advisers, and the media are conducted in accordance with the Guidance for the Government Information Service and the GICS Handbook.

### Waste Policy

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister whether the published review of waste policy being undertaken by the performance and innovation unit will constitute formal planning guidance to waste disposal authorities. [23186]

**The Prime Minister:** No. The performance and innovation unit will look at the whole range of issues around delivery of the waste strategy, which will include planning issues. Any recommendations or conclusions which the PIU may draw will not constitute formal planning guidance but will inform future policy.

### Minister for Retail

**Barbara Follett:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to create a Minister for retail. [23319]

**The Prime Minister:** None. My hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness is responsible for the retail sector. Additionally, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Business champions the interests of small retailers and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Whitty) is responsible for issues specific to food and drink retailing.

### BioIndustry Association

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Prime Minister how many times he has met Mr. Simon Best, deputy chairman of the BioIndustry Association; and what the purpose of each meeting was. [23243]

**The Prime Minister:** I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations, it is not my practice to provide details of such meetings.

## DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

### Lobbying

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance is provided to Government bodies in respect of the expenditure on funds on lobbying activities; and if he will make a statement. [23189]

**Mr. Leslie:** All contacts with lobbyists are conducted in accordance with the guidance on contacts with lobbyists which is set out in the Directory of Civil Service Guidance, Volume 2. Copies of the Directory are in the Library of the House and on the Cabinet Office website http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/guidance/two/default.htm. Any departmental expenditure will be conducted in accordance with the guidance on Government Accounting.

### E-envoy

**Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the annual report from the e-envoy will be published. [23271]

**Mr. Leslie:** The Ukonline annual report was published on 4 December, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. It is also available at www.e-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/champions/anrep menu.htm.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target for introducing new development and training packages for Departments' staff. [21250]

**Mr. Leslie:** The Cabinet Office has delivered training packages and other new developments to extend the skills of staff and enhance their leadership potential as part of the Government's programme of Civil Service reform.

The Centre for Management and Policy Studies is promoting improved leadership across the Civil Service through an updated group of corporate development programmes and networks for the Senior Civil Service, including interactive e-learning, and through a wide range of re-focused training programmes for staff at all levels.

Other developments aimed at improving the quality of leadership across the wider public sector include the Public Service Leaders Scheme which brings together young high potential middle-ranking officials from the wider public sector and the Civil Service for a two-year development programme. The new Pathways Programme is a two-year Senior Leadership Development Programme designed to identify and develop senior managers from ethnic minorities. We have also introduced a bursary scheme to enable civil servants with disabilities to achieve leadership potential.

Details of these activities have been placed in the Library of the House.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Magistrates Courts

**Simon Hughes:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which magistrates courts in England and Wales closed in each year since 1992; what plans there are for future closures; and if he will make a statement. [21644]

**Mr. Wills:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the noble Lord Phillips of Sudbury by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor on 12 November 2001, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column WA49. Since that answer we have subsequently been advised that Gravesend courthouse in Kent closed on 9 June 2000. This information was not available at the time the answer was given.

I am aware that 11 magistrates courts committees are currently considering courthouse closures. These are Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Surrey, Durham, North Yorkshire, Thames Valley, Greater Manchester, West Mercia, West Midlands, the Greater London Magistrates' Courts Authority and Staffordshire.

Magistrates courts committees are not statutorily required to inform the Lord Chancellor's Department of proposed courthouse closures which are not subject to an appeal by its paying authority or authorities.

It is the Government's policy that decisions concerning the number, location and future of magistrates courts are for each magistrates courts committee to determine, in consultation with its local paying authority or authorities.

### Justices of the Peace

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what is the payment made to justices of the peace for a daily loss of earnings; and when this payment was last *(a)* reviewed and *(b)* increased. [22484]

**Mr. Wills:** The amount payable to justices who are self employed for loss of earnings is £41.78 for sitting up to four hours and £83.56 for over four hours. As the Inland Revenue treat this allowance as compensating for loss of profits self employed justices are liable to pay tax. The amounts payable to employed justices are £32.17 for sitting up to four hours and £64.34 for over four hours.

The rates at which allowances are paid are reviewed annually by the Lord Chancellor's Department. The allowances were reviewed earlier this year and the new rates became payable on 1 September 2001.

### Departmental Sickness

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many days were lost due to sickness absence by staff in her Department in each of the last four years. [22834]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** The number of days lost due to sickness absence is collected, averaged to show working days lost per person per annum for each Department, and published annually by the Cabinet Office in the reports "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". For the Lord Chancellor's Department (including agencies), the last four published figures (in working days lost per person per annum) are as follows:

1996: 10.7 days

1997: 10.7 days

1998: 10.7 days

1999: 10.0 days.

The Department is committed to managing sick absence effectively and has set targets for reducing sickness absence in its Service Delivery Agreement (SDA).

### Gravesend County Court

**Mr. Pond:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases were dealt with by Gravesend county court in each six-month period beginning from January 1999. [18429]

**Mr. Wills** *[pursuant to his reply, 27 November 2001, c. 830W]:* Certain work load information was inadvertently omitted. This concerned the total number of default and fixed date claims issued and how many mortgage and rent possession actions were made. A revised table follows.

*Claims issued, small claims hearings and possession applications heard at Gravesend county court during selected periods*

| | *Total claims issued*[1] | *Small claims hearings* | *Mortgage and rent possession applications* |
|---|---|---|---|
| January to June 1999 | 769 | 46 | 197 |
| July to December 1999 | 802 | 34 | 252 |
| January to June 2000 | 699 | 33 | 215 |
| July to December 2000 | 724 | 35 | 182 |
| January to June 2001 | 575 | 17 | 190 |
| July to October 2001 | 531 | 21 | 187 |

[1] Includes default and fixed date claims

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Employment Tribunals

**Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received to amend the Equal Pay Act 1970 to allow for an extension of the time limit beyond six months from termination of employment for bringing an equal value pay claim before an employment tribunal. [15072]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* Under the Equal Pay Act 1970 a woman (or man) may bring a claim within six months of the time when she (or he) was last employed in that job for equal work, that is: for like work, work rated as equivalent, or work which is unlike but which the claimant believes is of equal value. Reference was made to time limits which apply in equal pay cases in the "Review of Women's Employment and Pay" published on 5 December by Denise Kingsmill CBE. That review made proposals to deliver improvements to women's employment prospects and reduce the pay gap between women and men. However, there was no formal recommendation made on tribunal time limits. The Government have received no other recent representations.

### Telecom Services

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce regulations to ensure that customers of telecoms companies can transfer existing numbers between suppliers of telecom services. [16812]

**Mr. Alexander** *[holding answer 22 November 2001]:* The regulation of telecoms operators is the responsibility of Oftel. All telecoms operators are subject to a licence condition, enforced by Oftel, which obliges them to provide number portability when customers switch networks, wherever that is reasonable.

We are now considering whether action is needed to ensure the regulatory framework meets the challenges of a competitive market.

### Grant Schemes

**Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will list the grant schemes administered by her Department; [18529]

(2) if she will list the grant schemes to be administered by her Department following its restructuring under each of the five portfolio headings; [18528]

(3) if she will list those business grant schemes administered by her Department which she proposes to abolish. [18530]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* Grant schemes form part of my Department's wider programme of expenditure in support of business. The Review of Business Support has so far identified 183 business support programmes operated by my Department, of which 59 provide grants direct to business. A number of these programmes consist of a range of sub-activities. The review is continuing to analyse this information to ensure all relevant programmes and business support activities have been identified. Decisions about whether and where these programmes fit in the new portfolio system will be made later in the review.

## Energy Sector

**Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect Government support for the energy sector, including oil and gas production, was in each year since 1990. [18831]

**Mr. Wilson** *[holding answer 28 November 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 16 November 2001, *Official Report,* columns 918–19W. Direct support for oil and gas production is set out in the table.

Since 1998 the Government have also worked with the oil and gas industry through the Oil and Gas Industry Task Force, now PILOT, to identify and deliver the measures necessary to ensure continued profitable activity on the UK Continental Shelf. The industry has made clear to me that they see PILOT as playing a crucial role in getting investment back to 1998 levels. Capital expenditure on UKCS projects was near £3 billion in 2000 and looks set to be substantially higher this year, and oil and gas production remains at peak levels of 4 million barrels of oil equivalent per day.

Sustained Hydrocarbons Additional Recovery Programme (SHARP) and predecessor programmes:

| *Financial year* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 5.000 |
| 1990–91 | 5.631 |
| 1991–92 | 5.087 |
| 1992–93 | 5.196 |
| 1993–94 | 5.000 |
| 1994–95 | 4.400 |
| 1995–96 | 4.400 |
| 1996–97 | 2.251 |
| 1997–98 | 3.215 |
| 1998–99 | 2.963 |
| 1999–2000 | 2.857 |
| 2000–01 | 2.731 |
| 2001–02 | [1]1.400 |

[1] To date

Support for the development of new products and services and competitiveness improvement within the UK oil and gas supplies sector:

| *Financial year* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 2.316 |
| 1990–91 | 2.958 |
| 1991–92 | 3.12 |
| 1992–93 | 2.671 |
| 1993–94 | 2.718 |
| 1994–95 | 2.34 |
| 1995–96 | 4.04 |
| 1996–97 | 2.603 |
| 1997–98 | 1.657 |
| 1998–99 | 1.667 |
| 1999–2000 | 1.65 |
| 2000–01 | 1.537 |
| 2001–02 | [1]1.7 |

[1] Total

## Correspondence

**Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reply to the letter of 22 October from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire on Harrington Generators International. [21471]

**Ms Hewitt:** The matters raised were the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State responsible for procurement has written to the hon. Member.

## Departmental Strategy Board

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if there will be engineers on her Department's Strategy Board. [21505]

**Ms Hewitt:** I am currently considering the criteria to be applied for the appointment of three non-executive members of the Strategy Board. I expect to make the appointments before 1 April 2002, and will announce them when they are made. We will be adopting an open and transparent procedure for making these appointments and I shall be making an announcement on this procedure in due course.

## Export Credits Guarantee Department

**Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the savings have been resulting from hedging the cost of interest make-up on fixed rate export finance loans offered by the Export Credits Guarantee Department in each of the last 20 years. [21976]

**Ms Hewitt:** ECGD's interest rate hedging activity protects against the risk of increased support costs arising from adverse interest rate movements under the Fixed Rate Export Finance (FREF) scheme.

ECGD began hedging its exposure 15 years ago, using interest rate swaps. During the previous five years, the total net cost of FREF interest support, without hedging, was £2,189 million. Over the following 15 years, up to and including 2000–01, the total net cost of support was £1,703 million, within which the net cost of interest rate swaps was £319 million. The yearly breakdown of net swap costs over the period was as follows:

| *Year* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1986–87 | 4.4 |
| 1987–88 | 10.2 |
| 1988–89 | –6.2 |
| 1989–90 | –27.4 |
| 1990–91 | –3.6 |
| 1991–92 | 13.1 |

| Year | £ million |
|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 37.9 |
| 1993–94 | 48.1 |
| 1994–95 | 48.7 |
| 1995–96 | 15.6 |
| 1996–97 | 37.4 |
| 1997–98 | 29.8 |
| 1998–99 | 21 7 |
| 1999–2000 | 71.6 |
| 2000–01 | 12.9 |
| | 318.9 |

Future outturn will depend on future interest rate movements and business volumes.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the reasons for which the annually managed expenditure of the Export Credit Guarantees Department has risen. [22195]

**Ms Hewitt:** Annually managed expenditure (AME) for the Export Credits Guarantee Department has risen due to the extra cost needed to unwind interest rate swaps. These swaps were used to hedge interest make up (IMU) costs on fixed rate export finance loans and commitments being guaranteed by ECGD. These loans are now being refinanced using direct funding from HM Treasury, as this produces greater value for money in terms of cost and hedging uncertainty. AME estimates have risen as the cost of unwinding swaps in the financial markets has increased since the AME forecast figures were last published at the time of the Budget 2001.

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the impact of the processes of and terms offered by the Export Credits Guarantee Department on the competitiveness of UK aviation exports. [23283]

**Ms Hewitt:** The major aircraft financing support for Airbus and Rolls Royce is governed by the OECD Consensus Large Aircraft Sector Understanding Arrangements.

Officials at ECGD together with those from its European partners, Hermes (Germany) and Coface (France) have been reviewing their products which are applicable to this agreement and intend to announce new products by 30 March 2002.

This review and product development has been carried out in consultation with the major manufacturers and they are broadly happy with progress to date. These products as a package are intended to match those provided to Boeing by the US authorities.

Together, the three Export Credit Agencies which provide support to Airbus and Rolls Royce continue to match the needs for support placed on them by these manufacturers especially since September 11 this year.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what power projects planned in *(a)* the Philippines and *(b)* Thailand, the Export Credits Guarantee Department has agreed to support; and which UK companies are involved; [23282]

(2) what power projects the Export Credits Guarantee Department has provided support for in *(a)* the Philippines and *(b)* Thailand during the last five years; and which UK companies are involved. [23281]

**Ms Hewitt:** In the Philippines ECGD has provided support for the following power project.

| Year/description | UK investor | Insured amount ($ million) |
|---|---|---|
| *2000* | | |
| Overseas Investment Insurance for San Lorenzo Project: 500 MW gas fired combined cycle power station | British Gas (BG Group plc) | 122 |

In Thailand ECGD has provided support for the following power projects:

| Year/description | Exporter | Contract value (£ million) |
|---|---|---|
| *1997* | | |
| Mini Hydros for Provincial Electricity Authority | Balfour Beatty | 9 |
| *2000* | | |
| Pluak Daeng substation for the Electricity Generating Authority | Va Tech Reyrolle | 7 |

ECGD has not currently agreed to support any future power projects in these countries.

## Combined Heat and Power Schemes

**Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what proportions of energy supply is supplied by combined heat and power schemes; [22332]

(2) what proportion of the UK's energy requirements were produced by combined heat and power schemes in each of the last 10 years. [22334]

**Mr. Wilson:** The available information is as follows. CHP statistics were not compiled on an annual basis before 1993.

*Percentage*

| | Proportion of UK gross inland energy consumption from CHP | Proportion of electricity supplied (gross) by all UK generating companies provided by CHP |
|---|---|---|
| 1993 | 2.8 | 4.0 |
| 1994 | 2.7 | 3.4 |
| 1995 | 3.2 | 4.8 |
| 1996 | 3.0 | 4.8 |
| 1997 | 3.0 | 5.1 |
| 1998 | 3.1 | 5.5 |
| 1999 | 3.1 | 5.8 |
| 2000 | 3.1 | 6.5 |

*Source:*
Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 2001 Tables 6A (and corresponding tables in earlier Digests), 1.11 and 5.12

While electricity generated by CHP schemes has almost doubled since 1993, heat generation has increased by only 6 per cent. This is because gas turbines working at a

higher power to heat ratio have increasingly displaced steam turbines (with lower power to heat ratios) as the main prime movers in CHP plant.

### Nuclear Waste

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what discussions she has had with BNFL regarding identification of new storage sites for nuclear waste; and if she will make a statement; [22345]

(2) what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding proposals to remove nuclear waste from current storage containers in Scotland and the construction of new storage containers; [22347]

(3) what discussions she has had with BNFL regarding removal of nuclear waste in Scotland from current storage; and if she will make a statement; [22346]

(4) what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding storage of nuclear waste at nuclear installations in Scotland. [22348]

**Mr. Wilson:** None.

### Liabilities Management Authority

**Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when *(a)* Thorp and *(b)* the Sellafield MOX plant will be transferred to the Liabilities Management Authority; and if she will make a statement. [22115]

**Mr. Wilson:** It is important that Sellafield continues to be managed as a single, unified site. Therefore Thorp and the Sellafield MOX plant will be transferred to the Liabilities Management Authority (LMA) following its establishment. The necessary legislation will be brought forward in due course.

**Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial contribution BNFL will make towards the decommissioning of *(a)* Thorp and *(b)* the Sellafield MOX plant; and if she will make a statement. [22114]

**Mr. Wilson:** As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry indicated in her statement to the House on 28 November, the Government intend that a Liabilities Management Authority (LMA) will take on responsibility for the UK's historic public sector civil nuclear liabilities and the associated assets including funds earmarked by BNFL for decommissioning and clean-up.

It is important that Sellafield continues to be managed as a unified site. Therefore once the LMA is established, ownership of both Thorp and the Sellafield MOX plant will transfer from BNFL to the LMA. The expectation is that the commercial revenues from these plants will be sufficient to fund their decommissioning costs.

### Wind Farms

**Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she has taken to encourage the development of offshore wind farms in the United Kingdom. [22333]

**Mr. Wilson:** The Government are vigorously encouraging the development of all forms of renewable energy including wind energy, both onshore and offshore. The main mechanism through which this development will be supported is the Renewables Obligation and the associated Renewables Obligation Scotland. This will oblige all licensed electricity suppliers in Great Britain to supply a specified and growing proportion of their electricity from renewable sources. The Obligation will create a long-term market incentive for renewables which taken with the exemption of renewables electricity from the climate change levy (CCL) and continuing support for NFFO projects, is expected to be worth over £1 billion by 2010.

The Government have put in place substantial direct funding specifically for the development of offshore wind farms. A total of £74 million has been allocated in the form of capital grants to support the development of this young industry. This fund of £74 million includes £25 million of the £100 million announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last March, £39 million from the DTI and £10 million from the New Opportunities Fund.

The Government have also recently consulted on the offshore consents process, and plan to bring forward a streamlined approach which should make it easier for project developers to get their projects up and running.

It is very encouraging that 18 projects for the wind farms successfully pre-qualified for seabed leases from the Crown Estate earlier this year.

### BAE Systems

**Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions the Government have had with BAE Systems about job losses at their Woodford site; and if she will make a statement. [21770]

**Mr. Wilson:** My officials are already in close touch with BAE Systems. The North West Regional Development Agency and the local Employment Service are also working closely with the company but I am looking carefully at arrangements to ensure that Government are deploying their resources as effectively as possible to mitigate the effect of the Regional Jet programme closure.

The prospects for the aerospace sector in the medium to long term remain robust.

### E-commerce

**Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the need for international agreements on the practice of e-commerce. [22299]

**Mr. Alexander:** The Government believe it is important that we have a clear, coherent, pro-competitive and predictable international framework for e-commerce and are working for this at European and global levels through our bilateral and multilateral channels. To be effective, this work needs the involvement of Governments, providers and consumers. The Government therefore believe that co-regulation is often the most appropriate way to address many international e-commerce issues, such as cross-border Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and mutual recognition between e-commerce codes of conduct.

The UK is a party to a number of bilateral and multilateral arrangements which apply to commerce generally including e-commerce

Multilaterally, the Hague Conference on Private International Law is discussing a possible convention on jurisdiction in civil and commercial matters and this would cover e-commerce unless a decision is taken to exclude such transactions. The UK is playing a full part in these negotiations.

## Energy Industry

**Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the need for Government subsidy of the energy industry. [22296]

**Mr. Wilson:** An assessment of the need for Government support in the energy sector is one aspect of the current Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) review of energy policy which is due to report by the end of the year. However, creating the right framework for competitive markets will remain a central part of Government policy.

**Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made that the projections in Energy Paper 68 remain credible; and what plans she has to produce new projections. [22344]

**Mr. Wilson:** The projections made in Energy Paper 68, published in November 2000, are long-term projections. At this stage there is no reason to believe that the projections are anything other than soundly based for longer-term assessments. There are no plans to update the projections in the immediate future.

**Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions during the last 24 months the monthly average price of *(a)* oil, *(b)* gas and *(c)* coal has been within the range of the medium/long-term high and low fuel price projections contained in Energy Paper 68; and on how many occasions prices of each of the fuels have been (i) above and (ii) below these ranges. [22343]

**Mr. Wilson:** The table shows, by number of months, how crude oil prices during the last 24 months have compared with the EP68 assumptions for the years 2005 and 2010.

| | *2005* | *2010* |
|---|---|---|
| Within range | 2 | 2 |
| Above range | 22 | 22 |
| Below range | 0 | 0 |

The table shows, by number of months, how gas prices during the last 24 months have compared with the EP68 assumptions for the years 2005 and 2010.

| | *2005* | *2010* |
|---|---|---|
| Within range | 17 | 20 |
| Above range | 7 | 4 |
| Below range | 0 | 0 |

International coal prices have remained within the medium and long-term range assumed in EP68 in every month during the last 24 months.

Results may differ according to the exact comparator used. The potential for prices to move outside the assumed long-term ranges was acknowledged in EP68.

## British Coal

**John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review the arrangements for apportioning surpluses in the pre-privatisation pension schemes for the former employees of British Coal. [19341]

**Mr. Wilson** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The agreement that was reached in 1994 with the Trustees of pension schemes for former British Coal staff and employees has supported the schemes' investment strategies, and has meant that members' have been awarded bonuses totalling around 30 per cent. These bonus awards are additional to the inflation linked increases applied to pensions each year to maintain their real value. The Government regularly review all information that they receive on these issues, and expect to be able to make a further announcement shortly.

## Power Lines

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the information contained in recent correspondence from the hon. Member for Vale of York on the health effects of electromagnetic fields; and if she will impose a moratorium on the proposed Lackenby to Shipton overhead transmission line; [21951]

(2) if she will *(a)* revoke her decision to proceed with the Lackenby to Shipton overhead transmission line and *(b)* enhance the power of the existing line through the Vale of York. [21952]

**Mr. Wilson:** While we are always interested to note the hon. Member's representations, development consent was granted for the North Yorkshire power line in March 1998 and it is now up to the National Grid Company to implement that decision.

## Enron

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment the Secretary of State has made of the implications of the new ownership of the former Enron power station in Teesside; and if she will make a statement. [21965]

**Mr. Wilson:** If a transfer of ownership qualifies for investigation under the Fair Trading Act 1973, it will be for the Office of Fair Trading to advise me on whether to refer the merger to the Competition Commission. If, on the other hand, it falls under the European Community Merger Regulation, it will be for the European Commission to consider it.

## Gas Supplies

**Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage loss of gas supply *(a)* during a 1 in 20 peak demand and *(b)* during an average peak demand on the gas system in (i) winter 2001–02 and (ii) winter 2005–06 would trigger emergency measures under the Emergency Powers Act 1920 or Energy Act 1976. [22340]

**Mr. Wilson:** It is not possible to define when such measures might be triggered. Losses of supply can occur at any time and not just in periods of peak demand.

Transco (who manage the National Gas Transmission System) are already empowered to take significant steps to mitigate against losses of supply. These are set out in Transco's Network Gas Supply Emergency Procedures which are tested regularly. I have arranged for copies of the procedures to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

If the situation arose, it is likely that the powers contained in the Energy Act 1976 would be sufficient to handle a gas supply emergency.

**Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contingency planning her Department undertakes with *(a)* the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, *(b)* Transco, *(c)* the National Grid Company and *(d)* the Health and Safety Executive to prepare for disruption to supplies of gas; and if she will make a statement. [22342]

**Mr. Wilson:** We have set up the Gas Industry Emergency Committee. Its membership includes Ofgem, Transco, NGC, HSE and many others from throughout the supply chain. It assesses the risks of new and emerging developments that could lead to large-scale gas supply failures. Its aim is to ensure that in the event of a gas supply emergency, contingency plans are in place to ensure the rapid and safe restoration of supplies to consumers.

These contingency plans have been tested in various exercises in recent months. Further tests are planned for the future to ensure that they are kept up-to-date and are fit for the purpose.

**Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the emergency gas stockholding capacity is in days of use at full levels of generation for each of the combined cycle gas turbine power stations commissioned since 1990. [22341]

**Mr. Wilson:** Combined cycle gas turbine power stations do not hold emergency stocks of gas, nor are emergency stocks of gas specifically held as part of the UK gas transmission system for these generators. Where a gas facility is dual fired, power stations usually hold stocks of their alternative fuel—predominantly coal or oil products. Some gas is stored, but this tends to be at the extremities of the transmission system in facilities such as salt cavities' offshore fields or as liquefied natural gas.

Some liquefied natural gas is held by Transco to cope with system emergencies. The remainder is used to help maintain the overall balance within the gas transmission system between supply and demand for gas. The stored gas tends to be used during periods of peak demand (e.g. winter months) and to meet shortfalls of gas supplies at other times during the year. Combined cycle gas stations compete for any gas coming from storage along with other gas users.

## Telecommunications Council

**Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Telecommunications Council held in Brussels on 6 and 7 December; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [22182]

**Mr. Alexander:** The Deputy UK Permanent Representative to the European Union, Bill Stow, attended the Council on 6 December on my behalf.

The Presidency reported to the Council on the state of play of negotiations with the European Parliament on the proposed new regulatory framework for electronic communications. The most contentious issues on which agreement is still outstanding are:

whether and the extent to which the Commission should be able to override proposed decisions of national regulatory authorities (NRAs) in order to protect the integrity of the single market;

the grounds on which undertakings should be able to appeal NRA decisions at the national level; and

whether a digital television standard should be mandated.

The March 2000 Lisbon European Council set a target of the end of 2001 to agree this legislative package. Informal discussions between the Presidency, the Commission and the European Parliament will continue during December with a view to finding an agreement as soon as possible and so avoid the need for conciliation under the forthcoming Spanish Presidency.

The Council reached political agreement on the proposed Communications Data Protection Directive by qualified majority; the UK voted in favour. In particular, the Council agreed on:

a harmonised "opt-in" solution for unsolicited commercial e-mail, with an exception where there is an existing customer relationship;

the introduction of an obligation to provide users with clear and comprehensive advance information about the purposes of cookies and similar devices and to offer them the possibility to refuse; and

a clarification of the scope for member states to legislate on data retention for law-enforcement purposes as long as this is in accordance with the agreed principles of Community Law. This was inserted in the body of the Directive itself at the request of the UK.

The Council adopted a Resolution on "a common approach and specific actions in the area of network and information security", and the Commission will now bring forward proposals for setting-up a cyber-security task force to assist member states in developing the capabilities to address network security problems.

The Commission presented a Communication on the exploitation of public sector information which aims to remove many of the barriers that content companies currently face in trying to develop the next generation of cross-border information services and products based on public sector information. The Commission may now propose a Directive to cover the commercial exploitation of public sector information. The Commission also gave a presentation on the seventh implementation report on telecoms regulation.

## Gibraltar

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what EU legal requirements governed the transfer of 70,000 telephone lines from Spain to Gibraltar. [R] [21546]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The allocation to Gibraltar of numbers from the Cadiz exchange is a matter for the Spanish authorities. HMG is

pressing the Spanish Government for an early resolution to the problems caused by non-recognition of Gibraltar's international dialling code.

### Gender Pay Gap

**Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of equal pay legislation; and if she will make a statement. [21776]

**Ms Hewitt:** The Equal Pay Act 1970 has enabled many women to make real headway, allowing women to claim their rights in a number of landmark cases and to challenge stereotypical assumptions about aspects of their work that have been undervalued.

The pay gap has halved from 37 per cent. when the Equal Pay Act was introduced 30 years ago to 19 per cent. today. Individual claims brought under the Act can impact on many other women and lead to employers making significant changes to their pay systems.

Work is under way to streamline and speed up employment tribunal procedures to make it easier for women to claim their rights on equal pay. Equal Pay tribunals can be stressful and time consuming for women and for employers faced with a claim. The proposal to introduce a questionnaire procedure into the Equal Pay Act has been included in the Employment Bill that was introduced on 7 November 2001. It will enable an individual who believes they may not be receiving equal pay to request key information from their employer when they are deciding whether to bring a case.

### Departmental Staff (Home Working)

**Mr. Challen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21835]

**Ms Hewitt:** Currently around 900 people in my Department have access to an IT service which allows them to work remotely. We do not keep data on how many people work from home on a regular basis.

I am keen to promote all forms of flexible working within my Department including working from home. I have asked management and the departmental trade unions to look at ways of achieving that.

### BP

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the occasions since 1 January 2000 when *(a)* she and any of her predecessors, *(b)* Ministers within her Department and *(c)* officials within her Department have had discussions with representatives from BP. [21406]

**Mr. Wilson** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* BP is a major British company which Ministers meet with quite frequently on a wide range of topics.

### Regulations

**Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the regulations affecting businesses introduced in the last financial year originated in European legislation. [22305]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* Approximately 20 per cent. of regulations introduced during the last financial year originated in European legislation.

**Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of *(a)* the number of and *(b)* the financial cost to (i) small businesses, (ii) SMEs and (iii) businesses in general of regulations introduced in the last financial year. [22307]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* My Department was responsible for 127 regulations introduced in financial year 2000–01. Of these regulations 96 imposed negligible or no costs on business and 11 have reduced costs.

Where these regulations either imposed or reduced costs for business, regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) were carried out analysing these anticipated costs. These are available from the House Libraries.

### Research Council

**Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Research Council held in Brussels on 10 December; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [22679]

**Ms Hewitt:** The Research Council of 10 December:

1. Reached unanimous political agreement on the Sixth EU Research and Development Framework Programme 2002–06, with an overall budget of euro 16.27 billion.
2. Reached unanimous political agreement on the Sixth EURATOM Research and Development Framework Programme 2002–06, with an overall budget of euro 1.23 billion.
3. Adopted a Resolution concerning the promotion of mobility for researchers in the European Research Area.
4. Received a presentation by the Commission on its Action Plan on Science and Society.
5. Adopted conclusions in relation to the promotion of closer links between the EU and the European Space Agency (ESA).
6. Received a short oral report from the Commission on its development of a Life Sciences and Biotechnology strategy.

### Manufacturing Summit

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the outcome of her Department's Manufacturing Summit held on 5 December. [22224]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* The aim of the Manufacturing Summit was to bring together national Government, devolved Administrations, regional development agencies and industry and trade union leaders to reach a shared view on the challenges facing UK manufacturing industry. The summit built on the joint work of the CBI and TUC on productivity, which was recently presented to the Chancellor and myself.

Acting on a recommendation from the CBI and TUC, I announced at the summit an additional £20 million of funding over two years to expand the Industry Forum and the Partnership Fund. This funding will help more firms to work to spread best practice within the supply chain through the extension of Industry Forum principles to

additional sectors. The expansion of the Partnership Fund will help employee and employer representatives to work together to achieve better performance in the workplace.

As a result of the summit, RDAs will work closely with manufacturers, unions and other local partners to implement regional industrial policies in accordance with their regional economic strategies.

At the meeting, industry representatives recognised the need to boost training and skills in order to achieve the productivity improvements that are necessary. We agreed to work more closely to share ideas and best practice on the promotion of innovation and skills that are key to the future success of our manufacturing industry. We will also ensure that Government agencies are working together more effectively to help people who are made redundant to get new skills and jobs as quickly as possible.

### Scottish Enterprise

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she made of the impact of Scottish Enterprise on the business birth rate when deciding to increase the amount of money given to regional venture capital funds. [22498]

**Nigel Griffiths:** In developing Regional Venture Capital Funds the experiences of schemes and initiatives elsewhere, including Scotland, were considered. The Regional Venture Capital Funds have been specifically designed to address the equity gap and their primary focus will be on existing businesses with significant growth prospects. It is unlikely that these funds would invest in start-up businesses, but they are not excluded from the programme.

Regional Venture Capital Funds are highly innovative in their approach and will bring together public and private equity finance of up to £270 million to invest in small growing businesses in the English regions.

### Regional Venture Capital Funds

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what business birth rate targets have been set for each of the regional venture capital funds; and how much additional private investment the ventures backed by the funds are expected to receive in subsequent funding rounds. [22497]

**Nigel Griffiths:** Specific business birth rate targets have not been set for individual Regional Venture Capital Funds (RVCFs). Their primary aims are to ensure that established small growing businesses in each of the English regions are able to access risk capital finance in the equity gap and to demonstrate to institutional investors that robust returns can be made by investing in this sector. As part of the assessment process, all proposals seeking to manage funds were asked to demonstrate their compatibility with the Regional Economic Strategy developed by the Regional Development Agencies.

As a cornerstone investor the Government will be investing around £80 million to the RVCF programme with up to another £190 million being levered in from private sector investors. There is no indication at present how much additional private investment ventures backed by the RVCFs are likely to receive in subsequent funding rounds.

### Social Exclusion

**Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many competitive grant schemes administered by her Department and its agencies were open in each of the last 10 years to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22433]

(2) if she will place in the Library a copy of the application form for each of the competitive grant schemes administered by her Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22409]

(3) if she will publish a list of the grants made under the competitive grant schemes administered by her Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22418]

(4) what estimate has been made of the administrative cost to the *(a)* state, *(b)* unsuccessful applicants and *(c)* successful applicants of the competitive grant schemes, provided by her Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22403]

(5) if she will list the competitive grant schemes, administered by the Department and its agencies, open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion and, for each scheme in each year *(a)* the number of applicants, *(b)* the number of successful applicants, *(c)* the total of grants awarded, *(d)* the number of pages in the application form and *(e)* if the grant can be used to fund the core costs of the applicant organisation. [22427]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* The Phoenix Fund, operated by the Small Business Service, is the only competitive grant scheme that my Department runs specifically to help tackle social exclusion. It is designed to encourage enterprise by promoting the provision of business support for entrepreneurs from disadvantaged neighbourhoods or groups of people. Community and voluntary groups can apply for the bidding rounds. There are no application forms. Bidding guidance is published and copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

There have been four rounds of bidding (Development Fund Rounds 1 and 2 and Community Development Finance Initiatives Rounds 1 and 2). A list of successful applicants and a summary of their individual projects is available on the SBS website www.sbs.gov.uk. Awards totalling £15 million were offered to 50 applicants, from a total of 253, in December 2000 (Development Fund Round 1). In January 2001 £6 million was offered to 16 applicants, from a total of 58 (CDFI Round 1). A further £15 million was awarded to 46 organisations (from a total of 358) in September 2001 (Development Fund Round 2). Up to £15 million will be offered from the current round being appraised (CDFI Round 2), which has received 50 applications. The projects to be supported will be announced in February 2002. Details of individual awards are not published. Although the Phoenix Fund is project based, it is possible for some core costs to be supported.

It is not possible to give a total for the administrative costs to the State, as the staff involved also undertake other duties. However, these costs are small in relation to the total grants awarded. The cost of the application will depend on the complexity of their bids, but again, these are small in relation to the average grant offered.

### Disability Discrimination Act

**Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to issue guidance to businesses concerning compliance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 for labelling which is user friendly for visually impaired and blind people; and if she will make a statement. [22495]

**Alan Johnson:** DTI has agreed to work with the Disability Rights Commission in promoting best practice in relation to the provision of information in accessible formats accompanying manufactured goods.

The manufacture or design of products, including labelling, is not covered by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

### EU Chemicals Strategy

**Sue Doughty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Down) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 653W, what information and advice was contained in the communications; and if she will make a statement. [22755]

**Ms Hewitt:** I have nothing further to add to my earlier reply.

### Pulmonary Disease Claims

**Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many chronic obstructive pulmonary disease medical assessments have been made by Healthcall in each of the coalfield areas, showing the level of diagnosed disability in each case. [22234]

**Mr. Wilson** *[holding answer 12 December 2001]*: Healthcall, the company contracted to undertake the delivery of the Medical Assessment Process, has completed 50,124 appointments, to date. The Department is unable to list the diagnosed disability in each case. The number of appointments completed by region is as follows:

| *Region* | *Number of appointments completed* |
|---|---|
| Yorkshire | 6,124 |
| North East | 2,300 |
| North West | 1,226 |
| Nottinghamshire | 2,244 |
| Derbyshire | 693 |
| Midlands Other | 1,871 |
| South West | 77 |
| South East | 528 |
| Wales | 7,670 |
| Scotland | 2,583 |
| Mobile Test Units | 359 |
| Domicillary | 2,912 |
| Deceased MAPs | 21,537 |
| Total | 50,124 |

### Foreign Direct Investment (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the amount of foreign direct investment in the constituency of Buckingham in each year since 1997. [22648]

**Nigel Griffiths:** Figures collated by Invest UK on inward investment are not recorded at constituency level but on a regional basis. Following are figures from the south-east for each of the years since 1997.

The figures are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. They are based on the companies' best estimate, at that time, of the number of jobs to be created/safeguarded by the investment in its first three years.

There is no requirement to notify inward investment decisions and so the figures include only those projects where Invest UK and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice.

| *South-east region* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of projects | 57 | 73 | 110 | 191 |
| Number of new jobs | 5,534 | 4,497 | 6,236 | 18,190 |
| Number of safeguarded jobs | 7,482 | 13,957 | 15,987 | 4,547 |
| Total number of associated jobs | 13,016 | 18,454 | 22,223 | 22,737 |

### Broadband (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of *(a)* the availability and *(b)* the take-up of broadband services by (i) individuals and (ii) businesses in the constituency of Buckingham. [22532]

**Mr. Alexander:** The Government have made no assessment at that level of localised information. A map showing availability of broadband services in the UK has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

### Business Support (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what business support services funded by her Department are based in the constituency of Buckingham. [22529]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The Small Business Service funds a network of local business link operators throughout England. Business link operators provide access to a wide range of services to local businesses, including information and advice, export development assistance, marketing, training and development, financial packaging, information and communication technologies, design, etc.

Business link operators assess the needs of individual businesses (including start-ups) and put together packages of assistance to meet these needs, referring as necessary to support provided by partner organisations and other suppliers.

The business link operator for Buckinghamshire is Business Link Solutions which covers Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

### Small Business Service

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* small businesses from the constituency of Buckingham have written to the Small Business Service in the last 12 months; and what the average number of working days taken to respond was. [22527]

**Nigel Griffiths:** SBS's South East Regional Team has received three written requests relating to this area, all inquiries were answered within three days of receipt, and were all directed to Business Link Milton Keynes Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

SBS takes an average of 10 working days to respond to correspondence. Most requests are handled by Business Links, rather than the SBS.

May I also refer the hon. Member to the answer given today to question No. 22528.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* small businesses for the constituency of Buckingham have used the Small Business Service in each quarter since April 2000. [22528]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The table shows the number of businesses and individuals assisted by Business Link Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Management Information for Business Link local and national services are not desegregated to constituency level.

| | *(a) Business* | *(b) Individuals* |
|---|---|---|
| *2000–01:* | | |
| April to June (Q1) | 2,378 | 1,035 |
| July to September (Q2) | 3,790 | 905 |
| October to December (Q3) | 3,710 | 839 |
| January to March (Q4) | 1,972 | 658 |
| *2001–02:* | | |
| April to June (Q1) | 2,395 | 767 |
| July to September (Q2) | 3,105 | 607 |

*Source:*
Business Link Management Information returns.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target on foreign direct investment. [23172]

**Ms Hewitt:** The latest foreign direct investment (FDI) statistics published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) show that the UK maintained its position as the largest recipient of inward FDI stocks in the EU in 2000. The UK percentage share increased slightly from 20.0 per cent. in 1999 to 20.3 per cent. in 2000.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target on support for exporters, quality of service, exports and the business image of the UK. [23173]

**Ms Hewitt:** Details on the requested PSA targets were published in March 2001 in "British Trade International—The Government's Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04 and Main Estimates 2001–02", Cm 5123, a copy of which was placed in the Libraries of the House.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the target to operate a zero. [23160]

**Ms Hewitt:** The Department has reviewed and refined its Fraud Policy Statement and supporting Guidance on Fraud Risk Management within the last year. These have been published on the departmental intranet. Guidance on the topic has also been issued to departmental staff.

As well as operating a general "whistleblowing" scheme through which staff can raise areas of concern (which may include suspicions of fraud) the Department has posted contact details for the Fraud Officer so that concerns may also be raised directly with him.

The Department is represented at a range of ministerial, interdepartmental and treasury working groups on counter fraud measures and liaises with Scotland Yard and others in the wider counter fraud community to ensure that we remain current on issues of best practice in this area.

We are committed to prompt and appropriate response to the occasional instances of suspected fraud that arise.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the target on payment of presented bills within 30 days of receipt of goods or a valid invoice. [23159]

**Ms Hewitt:** The percentage of bills which were paid by my Department within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice has increased from 93 per cent. for the period April to November 2000 to 96 per cent. for the same period in the year 2001.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the public service agreement target on the number of companies spun out from universities. [23170]

**Ms Hewitt:** The DTI has met the PSA target of increasing by 50 per cent. the 1997–98 number of companies spun out from universities by 2001–02.

A recent survey of exploitation activity in the higher education sector has shown that 199 companies were spun out from universities in the academic year 1999–2000, and a total of 537 university spinouts were created over the period 1994–95 to 1999–2000 inclusive. This compares with the baseline of 26 companies spun out from universities during 1997 against the background of a total population of 223 companies wholly or partially owned by HEIs for the commercial exploitation of their research results in 1997–98.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the target on key services on-line. [23156]

**Ms Hewitt:** My Department has already made 32 of its services (41 per cent. of the planned total) available online. We expect to make a further 28 available online by the end of 2002, a cumulative figure of 60 (76 per cent.), and, subject to the outcome of the 2002 Spending Review, the remaining 19 (100 per cent.) by the end of 2005.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the target on unit cost reduction on document registration. [23165]

**Ms Hewitt:** Companies House has consistently met or exceed its unit cost reduction target for document processing since the target was first set in 1997–98. On the back of record growth in the register in 2000–01, the target was bettered by 100 per cent. in that year. It is not possible to anticipate results for 2001–02 as calculation requires end-year figures. While Companies House believes it is broadly on target, it is unlikely to do more given the increased focus on quality and customer service rather than lower cost per se.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the target on measures of efficiency. [23166]

**Ms Hewitt:** Progress against the Department's main target on efficiency will be reported on in its Expenditure Plans Report which is due in to be published in April 2002.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the target on services and activities as set out in the handbook Better Quality Services. [23158]

**Ms Hewitt:** My Department is on line to meet its BQS targets which are to review 60 per cent. of its activities by March 2003 and 100 per cent. of its activities by the end of 2004.

### Universal Bank

**Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the implementation of universal banking services. [23090]

**Mr. Alexander:** Good progress is being made on universal banking services in advance of the migration of benefit payments to ACT in 2003. Through universal banking services there will be post office access to a range of bank accounts. This will enable all those who wish to do so to continue to be able to collect their benefits in cash at post offices. The Government are currently negotiating with the Post Office for the provision of the Post Office Card Account and is developing a detailed migration and marketing strategy for the transition to ACT.

The emphasis of the ACT migration and marketing strategy will be to ensure that each customer has the best account for his or her circumstances. Conventional and basic bank accounts offer more services and do not have the limitations of the Post Office Card Account so are likely to be the best option for the vast majority of people.

Our operational assumption is that around three million benefit and tax credit recipients will open a POCA, but there will not be a cap on numbers or eligibility criteria for a POCA. For most people the best account will be a conventional bank account or a basic bank account, whether new or existing. The vast majority of claimants already have an existing bank account and we expect that they will choose to use them when they start to be paid by ACT.

If claimants do not have a bank account, staff of the Government Departments concerned will discuss options with them to help them take the best choice for their circumstances.

Whatever type of account is used we remain fully committed to meeting the Prime Minister's pledge that those who wish to do so will be able to continue to get their benefits in cash at post offices, in full and without charge.

### South West of England Regional Development Agency

**Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the South West regional development agency has provided support to the South West regional convention; and if she will make a statement. [23625]

**Alan Johnson:** The South West regional development agency has provided no financial support for the South West regional convention.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Allan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam on 26 November 2001. [23318]

**Mr. Alexander:** I answered the question on 11 December.

### Sub-Post Offices

**Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on moneys available under and progress on the urban development fund for urban sub-post offices. [19493]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Staff of Post Office Ltd. are working up detailed proposals in consultation with my officials on how best the urban network of post offices should adapt to changes in the marketplace and how Government funding to assist such adaptation should be structured.

### Equal Pay

**Barbara Follett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she has taken to encourage business associations to produce guidance on voluntary equal pay reviews. [15728]

**Ms Hewitt:** The official guidance on voluntary equal pay reviews is that published by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) as a statutory code of practice on equal pay in 1997. The Government have recently

provided the EOC with an extra £100,000 to produce a model for voluntary pay reviews. It will offer a technical example for employers in how to review the pay of their male and female employees and will soon be piloted so that it is shown to be workable for business and effective for women.

The Employers' Association for Local Government has produced equality guidance which includes advice on pay reviews. The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development has also produced an "Equal Pay Guide" for its members who are generally personnel managers.

The Government have recently announced the annual Castle Awards for employers to encourage them to undertake and act on voluntary pay reviews. They will recognise employers' excellence in addressing equal pay and related issues. Earlier this year the Government appointed 'Fair Pay Champions' from business, the public sector and trade unions to help with our drive towards achieving fair pay for women through promoting and sharing good practice and heightening awareness of employment rights and responsibilities.

## Flooding (Ilford)

**Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made in the last 12 months of the impact of flooding of the River Roding on businesses in Ilford, North; and what assistance is available to businesses in the event of further flooding. [15528]

**Nigel Griffiths** *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* We have made no such assessments.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is the responsible Department for matters dealing with the consequences of floodings. They are considering whether help can be given to all those affected.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Live Animals (Export)

**Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many live *(a)* sheep and *(b)* pigs were exported for (i) slaughter, (ii) further fattening and (iii) breeding in 2001, broken down by country of destination. [13548]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* The total number of live sheep and live pigs certified for export from the UK during 2001 for breeding, slaughter and fattening are shown in the following tables:

| | *Live sheep* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Country of destination* | *Breeding* | *Fattening* | *Slaughter* |
| France | 7 | 51,300 | 0 |
| Republic of Ireland | 4,537 | 2,226 | 130,244 |
| Belgium | 0 | 3,850 | 0 |
| Germany | 0 | 10,132 | 0 |
| Italy | 0 | 1,679 | 0 |
| Netherlands | 0 | 18,344 | 390 |
| Spain | 0 | 770 | 0 |
| Totals | 4,544 | 88,301 | 130,634 |

| | *Live pigs* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Country of destination* | *Breeding* | *Fattening* | *Slaughter* |
| Republic of Ireland | 482 | 0 | 20,797 |
| Belgium | 1,629 | 0 | 0 |
| Germany | 7,357 | 0 | 0 |
| Greece | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| Italy | 410 | 0 | 0 |
| Netherlands | 2,254 | 0 | 0 |
| Spain | 542 | 0 | 0 |
| Thailand | 63 | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | 12,746 | 0 | 20,797 |

These figures are derived from the computer system used to issue export health certificates and are subject to updating and amendment.

### Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the areas of outstanding natural beauty in the Buckingham constituency. [16254]

**Mr. Meacher:** Part of the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty lies within the Buckingham constituency.

### UK Fuel Poverty Strategy

**Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy specifies a target date for achieving the objective of ensuring that as far as reasonably practicable persons in England and Wales do not live in fuel poverty. [17941]

**Mr. Meacher:** The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy sets a target date of 2010 for assisting all vulnerable fuel poor households, as well as all other fuel poor households living in social sector housing. Together these two groups represent some 90 per cent. of all the fuel poor households in England in 1998.

The Strategy therefore meets the terms of the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000 for England in ensuring that as far as reasonably practicable, persons do not live in fuel poverty. We intend to work with interested groups to develop practical, cost-effective mechanisms for assisting the remaining group of fuel poor: the healthy adult households living in private sector housing.

Fuel poverty is a devolved matter and it is the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales to comment on the situation in Wales.

### Household Waste

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what measures she is taking to reduce household waste; [18012]

(2) what incentives exist to encourage households to reduce the amount of waste they produce. [18010]

**Mr. Meacher:** Tackling the amount of waste produced is the first priority in the hierarchy for waste management decisions set out in the Government's Waste Strategy 2000. The Government are supporting the National Waste Awareness Initiative and have issued guidance to local authorities on their powers under the Waste Minimisation Act 1998.

The Government have implemented the Packaging Directive and a voluntary agreement on the recycled content of newsprint. Further legislation on electrical and electronic equipment and batteries will follow and a voluntary agreement on direct mail and promotions (junk mail) is planned. These are all designed to reduce the amount of waste arising from these products and their impact on the household waste stream.

Local authorities are experimenting with a range of measures to encourage minimisation. Waste minimisation will be one of the issues considered in the recently announced review of the waste strategy by the Performance and Innovation Unit.

### Sheep (Ear Tagging)

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the farming community about the proposed ear tagging schemes for sheep. [18516]

**Mr. Morley:** My officials have had initial discussions with English and Welsh industry representatives about the future identification requirements for sheep and goats. We are now considering the views expressed by industry before a final decision is taken.

### Sheep Farmers

**Mr. Moore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make additional financial assistance available to UK sheep farmers. [19249]

**Mr. Morley:** Community Regulations provide for direct support to sheep farmers through the sheep annual premium. Rates of premium are determined each year by

the European Commission and are based on the difference between the EU basic price for sheepmeat and the annual average price for sheepmeat on the EU market. There is no provision in the EU sheepmeat regime for additional financial assistance to be made by member states.

### Recycling

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to promote a national recycling strategy, with particular reference to the targets set for recycling within councils' waste *(a)* collection and *(b)* disposal policies. [19707]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Government set out their strategy for delivering sustainable waste management in 'Waste Strategy 2000', published in May last year. Minimising waste production and maximising the re-use and recycling of waste is at the heart of this strategy and we have set statutory targets under Best Value for local authorities to double the amount of household waste recycled by 2003–04 and treble it by 2005–06. Targets have been set for each collection and disposal authority in England.

We have recently published a consultation paper on the operation and distribution of a new waste minimisation and recycling fund in England. The fund was agreed in Spending Review 2000 and provides £140 million over the next two years. The fund is designed to support better waste management practices including waste minimisation, re-use and recycling.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Government will achieve the packaging waste recovery and recycling targets for 2001. [22593]

**Mr. Meacher:** It is too early to say. Reprocessing of packaging waste reported by accredited reprocessors for the first three quarters of 2001 is over three million tonnes, but we do not expect to have figures for the whole of 2001 until early next year.

### Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the current review of the levels of HEES grants, with particular regard to *(a)* the scope of the review, *(b)* the timetable and *(c)* which organisations will be consulted; and if she will abolish the grant maximum levels and set an average grant level instead. [19373]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The companies that manage the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme provide regular advice to my Department on the average cost of work under the scheme. This advice, together with information on work which costs more than the current grant limits is used to review the grant maxima. I plan to consider whether any changes to the maximum grant levels are required early next year.

We have no plans to set an average grant, rather than the maximum grant approach used at present.

The present approach encourages scheme managers to reach those vulnerable householders in most need. These householders are likely to live in homes requiring the complete package of measures available under the scheme.

Under an average grant system, the scheme managers would be contractually bound to improve a set number of properties using the available moneys. This would create an incentive for them to target householders in less need, who require fewer improvements to their homes, simply to ensure that the average was not exceeded.

### Rural Payments Agency

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the efficiency and promptness of the tasks carried out by the Rural Payments Agency; and if she will make a statement. [20024]

**Mr. Morley:** Following the launch of the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) as an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 16 October 2001, the House was informed of the Agency's Performance Targets on 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1247W. These cover a range of targets that reflect the efficiency and promptness of tasks undertaken by RPA. Copies of its Framework Document, Corporate Plan and Business Plan were placed in the Library of the House on 15 November 2001.

An ownership board was appointed, chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Department. Other members include three independents and representatives of the devolved Administrations.

Within the objective of providing strategic direction and oversight to RPA, one of the four primary roles of the ownership board is to monitor regularly on behalf of the Secretary of State, the devolved Administrations and Competent Authority the performance of RPA against its targets.

### Portland Cement

**Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of waste derived fuels constitute total kiln fuels consumed by Portland cement manufacturers in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the rest of the EU. [20511]

**Mr. Meacher:** The latest available estimated figures show that: *(a)* in 1999 the UK consumption of waste derived fuel was about 6 per cent. of total fuel consumption by Portland cement manufacturers; *(b)* in 1998 the EU consumption of waste fuel was about 12 per cent. of total fuel consumption by Portland cement manufacturers.

### Livestock Markets

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many employees of livestock markets have been made redundant since their closure under foot and mouth regulations. [19738]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The Department does not have any information on the number of employees made redundant from livestock markets since their closure due to foot and mouth restrictions.

The Employment Service has been collecting statistics of the number of claims made in Great Britain by those who either lost their job or were temporarily laid off as a

result of the foot and mouth disease. These are general figures and are not limited to those who worked in markets.

The Employment Service estimates that approximately 6,600 people have submitted claims as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak. However, this figure includes those whose employment has been temporarily stopped (people still under contract to their employer but whose employment is temporarily unavailable, or whose working hours are reduced due to the crisis).

### Organophosphates

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the economic impact on brassica growers of the revocation of licences to use *(a)* carbofuran and *(b)* chlorfenvinphos. [20664]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Pesticide products containing carbofuran and chlorfenvinphos have been reviewed as part of the general review in the UK of all organophosphate pesticides. The review was undertaken because of public concerns about the potential toxicity of these chemicals and in the absence of any supporting safety data from the approval holder, products containing carbofuran and chlorfenvinphos will not be available to users from the end of 2001. The economic impact on a particular sector of the industry would not form part of an assessment where the overriding priority is to protect those who work in the industry and consumers of the treated crop. However, my officials are aware of the difficulties the withdrawal of these products from the market may cause and will of course give any assistance they can to exploring other sources of control.

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the scientific basis is for the ban on the use of chlorfenvinphos and carbofuran in pesticides; and if she will make a statement. [21478]

**Mr. Morley:** Pesticide products containing carbofuran and chlorfenvinphos have been reviewed as part of the general review in the UK of all organophosphate pesticides. The review was undertaken because of public concerns about the potential toxicity of these chemicals.

Organophosphate pesticides are mainly older compounds and the review will establish whether there is sufficient safety data available to satisfy modern standards. Companies are therefore required to submit data they hold on human health and environmental effects to support the continued safe use of the products containing these compounds. If data are not submitted then the approval for these products are revoked.

The approval holders for carbofuran and chlorfenvinphos did not submit supporting data for their products under the UK review and therefore these products will not be available in the UK after 31 December 2001.

The impact of the loss of these pesticides is not underestimated and officials will continue to do everything possible to help the trade and user groups. However the safety of users, consumers and the environment is the key issue that needs to be considered.

### Animal Welfare

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the working relationships of the UK Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority, the Farm Animal Welfare Council and the Agriculture Environment Biotechnology Commission. [20925]

**Mr. Morley:** The Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC) was set up to provide the Government with independent strategic advice on developments in biotechnology and their implications for agriculture and the environment. It reports to the Secretaries of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for Trade and Industry and to Ministers in the devolved Administrations.

The AEBC works alongside the regulatory and advisory bodies in agricultural biotechnology. It has taken evidence from and consulted informally the Farm Animal Welfare Council. Through its secretariat, the AEBC has also liaised as required with the UK Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority.

### Flood Protection

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to improve flood protection in the Portsmouth area. [21214]

**Mr. Morley:** Operational responsibility for flood management measures rests with the local operating authorities, normally the Environment Agency and local councils, who decide which projects to promote and their timing. The operating authorities are invited to submit applications for DEFRA funding for flood and coastal defence capital works, and associated studies, which meet essential technical, economic and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority score.

DEFRA recently agreed Portsmouth city council's strategy for Old Portsmouth, including both flood alleviation and coast protection works. Applications are now awaited from the council for funding approval of individual phases of work. DEFRA has also approved funding for the council's strategy study for Portsea Island (Portsmouth and Southsea). The study, designed to examine options for coastal defence work, began earlier this year and is scheduled for completion by the end of next year.

### New Deal

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21326]

**Mr. Morley:** The Department and its agencies currently employs eight staff under the new deal for young people. All these staff are unsubsidised.

### White Goods

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to improve the consistency of local re-use projects for white goods. [21676]

**Mr. Meacher:** None at present.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to increase the capacity of local projects to recondition white goods appliances. [21674]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Government currently have no such plans. However, the Prime Minister has announced that across the UK £50 million from the New Opportunities Fund is to be used to support community recycling and related initiatives, which could include the reconditioning and re-use of white goods.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if the Government plan to continue to encourage the re-use of whole white goods appliances to supply to people on low incomes; [21673]

(2) if she will make a statement on the European Directive concerning the recycling of components parts of white goods; and what plans the Government have to ensure that the Directive does not obstruct the recycling of whole appliances for re-use by those on low income. [21675]

**Mr. Meacher:** A draft Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive is under discussion. Once agreed and implemented in the UK and other member states it will require targets of recovery, re-use and recycling for components, materials and substances of separately collected electrical equipment to be met.

The wording of the current draft points to targets for the re-use of whole appliances being set in the future. Although these have yet to be set, an objective of this draft is to minimise the amount of electrical equipment becoming waste and so the proposal ensures that priority would be given to the re-use of whole appliances. There is a requirement for appliances to be collected and transported carefully to ensure that any re-usable equipment does not get damaged in transit. There is also a requirement for consumers to be informed of return systems, which could include information on offering equipment for re-use.

The draft Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive defines re-use as any operation by which waste electrical and electronic equipment or components thereof are used for the same purpose for which they were conceived, including the continued use of the equipment or components thereof which are returned to collection points, distributors, recyclers or manufacturers.

The Government see no reason why the implementation of this directive will obstruct the current infrastructure of the re-use of whole appliances by those on low income.

### Sustainable Timber

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research the Government are conducting into the use of sustainable timber. [21671]

**Mr. Morley:** The Government have commissioned research into the scale and variety of timber and timber products being purchased to meet the operational requirements of central Government Departments and their agencies. Three Departments and three agencies have been selected as samples to reflect the range of activities involved. The research is due to be completed by the end of May 2002 and should help the Government in implementing their timber procurement policy by identifying options for guidance that will be made available to its own buyers and to the wider public sector.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the progress of the Government's plans to use sustainable timber only, whenever possible, as part of the materials used in the construction of public buildings. [21670]

**Mr. Morley:** The Third Annual Report on Greening Government, published on 27 November 2001 and available on the internet http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk includes information on timber purchase by Department as well as information on overall progress towards implementing the Government's policy on purchasing timber from sustainable and legal sources. That report covers activities undertaken during the financial year ended 31 March 2001. Since then the Government have commissioned consultants to undertake research and report on options for further assisting their buyers to actively seek to purchase timber and timber products from sustainable and legal sources.

The Government are working with stakeholders in producing countries to encourage sustainable forest management as well as tackling illegal logging. The UK was instrumental in organising a ministerial conference in Indonesia this year to address forest law enforcement and governance in East Asia. This produced the real prospect of bilateral agreements to secure more effective controls. A similar conference is planned to address the same issues in Africa next year. These international initiatives are intended to help to reduce the volume of illegally logged timber entering the UK and to effectively create more demand for sustainable timber in construction projects and more generally across both the public and private sectors within the UK.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of her Department in encouraging Government Departments to take part in the pilot project to use only wood from sustainable sources. [21669]

**Mr. Morley:** This Department has accepted, on behalf of the Government, an offer made by the World Wide Fund for Nature to assist the Government in their efforts to source timber from sustainable and legal sources when a suitable project can be identified. The Department has written to Heads of Procurement in the major central Government Departments to advise them of the offer made by WWF. To date no Department has come forward to suggest a suitable project. The Department will continue to engage the inter-departmental working group on timber procurement in searching for a suitable project.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she plans to take to implement her Department's policy of using only sustainable timber for public buildings. [21672]

**Mr. Morley:** The Government are working with the timber trade, environmental pressure groups and other stakeholders to encourage a greater demand for sustainable timber across all sectors of the economy. The

Government are also working with many stakeholders in different producer countries to promote sustainable forest management as well as tackling illegal logging.

For their own operational activities the Government are committed to actively seek to purchase the timber and timber products they need from legal and sustainable sources. To this end Government buyers have been instructed to implement this policy and to report annually on their purchases. An interdepartmental working group is monitoring progress and will provide further guidance and advice to that already provided to buyers in our Green Guide for Buyers and elsewhere on the Greening Government website http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/greening/gghome.htm. The Government's approach should help to transform the market into supplying more timber and timber products from sustainable managed sources. The Third Annual Report on Greening Government, published on 27 November 2001 and available on the internet http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk includes information on timber purchase by Department as well as information on overall progress towards implementing the Government's policy on purchasing timber from sustainable and legal sources. More generally, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently set up a Sustainable Procurement Group of officials to consider how Government policies on sustainable development can be more effectively implemented through the Government's own procurement activities.

## Departmental Payments

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to reduce the cost of administering departmental payments; and if she will make a statement. [20948]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The Department established the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) on 16 October to make CAP payments. RPA brings together the administration of CAP grants and subsidies schemes previously divided between MAFF's (now DEFRA's) regional offices and the Intervention Board. RPA will deliver a change programme to modernise the way that CAP payments are made through a major investment in new technology.

This will provide advanced electronic processing capability and enable farmers and traders to submit claims electronically. It will result in significant benefits for taxpayers with a 10 per cent. cut by March 2004 in unit costs of administering payments and further savings in subsequent years after the new systems are fully implemented.

In addition, and as part of a continuing review of efficiencies, a number of initiatives are under way across DEFRA to improve the processes for the purchase and payment of goods and services through electronic procurement, making greater use of purchase cards, the electronic receipt and payment of invoices and further centralisation of invoice processing where appropriate. It is anticipated that by March 2003 the core Department will have realised the level of savings identified.

## Peat

**Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions (1) her Department has had with the Treasury about fiscal incentives to reduce consumer demand for peat products; [21612]

(2) her Department has had with the Department of Trade and Industry about funding the development of the peat replacement industry; [21613]

(3) her officials have had with other Departments about action to promote sustainable alternatives to peat use. [21611]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Peat Working Group is the interdepartmental forum, on which the peat industry and environmental bodies are represented, where such issues are considered. This meets periodically and my officials are represented. The Government's policy on the use of peat is set out in the relevant Biodiversity Action Plan which commits Government to undertake and promote research and development into sustainable alternatives while generating publicity to encourage amateur and professional peat users to adopt alternatives, highlighting the threat to peatland conservation of continued peat use. We aim for 40 per cent. of the total market requirements to be peat-free by 2005 and 90 per cent. by 2010. Recently, in response to a question from the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) on 16 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1219W, I detailed the mechanisms which Government use both to ensure the protection of the best examples of peatland habitat and to meet our obligations under the EU Habitats Directive.

## Horses

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to consider the tethering of horses; and if she will make a statement. [22110]

**Mr. Morley:** It is an offence under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 to cause a horse unnecessary suffering due to the manner in which it is tethered and is punishable by a fine of up to £5,000 or six months imprisonment, or both.

## Form OTM22

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what changes she plans to introduce to the requirement of form OTM22 for the signature of the producer of the animals; and if she will make a statement. [22116]

**Mr. Morley:** Animals over-30-months of age which are unable on welfare grounds to travel to OTMS collection centres can be slaughtered on farm and presented into the scheme at casualty centres. An on-farm slaughtered casualty animal must be covered by an OTM22 emergency slaughter certificate which in the main is completed by the attending veterinary surgeon. The primary purpose of the OTM22 is to confirm that the

animal showed no signs of disease or pathological condition which would render the whole carcase unfit for human consumption. There are currently no plans to amend the OTM22 form.

### Regulations

**Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many regulations her Department has proposed to Parliament since June; what regulatory impact assessments have been made for those regulations her Department has implemented in 2001; and what plans her Department has to reduce the number of regulations affecting small businesses. [21969]

**Mr. Morley:** With the exception of foot and mouth disease related orders the Department has made 42 regulations since June. In addition to these the Animal Health (Amendment) Bill was introduced on 30 October. Regulatory Impact Assessments for regulations imposing a cost or benefit implemented in 2001 are published on the Department's website and are available in the House Libraries.

The Department's plans for regulatory reform which will affect businesses, including small businesses, will be set out in a Regulatory Reform Action Plan which will be published in due course.

### Farm Workers (Security of Tenure)

**John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many farm workers and other rural tied workers have no security of tenure; [21760]

(2) what representations she has received since January on security of tenure of farm workers and other rural tied workers; and what proposals she has on this subject. [21761]

**Mr. Morley:** I have no information on the number of farm workers and other rural tied workers who have no security of tenure. The Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976 and the Housing Act 1988 provide security of tenure for qualifying agricultural workers who pay no rent at all or only a low rent.

Most lettings by private landlords to agricultural workers and other people who pay a market rent for their property which began before 15 January 1989 are regulated tenancies under the Rent Acts. Lettings of this sort made after that date will be assured or assured shorthold tenancies under the Housing Act 1988.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received no specific representations on this subject since January. Housing legislation is primarily the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions although DEFRA is jointly responsible with DTLR for certain provisions in the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976.

### Refrigerator Recycling

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many recycling plants in the United Kingdom are equipped to handle fridges under the new regulations being introduced on 1 January 2002. [22073]

**Mr. Meacher:** EC Regulations No. 2037/2000 requires the removal of ozone depleting substances (ODS) from waste fridges before they are scrapped. The Department is aware of one facility in the UK capable of extracting ODS from waste fridges prior to scrapping, although this facility is not yet on-line. A number of other companies have indicated their intention to establish other such facilities in the UK.

**Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make a statement on the methodology employed to determine the additional sum of money required to deal with the extra costs to local waste service companies of dealing with unwanted refrigerators and freezers; [22220]

(2) how the additional funding for the storage of old refrigerators containing CFCs will be allocated, broken down by county. [22223]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* This Department recently announced a payment of £6 million to English local authorities to cover their costs of handling fridges and freezers until March 2002. We shall urgently assess the impacts of the regulation and will determine what further action is required beyond that.

The provision for waste disposal is included, together with other council services, within the upper tier of the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS) Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). The SSA is taken into account in the calculation of revenue support grant allocations to each authority. The additional £6 million for the disposal of refrigerators regulation has been added into the EPCS block.

### Agriculture Concordat

**Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the operation of the concordat between the Scottish Executive and the UK Government on co-ordination of European policy issues concerning agriculture; what representations she has received from the Scottish Executive to amend the concordat; and if she will make a statement. [21869]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Our assessment is that the concordat between the Scottish Executive and the UK Government on co-ordination of European policy issues concerning agriculture has worked well. We have received no representation from the Scottish Executive to amend the concordat although it will need to be amended to reflect the change in the name of my Department. The United Kingdom Government attach great importance to ensuring that the devolved Administrations play their proper role in the development of European policy and we are in regular contact with all the devolved Administrations on European issues.

### Departmental Staff (Home Working)

**Mr. Challen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21825]

**Mr. Morley:** The Department is committed to the work-life balance of its staff. A range of flexible working patterns including part-time working, job sharing and home working is available to staff by agreement with their management.

DEFRA publicises its policy on flexible working and encourages managers to respond positively to requests as part of their commitment to the diversity agenda.

Information on the number of staff undertaking home working on a regular basis is not kept centrally and a complete list of those using working from home arrangements could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, IT dial-in facilities which enable staff to work remotely are widely used, with around 1,400 having access to this facility. A regular element of home working is normal practice for certain groups of staff. It is estimated that around 10 per cent. of staff make use of informal arrangements to work from home occasionally.

### Asbestos

**Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will seek the support of her European colleagues to press the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for a worldwide ban on all forms of asbestos; and if she will make a statement. [21857]

**Mr. Meacher:** The WTO applies the rules of the multilateral trading system. It does not itself impose restrictions on the import or export of particular goods or services. It is a matter for individual members of the WTO to decide whether such trade restrictions are appropriate.

With respect to chrysotile asbestos, the WTO's Appellate Body reached a decision in March 2001 which upheld the French ban on imports of chrysotile asbestos, which had been challenged within the WTO's Dispute Settlement Mechanism by Canada. The Appellate Body found that in view of the toxicity of chrysotile asbestos, the French import ban was justified under Article XX of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which allows measures necessary for a range of purposes, including the protection of human, animal or plant life or health.

The Declaration adopted at the 4th Ministerial Conference of the WTO, held in Doha on 9–14 November 2001, reaffirms that:

> "under WTO rules no country should be prevented from taking measures for the protection of human, animal or plant life or health, or of the environment at the levels it considers appropriate . . .".

The United Kingdom has in place a body of regulations to prevent and control exposure to asbestos. These cover the prohibition of its importation, supply and new use, the control of work where employees may be exposed to asbestos, and the licensing of removal contractors. Forthcoming proposed legislation will additionally require those in control of non-domestic premises to manage any asbestos in their buildings in order to prevent accidental exposure.

On 26 July 1999 the European Community adopted further restrictions on the supply and use of asbestos, through the Marketing and Use Directive, that must be in force in all member states by 1 January 2005. The United Kingdom legislation which implements this Directive (with a small number of time limited derogations) came into force on 24 November 1999.

### Wild Mammals

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to improve the monitoring of the wild mammal population. [R] [21422]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* At present there is no comprehensive, standardised national monitoring of British mammals that embraces the full range of important species. While a range of organisations undertake monitoring, not all mammals are included, surveys are often sporadic and the results distributed to only a limited extent.

A GB-wide research contract "Design and pilot a multi-species terrestrial mammal monitoring project" was let in June 2001 to the British Trust for Ornithology and the Mammal Society. The overall aim will be to design and pilot, using a volunteer network, a winter monitoring project involving both visual recording of mammals and the recording of their signs, and is intended to form a building block for an integrated mammal-monitoring system.

The work will include an analysis of the results and consider aspects such as accuracy, repeatability and the utility of the results for monitoring mammal abundance and distribution and for the potential to assess long-term trends.

### Water Leakage

**Andrew Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how far each United Kingdom water provider has reduced water leakage from the supply system; and which companies have met the targets set by the Deputy Prime Minister in 1997. [22165]

**Mr. Meacher:** At the Water summit in 1997, the Deputy Prime Minister asked the Office of Water Services to set leakage targets for water companies in England and Wales. The objective was for companies to reach their economic level of leakage by 2002–03 and all companies, with the exception of Thames Water, are on target to reach that level. To date, this amounts to a reduction in leakage of about 30 per cent. Thames Water has been required to take the necessary corrective action by 2003–04. Details of the action required of Thames and other companies' performance are contained in the Ofwat report 'Leakage and the efficient use of water 2000–01', a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The Water summit did not involve the water authorities in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Scottish Executive published their most recent leakage information in 'Public Water Supplies in Scotland 1999–2000 Water Resources Survey'. The Northern Ireland Water Service does not currently publish any information on leakage.

### Farm-based Horse Enterprises

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps she has taken to assist farmers diversifying into

farm-based horse enterprises; what representations she has received on this issue since June; and if she will make a statement. [22461]

**Alun Michael:** Farmers wishing to diversify their farm business, including diversification into farm-based horse enterprises, can apply for funding under the Rural Enterprise Scheme (RES), part of the England Rural Development Programme which was launched in September 2000. There are equivalent measures in Objective 1 areas.

DEFRA also offers assistance in the form of free planning consultancy advice to farmers who intend to pursue an eligible RES diversification project.

Other funding for farm diversification projects which utilise existing farm buildings is available from regional development agencies in the form of redundant building grant.

The Government have also taken other practical measures to encourage farm diversification generally which will assist farmers diversifying into equine businesses. The Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Act 2001 provides for rate relief on buildings and land used for all non-agricultural enterprises on what had previously been agricultural premises. An amendment to guidance in Planning Police Guidance note 7 (PPG7), "The Countryside—Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development", on farm diversification makes clear the importance that the Government attach to diversification. It encourages local planning authorities to support well-conceived schemes that are consistent in their scale with their rural location.

Since June I have had representations on this issue from the British Equestrian Federation and the British Horse Industry Confederation.

### Abandoned Vehicles

**Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on changes in the numbers of abandoned vehicles in England over the last three years. [22470]

**Mr. Meacher:** Local authorities are responsible for dealing with abandoned vehicles. Although the Department currently holds no central records of the number of vehicles abandoned each year we estimate that some 350,000 are abandoned in the United Kingdom each year. We know anecdotally that the numbers of abandoned vehicles are increasing year on year.

More up to date information on the number of abandoned vehicles removed by local authorities is being collected in the Department's 2000–01 Municipal Waste Management Survey which should be published in July 2002.

### Flooding (North Yorkshire)

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what allowance has been made in the Revenue Support Grant for 2002–03 for the November 2000 floods in North Yorkshire. [22662]

**Mr. Morley:** The provisional increases in flood defence standard spending assessments (SSAs) for councils in the north of Yorkshire are shown in the table. SSAs are reflected in the distribution to councils of revenue support grant and national non-domestic rates.

*£ million*

| *Council* | *2001–02* | *2002–03* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|---|---|
| North Yorkshire | 2.423 | 2.577 | 6 |
| East Riding of Yorkshire | 2.001 | 2.266 | 13 |
| York | 1.156 | 1.354 | 17 |
| Selby | 0.813 | 0.927 | 14 |
| Kingston upon Hull | 0.768 | 0.809 | 5 |
| Ryedale | 0.096 | 0.116 | 21 |
| Harrogate | 0.094 | 0.119 | 27 |
| Scarborough | 0.041 | 0.038 | −8 |
| Hambleton | 0.038 | 0.032 | −14 |
| Craven | 0.029 | 0.060 | 107 |
| Richmondshire | 0.007 | 0.011 | 59 |
| Total | 7.467 | 8.311 | 11 |

### Scottish Water

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what channels of communication she will have with the Water Industry Commissioner for Scotland after the formation of Scottish Water. [22788]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The water and sewerage service in Scotland is a devolved responsibility of the Scottish Executive. The Executive will write to the hon. Member about the lines of responsibility between itself and Scottish Water.

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what responsibility her Department will have concerning the level of water bills in Scotland after the formation of Scottish Water; [22787]

(2) what channels of communication she will have with the Water Industry Commissioner for Scotland after the formation of Scottish Water; [22789]

(3) what role her Department has had in the scheduled transfer of the existing water authorities to Scottish Water. [22786]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* None. The water and sewerage service in Scotland is a devolved responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

### Tuberculosis

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the number of all categories of staff devoted to tuberculosis in cattle will be returned to their pre foot and mouth levels *(a)* in total and *(b)* in Gloucestershire; what the percentage drop was in each case between February and the latest month for which figures are available; what effect this will have on the projected date for publishing the results of the Krebs Trials; and when that is estimated to be. [R] [22844]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* It is not yet possible to give a firm date when all the staff resource that used to be applied to TB testing can be restored to pre foot and mouth disease (FMD) levels. This depends on developments in FMD and post FMD controls.

Overall the percentage drop from February to October 2001 was: for SVS and LVIs 81 per cent.; for TVIs 87 per cent. and for administrators 53 per cent. This

reflects the fact that many veterinarians were still heavily involved in FMD controls and movement licensing in October.

The equivalent percentage drops for the Gloucester Animal Health Office were: for SVS and LVIs 97 per cent.; for TVIs 90 per cent. and for administrators 70 per cent. This reflects the fact that the area covered by these staff was more heavily and more persistently affected by FMD and that FMD-free status was only gained by mid-October.

The Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG) overseas the field trial. Prior to the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak, the ISG advised in its second report that firm scientific data were likely to be available to inform policy by 2004. The group has indicated that the FMD emergency might delay this timetable by a calendar year.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research has been commissioned into finding a vaccine for tuberculosis in cattle; what plans there are to increase Departmental spending in this area; and what progress has been made in finding such a vaccine. [R] [22846]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* In 1999, one three-year and three five-year research projects for finding a vaccine for TB in cattle were commissioned by MAFF at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency and at the Institute of Animal Health. £1.2 million funding is being provided by DEFRA in this area each year up to 2004. The key objectives of the research are to produce live candidate vaccines, to develop a test to differentiate vaccinated animals from infected animals and to evaluate the vaccine candidates in the host species. The Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG) is undertaking a detailed study of vaccine development and their potential use. In its third report the ISG advised that vaccines in either cattle or badgers remains a potential policy option although likely to offer prospects only in a long-term context. Nevertheless, research into vaccines remains an important element in the strategy to control TB in cattle and will receive funding accordingly.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of tuberculosis in cattle have been reported in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* each month this year. [R] [22847]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* In 1999 a total of 6,772 cattle were slaughtered under TB control measures. This rose to 8,355 cattle in 2000.

Raw data on TB incidents in the months of 2001 have not yet been subject to quality control and statistics for each month are not yet available. Raw data indicate that so far some 900 tuberculin reactor cattle have been identified.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the geographical spread of tuberculosis in cattle in the last three years. [R] [22845]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Over the last three years the rise in bovine TB incidents in cattle in England has generally been contained to the south and west. In descending order the areas with the highest confirmed incidence are Gloucestershire, Hereford and Worcestershire, Wiltshire, Avon, Cornwall and Devon. Generally, within this area the number of TB incidents has continued to increase year on year.

Outside these higher incidence areas we are closely monitoring bovine TB incidence in the areas of Shropshire, Staffordshire and Dorset.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the resumption of *(a)* full road traffic survey and testing of dead badgers and *(b)* full scale TB99 questionnaire forms will take place. [R] [22848]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Work on the road traffic accident (RTA) survey of badger carcases and the TB99 survey was suspended earlier this year due to the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak. Plans to restart the work are currently being considered and, as staff return to normal duties, it is hoped to do so early in the new year. An exact date for the resumption of the surveys cannot be given at present.

## Agriculture Select Committee

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the financial projections contained in Annexe A of the Government's response to the Agriculture Select Committee, Session 2000–01, HC 92, have changed. [R] [22849]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The estimates for expenditure on tackling TB in cattle contained in the Government response for the years 2002–03 and 2003–04 remain unchanged.

Outturn figures for 2000–01, when they become available, are likely to show a reduction in expenditure on TB, due to diversion of veterinary resource to deal with the classical swine fever and foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreaks. The outturn figures for 2001–02, when they become available, will almost certainly show a more marked reduction because of the diversion of resource to deal with FMD and the length and severity of the outbreak in this financial year.

## Mink Farms

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many breeding female mink there were at UK mink farms on 28 February. [23180]

**Mr. Morley:** In relation to England, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 814W.

Fur farming in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is the responsibility of the devolved Administrations. However, I understand that they currently have no mink farms.

## Game Licences

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the number of game licences sold in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [22397]

**Alun Michael:** I am able to provide figures for the last nine years. The figures are:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 43,914 |
| 1993–94 | 41,311 |
| 1994–95 | 30,872 |
| 1995–96 | 25,702 |
| 1996–97 | 30,285 |
| 1997–98 | 31,939 |
| 1998–99 | 31,987 |
| 1999–2000 | 39,262 |
| 2000–01 | 42,310 |

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list the costs of issuing the game licence for the last year for which figures are available; [22394]

(2) how many game licences were sold in the last year for which figures are available; and how much was raised, net of costs. [22395]

**Alun Michael:** The costs in the year 2001–02 were £224,792.51. 42,310 game licences were sold in 2000–01. £4,132 was raised net of costs.

### Waste Management

**Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consideration she has given to instituting specific procedures to check on the background, including criminal convictions, of new relevant persons once a waste management licence has been granted. [21210]

**Mr. Meacher:** Under section 74 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Environment Agency has the power to take into account the relevant offences of a new relevant person in relation to a current waste management licence. Under section 38 of the 1990 Act, the Environment Agency has the power to suspend or revoke licences if the licence holder ceases to be a fit and proper person—one of the tests of which is relevant offences. When invoking these powers the agency must have a regard to the statutory guidance provided in Waste Management Paper 4, "Licensing of Waste Management Facilities".

### Livestock Movements

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the restrictions on the movement of livestock will be further relaxed. [24056]

**Margaret Beckett:** I welcome the fact that we have not had a confirmed case of FMD since the end of September, and that the programme of testing has enabled us to reduce the risk status of all the counties affected, so considerably easing the movement of livestock within the present control regime. I hope that it will not be long before the country can, with reasonable confidence, be regarded as free of disease. We still need to maintain precautions against the recurrence of the disease. This will need to be recognised in an interim animal movement regime which, assuming all continues to go well, we hope to introduce in mid-February. My Department has been discussing the terms of such a regime with the livestock industry over recent weeks. My noble Friend Lord Whitty plans to publish tomorrow the general principles of such a regime.

### Fisheries

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether she has assessed for the year 2000 the impact of the economic link measures introduced for the fisheries sector on 1 January 1999; and if she will make a statement. [23918]

**Mr. Morley:** From 1 January 1999 all British registered fishing vessels over 10 metres in length and catching more than 2 tonnes of quota stocks have had to demonstrate an economic link with fisheries-dependent communities in the United Kingdom. This link can be demonstrated in a number of ways, for example by vessels landing at least 50 per cent. by weight of their quota catch into the UK or by employing a crew of whom at least 50 per cent. are normally resident in a UK coastal area.

In 2000, 1,627 vessels caught more than 2 tonnes of quota stocks and in each case achieved a satisfactory economic link, primarily through landings into the UK. The economic link arrangements have maintained the increases in UK landings and expenditure achieved by foreign-owned UK-registered vessels in 1999. In addition almost 400 tonnes of quota was made available for redistribution to the UK fleet.

A full report by the Fisheries Departments in the United Kingdom on the operation of the economic link measures and their impact in 2000 has been placed in the Library of the House.

### Illegal Timber Logging

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent measures she has taken to promote an international code to combat illegal timber logging. [8286]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Government are currently investigating options for intergovernmental agreements to combat illegal logging. My Department works closely with the Department for International Development (DfID) on this. A study by the Royal Institute of International Affairs has been commissioned and final results will be available before the end of the year. The study considers possible options to combat illegal logging and in particular frameworks for voluntary and mandatory agreements and the relationship of such agreements with WTO rules, market based instruments such as labelling and certification, particularly where they include requirements for chain-of-custody documentation.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development represented the Government at the recent Forest Law Enforcement and Governance, East Asia, Ministerial Conference (Indonesia, 11–13 September 2001). The conference was successful. Participants agreed to intensify national efforts and strengthen bilateral, regional and multilateral collaboration to address violations of forest law and forest crime and to create a regional task force on forest law enforcement and governance. The UK will play its part in taking forward these actions on forest

governance, working with overseas partners both bilaterally and internationally through the United Nation Forum on Forests and the G-8 processes.

## Foot and Mouth

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will update and publish the information given in the letter of 11 September from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the hon. Member for the Vale of York assessing the damage to the agricultural and tourism sectors of the foot and mouth outbreak (ref 3468). [12070]

**Mr. Morley:** My letter of 11 September provided the following information:

"On 9 July you tabled a parliamentary question in which you asked what assessment has been made of the damage to the agriculture and tourism sectors of the current foot and mouth outbreak. I am sorry I was unable to reply before the House rose for summer recess, but had I had done so, I would have said that the Department does not have statistics on job losses in the agriculture sector resulting from foot and mouth. We are, however, developing proposals for a survey to collect information relating to the impact of foot and mouth disease on farmers directly or indirectly affected by the outbreak, including details relating to employment.

As regards tourism, our best estimate is that overall UK tourism revenues may fall by over £3 billion over the eight month tourism season (March-October). However, figures from the International Passenger Survey, released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), show that overseas visitors to the UK increased by 1 per cent. to 2.3 million in June 2001 compared with June 2000, up from April and May, when visits fell by 7 per cent. and 11 per cent. respectively.

The latest figures are quite encouraging and suggest that some of the work Ministers and British Tourism Authority have been doing in overseas markets is starting to have an effect.

A copy of this letter was placed in the Library of the House."

Our best estimate continues to be that overall UK tourism, in terms of gross value added, may fall by over £3 billion over the eight-month tourism season (March-October). More recent International Passenger Survey statistics, released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), show that on average over the seven months between March and September the number of overseas visitors was down by 7 per cent. compared to the same period in 2000. The number of overseas visitors was also down on average 7 per cent. in the first nine months of the year, including those months prior to the outbreak of FMD. There was also an 11 per cent. fall in spending by overseas visitors over the same period.

The survey of farmers mentioned in my letter has now been completed by ADAS. Officials are now considering the results and these will be made available early in the new year.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of blood tests taken from animals slaughtered in efforts to eradicate foot and mouth disease were later confirmed as positive; and if she will make a statement. [13888]

**Mr. Morley:** 55 per cent. of tests from animals slaughtered in efforts to eradicate foot and mouth disease were later confirmed as positive. This percentage includes samples taken from animals slaughtered on infected premises, as dangerous contacts, on contiguous premises and as slaughter on suspicion cases. Not all animals slaughtered on infected premises are sampled; confirmation of the disease frequently being based only on clinical examination. Additionally, a negative test result does not necessarily mean that the premises was free from disease. For instance, if the disease is old the virus may not be present in the sample collected, and blood tests from newly infected animals may not give a positive reaction to the laboratory test as antibodies may not yet be present.

*Source:*

DEFRA Disease Control System database as at 17.30 4 December 2001. Figures subject to change as more data become available.

**Mr. Keith Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what scientific evidence there is that vaccination can prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease. [15363]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* There are three principal lines of scientific evidence which demonstrate that suitable foot and mouth disease (FMD) vaccines, properly applied, can minimise or prevent the spread of the disease. These are:

the results of routine, laboratory-based, vaccine potency tests which are required of licensed vaccine manufacturers in compliance with pharmacopoeial criteria;

the testing of the duration of immunity engendered by FMD vaccines, by means of similar tests. These tests have shown immunity following a primary course of vaccination with conventional FMD vaccine typically lasts for four to six months; and

the results of vaccination campaigns which have been associated with the successful control of FMD, as has been apparent in a number of countries.

It is essential that any vaccination campaign is both effectively and efficiently managed in order for it to work and there are many aspects to this, including, the correct strain of vaccine and enough of it, targeting the correct population of animals in the right location and that there are enough trained vaccinators.

Throughout the outbreak, the Government have kept vaccination actively under review. Vaccination would be used if scientific advice were clear that it was the most appropriate measure to shorten the outbreak. But vaccination on its own could never have eradicated FMD entirely.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will calculate Her Majesty's Government's annual expenditure on foot and mouth vaccine research in each of the last 10 years. [18208]

**Mr. Morley:** Government expenditure on research into foot and mouth disease vaccine development for each of the last 10 years is as follows.

| *Year* | *£* |
|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 255,000 |
| 1993–94 | 285,000 |
| 1994–95 | 427,000 |
| 1995–96 | 318,000 |
| 1996–97 | 312,000 |
| 1997–98 | 317,000 |
| 1998–99 | 253,000 |
| 1999–2000 | 309,000 |
| 2000–01 | 268,000 |
| 2001–02 | 154,000 |

**Patrick Mercer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of alternatives to mass slaughter of livestock in the event of further outbreaks of foot and mouth disease. [18020]

**Mr. Morley:** The disease control policies employed by the Government to eradicate foot and mouth disease are being guided by advice received by the Chief Veterinary Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser. The requirements to slaughter animals which are infected or suspected of being infected with FMD is also a key part of the rules established by the European Union on the control of the disease.

The use of vaccination in certain circumstances would be considered if scientific advice were clear that it was the most appropriate measure to shorten the outbreak. However, vaccination does not provide complete protection against FMD and could never be used solely to eradicate FMD entirely. The Government recognised early in this year's outbreak that future EU and international policies for handling FMD would need to be reassessed, including the role of vaccination. The UK, with the Dutch, took the initiative to organise an International Conference on Prevention and Control of Foot and Mouth Disease on 12–13 December in Brussels.

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the risk of the transmission of foot and mouth disease from the consumption by dogs of fallen stock. [17969]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* Although experimental studies demonstrated a degree of susceptibility to FMD in some dogs, there is no direct evidence to show that the species has been involved in the transmission of FMD to susceptible livestock. There is a theoretical risk that dogs could be involved in the mechanical transmission of the virus by carrying infective virus on their paws or coat. There is also a remote possibility that the consumption by a dog of FMD infected material could pass infection on to susceptible livestock, particularly if the dog vomited soon after consuming the infected material. However, provided the dog had a normal digestive process, it is unlikely that any viable virus would survive passage through the stomach and intestines. It is considered most unlikely that this theoretical possibility poses a serious risk of spreading FMD.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her oral statement of 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 578, on what basis she stated the number of local appeals which were lodged against the contiguous cull in the Thirsk blue box. [20822]

**Mr. Morley:** Since my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement of 12 November, I have asked my officials to re-check the source of the figures I provided on challenges to the contiguous cull in the Thirsk area. I can now confirm, that while accurate in themselves, the figures my right hon. Friend gave then relate to North Yorkshire as a whole. Thirsk was the name given to the area imposed for foot and mouth disease control and is often used as a shorthand to describe the wider area. I apologise if this led to any confusion.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the changes in foot and mouth *(a)* management and *(b)* eradication policy since the previous significant outbreak; and if she will make a statement. [20991]

**Mr. Morley:** An accurate and complete list of headline changes in the management and eradication of foot and mouth disease since 1967 would need to pick up a wide range of issues such as changes in legislation, science and technology. This could be produced only at disproportionate cost. However, a comparison of the way in which the current outbreak differs from the 1967 outbreak may be found on the DEFRA website at http:\\www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth/about/current/comparisons/1967 a.asp. This contains a section on how the 1967 and 2001 outbreaks were tackled.

A clearer picture of the changes requested by the hon. Member will emerge as my Department and the independent inquiries commissioned by the Government are able to assess the lessons learned from the current outbreak.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is towards the request for pre-action disclosure of departmental papers relating to the Government's handling of the foot and mouth outbreak; and if she will make a statement. [21105]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Pre-action disclosure is governed by the Civil Procedure Rules which regulate the conduct of civil litigation. The question of disclosure of any departmental papers would have to be considered in the light of these rules as applied to the facts and circumstances of each case.

**Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what moneys remain outstanding to auctioneers and valuers subcontracted to MAFF in Scotland during the foot and mouth outbreak; and if she will make a statement. [21541]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* A total of £327,061 remains outstanding to auctioneers and valuers in Scotland. This matter is currently being considered by my legal department and it would be inappropriate to comment at this stage.

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many vets work for the State Veterinary Service; and how many were employed at the outbreak of the current foot and mouth epidemic. [22104]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The number of vets that work for the State Veterinary Service is 286 (full-time equivalents, as at January 2001). All of these veterinarians have assisted in the eradication of foot and mouth disease in some capacity.

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost of employing temporary veterinary inspectors during the foot and mouth outbreak was. [22107]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The total cost of payment to those temporary veterinary inspectors (TVIs) appointed for foot and mouth disease, (as of November 2001) is £33,183,049. This comprises fees plus travel and subsistence expenses.

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many temporary veterinary inspectors, by area, were taken on during the foot and mouth epidemic. [22105]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* It is not possible to provide the number of temporary veterinary inspectors (TVIs) employed by area during the foot and mouth epidemic. We appointed 2,575 TVIs during the foot and mouth crisis and they moved around the country where they were most needed. TVIs were not necessarily assigned to one area.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will answer the letter from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight concerning HF Holidays and letters from HF Holidays to her Department. [12919]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* A response to the hon. Member's letter was sent on 23 October 2001. I apologise for the time taken to respond to this letter.

**Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when he will answer the letter dated 8 August from the hon. Member for Banbury concerning Mr. Rodney Thompson and those leaving the pig industry. [15602]

**Mr. Morley:** A response to the hon. Member's letter of 8 August was sent on 10 December 2001.

**Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of the hon. Member for Wealden of 26 July relating to a petition on genetically modified foods. [16385]

**Mr. Morley:** A response to the hon. Member's letter of 26 July was sent on 27 November 2001. I apologise for the time taken to respond to this letter.

**Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter (1) from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire dated 4 July concerning Mr. and Mrs. Don Holland of Shallow Grange Farm, Chelmorton, Derbyshire; [5444]

(2) of 4 July from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire concerning Mr. and Mrs. Don Holland. [17964]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* A response to the hon. Member's letter of 4 July was sent on 10 December 2001.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from Mr. V. Patrick, of Woodmancote, Gloucestershire, a constituent, which was acknowledged by her Department on 25 June, Reference 156734. [19804]

**Mr. Morley:** A response to the hon. Member's letter was sent on 30 November 2001. I apologise for the time taken to respond to this letter.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters of 14 May and 3 September from the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire concerning his constituent, Mr. John Sanders. [22265]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* My noble Friend Lord Whitty replied to the letter dated 14 May from the hon. Member on 21 November 2001. The Department has no record of the letter dated 3 September.

**Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire of 20 August concerning the foot and mouth disease slaughter policy. [15013]

**Mr. Morley:** Lord Whitty replied to the letter from the hon. Member on 10 December 2001.

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter dated 10 October from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding livestock movement and traceability. [21477]

**Mr. Morley:** A response to the hon. Member's letter of 10 October was sent on 6 December 2001. I apologise for the time taken to respond to this letter.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Child Support

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions further to his answer of 16 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1209–10W, if he will commission an up-to-date assessment of the numbers of non-resident parents gaining and losing from the introduction of new child support mechanisms for 2002. [10264]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The assessment of gainers and losers carried out in 1998 was made in order to determine the general effect of the new child support scheme. As I indicated in my answer to my hon. Friend on 16 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1209–10W, simple comparisons between current and potential liabilities cannot provide reliable information on the effect of the

reforms on individual parents. The new child support rates are now laid down in legislation and we do not intend to commission further work to establish the overall pattern of gain and loss resulting from conversion to the new scheme.

### New Deal

**Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of those who have entered work through the new deal programme have commenced unsubsidised employment in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the Galloway and Upper Nithsdale constituency. [23265]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The available information is in the table.

*Number of people entering unsubsidised jobs (up to the end of September 2001, unless otherwise stated)*

| *Programme* | *Scotland* | *Galloway and Upper Nithsdale* |
|---|---|---|
| New Deal for Young People | 35,231 | 424 |
| New Deal 25 plus | 6,398 | 107 |
| New Deal for Lone Parents | 12,130 | 108 |
| New Deal 50 plus: Employment Credit | [1]6,688 | [1]130 |
| New Deal for Disabled People | [1]16 | [3]— |
| New Deal for Partners | [2]243 | [3]— |

[1] At end of October 2001
[2] At 26 October 2001
[3] Information at constituency level is not available for the new deal for disabled people and the new deal for partners
*Sources:*
New Deal Evaluation Database
Employment Service Labour Market System

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the proportion of those leaving for sustained jobs from *(a)* the new deal for young people and *(b)* the new deal for the long-term unemployed who were still in employment (i) six and (ii) 12 months after leaving the new deal. [9330]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The available information is in the table.

*Proportion of clients leaving the programme for employment who had not re-claimed jobseeker's allowance (JSA)*

*Percentage*

| | *Within 6 months of leaving* | *Within 12 months of leaving* |
|---|---|---|
| New Deal for Young People | 80 | 66 |
| New Deal for the Long-Term Unemployed | 88 | 77 |

*Notes:*
(i) Figures for new deal for the long-term unemployed relate to the pre-April 2001 programme.
(ii) The figures include those leavers who have been in employment for less than 6–12 months, but who have not yet returned to JSA.
*Source:*
New Deal Evaluation Database

### New Deal (Loughborough)

**Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the Loughborough constituency are on the new deal programme, broken down by each category. [18491]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The available information is in the table.

| *Programme* | *Number*[1] |
|---|---|
| New Deal for Young People | 102 |
| New Deal 25 plus | 41 |
| New Deal for Lone Parents | [2]74 |
| New Deal 50 plus (Employment Credit claims) | [3]63 |

[1] To end September 2001
[2] Figure for end of August 2001.
[3] Figure for end of October 2001.
*Note:*
The figures are not cumulative.
*Source:*
New Deal Evaluation Database

Information at constituency level is not available for the new deals for disabled people and partners.

### Pensioner Poverty (South Tyneside)

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress he has made in combating pensioner poverty in South Tyneside in the last 12 months [13210]

**Mr. McCartney:** Since taking office in 1997 we have made a significant impact on the lives of our poorest pensioners.

We have introduced the minimum income guarantee from which some 6,800 pensioners in South Tyneside have benefited. We have boosted retirement pension through above inflation increases, both this year and next, to the benefit of some 29,800 pensioners in South Tyneside. We have also introduced free TV licences for the over 75's and next winter the winter fuel payment will again be £200.

All in all, throughout Great Britain, 2 million people in pensioner households are now at least £15 a week, or £800 a year better off in real terms as a result of our measures.

### Benefit Take-up

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to improve take-up of benefits by older people [23118]

**Mr. McCartney:** I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 601–02W.

### Benefit Take-up (Wycombe)

**Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in each ethnic group living in the Wycombe constituency were in receipt of income-related benefits in each of the last four years. [14876]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The information is not available.

### Income Support

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to review the arrangements for the level of deductions from income support based upon an individual's capital limit; [16127]

(2) what research his Department has carried out into the relationship between the rate of interest and the level of deductions from income support, based upon capital limits; [16128]

(3) if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on income support for those who have relatively low savings. [16129]

**Malcolm Wicks** *[holding answer 20 November 2001]:* It would make no sense to carry out research into the relationship between interest rates and the level of tariff income deducted. This is because a tariff is deducted from income support on a sliding scale for capital held between the lower and upper capital limits. Capital is treated in this way so that people with capital in excess of the lower limit make a reasonable weekly contribution from those resources to help meet their normal living expenses before having recourse to public funds. It is not intended to represent any return that could be obtained from investing capital and is not based on the current bank interest rate.

### ONE Pilot

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the benefits included on the integrated claim form piloted in the ONE-callcentre pilots. [17999]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The benefits included on the integrated claim form which is used in the ONE-callcentre pilots are income support, jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

### Departmental Bodies and Reviews

**Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the date of establishment was for all *(a)* taskforces and *(b)* policy reviews with external members established by his Department since January 2000; which of them have issued their final reports and what the dates of publication were; which of them have been terminated and what the dates of termination were; and for those bodies still in existence, what their expected (i) reporting and (ii) termination dates are; [18157]

(2) what *(a)* taskforces and *(b)* policy reviews with external members have been established by his Department since January 2000; and what (i) sub-groups, (ii) working parties and (iii) other subsidiary committees were established by each body. [18158]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown** *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* Departmental Ministers and officials consider many policy questions and issues on a routine and on-going basis and frequently seek the views of people external to the Department on a more or less informal basis. The following taskforces, ad hoc advisory and policy review groups with external members, have been established since January 2000 with formalised terms of reference:

Older People—Media Images Working Group was established in August 2000 and terminated in March 2001 with no report being published.

Partnership Against Poverty and the Scottish Partnership Against Poverty were established in March 2001 and November 2001 respectively. The groups are on-going with no planned formal reports or end dates. The Partnership Against Poverty group has formed a Black and Ethnic Minority Elder sub-group.

Jobcentre Plus Employers Forum and Jobcentre Plus Stakeholders Forum were both established in May 2001. Both are consultative groups and have been involved in discussions about the development of Jobcentre Plus. The Jobcentre Plus Stakeholders Forum has formed two sub groups, the services sub-group and the training sub-group which are looking at specific issues and will report to the main forum. None of the groups have a time-bound existence, although both the Employer Forum and Stakeholder Forum are under review, and the Stakeholder Forum sub-groups are likely to complete their work by April 2002.

The National Employment Panel was launched in October 2001 as the successor to the New Deal Task Force. The National Employment Panel is an employer-led body which provides independent advice to Ministers on the design, delivery and performance of the UK Government's labour market services. The panel reports on a regular basis to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The panel has established the following sub-groups: the Performance Committee; the Minority Ethnic Advisory Group; the Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Board; and a Skills sub-group which will report to the Under-Secretary of State for Adult Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey). The panel does not have a time-bound existence.

The Private Pensions Simplification Review was announced on the 26 September 2001 and is expected to report in July 2002.

The Minimum Funding Requirement Consultation Panel was announced on 18 September 2001. There are currently no plans for the panel to produce a report. It will continue to meet while legislation for the replacement for the MFR is being developed. The termination date for the panel depends on when a Bill is secured and legislation is in place, so it is not possible to give a precise termination date as this is subject to the parliamentary timetable.

### Parliamentary Ombudsman

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on how many occasions since 1997 the Parliamentary Ombudsman has written to him asking for redress on the grounds of equity to be made to clients of his Department resulting from a finding of maladministration leading to injustice; and how many people have received compensation in each case. [19505]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* I am aware of five such instances since May 1997.

Information concerning any people who may have received compensation in those cases is not generally available.

Specific records have, however, been retained of payments made further to the Ombudsman's report to Parliament on 26 February 2001 (State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) Inheritance Provisions: Redress of Maladministration HC271). To date, 101 people have received financial redress as a consequence of that investigation.

### Winter Fuel Payments

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is *(a)* take-up of winter fuel payments by males over 60 years not in receipt of a retirement pension and *(b)* the average delay between claims and payment for such persons. [20798]

**Mr. McCartney** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* For winter 2000–01, we estimate about three in every four men aged 60 and over but not in receipt of retirement pension received a winter fuel payment. This figure includes men paid automatically because they receive a social security benefit other than retirement pension and those who needed to claim.

It is not possible to provide a meaningful figure for the average time between a person claiming and receiving a payment.

### Stakeholder Pensions

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on take-up of stakeholder pensions among the target group. [20998]

**Mr. McCartney:** As set out in our 1998 Green Paper "Partnership in Pensions" the Government's long-term pension reforms are designed to ensure that all pensioners have a decent income in retirement, building on the foundation of the basic state pension available to all. This means everyone recognising their responsibilities; with those who are able, saving for their retirement, the Government supporting those who cannot save, and the private sector providing affordable and secure second pensions.

Before April 2001, many of those who could put money aside to provide for themselves in retirement had no straightforward, good-value way to enter a pension scheme. Stakeholder pensions, which were introduced from that date, offered such people a route through provision of a simple, low-charge, flexible pension scheme which, for many employees, can be accessed through their workplace.

Stakeholder pensions are open to everyone and over 490,000 have been sold in their first seven months on the market. They are particularly targeted at moderate and higher earners who do not have access to an occupational pension or to a cost-effective personal pension. Many of the target group work for employers without a comprehensive occupational or personal pension scheme for their staff before the introduction of stakeholder pensions. The requirement for such employers to provide their work force with access to a stakeholder pension scheme came into force on 8 October. It is too early to have sufficient information on which to base a reasoned assessment of take-up by the target group.

### Pension Up-rating

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost of the minimum state pension up-rating guarantee in 2004–05 for each half a per cent. if the September retail price index were to undershoot by 2.5 per cent. [21010]

**Mr. McCartney:** The information requested is in the table.

| *Inflation rate in 2004–05 (Percentage)* | *Cost of up-rating guarantee (£ million)* |
|---|---|
| 0.0 | 700 |
| 0.5 | 550 |
| 1.0 | 400 |
| 1.5 | 300 |
| 2.0 | 150 |

*Note:*
Figures are in 2001–02 prices, rounded to the nearest £50 million.

### Income Related Benefits

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people living in Regent's Park and Kensington, North were in receipt of income-related benefits in each of the last four years. [21459]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The available information is in the tables.

*Income-related benefit recipients in the Regent's Park and Kensington, North constituency*

| | *May 1998* | *May 1999* | *May 2000* | *May 2001* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Income support | 14,600 | 14,000 | 13,600 | 13,600 |
| Jobseeker's allowance (income based) | 4,900 | 4,700 | 3,600 | 3,200 |
| Family credit/working families' tax credit[1] | 1,300 | 1,600 | 1,900 | 2,200 |
| Disability working allowance/disabled person's tax credit[1] | 20 | 24 | 31 | 38 |
| Total | 20,800 | 20,400 | 19,200 | 19,000 |

[1] Family credit and disability working allowance were replaced in October 1999 by working families' tax credit and disabled person's tax credit which are not social security benefits.

*Notes:*

1. Figures (other than disability working allowance/disabled person's tax credit which is a 100 per cent. count of all cases) are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
2. Income support, jobseeker's allowance (income-based), family credit/working families' tax credit and "Total" figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. Income support/jobseeker's allowance claimants in receipt of family credit/working families' tax credit or disability working allowance/disabled person's tax credit are not shown in income support/jobseeker's allowance totals.
4. Disability working allowance/disabled person's tax credit figures are for April each year.
5. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

*Source:*

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries May 1998-May 2001
Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Enquiries May 1998-May 2001
Family Credit/Working Families' Tax Credit Quarterly Statistical Enquiries May 1998-May 2001
Disability Working Allowance/Disabled Person's Tax Credit Quarterly Statistical Enquiries April 1998-April 2001

Housing benefit and council tax benefit figures are not available for the Regent's Park and Kensington, North constituency but are available for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the City of Westminster.

*Housing benefit and council tax benefit caseload for Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea*

| | *Housing benefit* | *Council tax benefit* |
|---|---|---|
| May 1998 | 16,240 | 13,560 |
| May 1999 | 15,570 | 12,930 |
| May 2000 | 15,350 | 12,820 |
| May 2001 | 14,030 | 11,940 |

*Housing benefit and council tax benefit caseload for City of Westminster*

| | *Housing benefit* | *Council tax benefit* |
|---|---|---|
| May 1998 | 21,890 | 16,090 |
| May 1999 | 20,200 | 15,350 |
| May 2000 | 17,720 | 13,220 |
| May 2001 | 17,630 | 13,140 |

*Notes:*
1. Regent's Park and Kensington, North parliamentary constituency is covered in part by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and City of Westminster local authority areas. Figures are not therefore representative of the constituency area.
2. The data refer to households, which may be a single person or a couple.
3. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 cases.
4. City of Westminster figures for May 1998 are estimated because the authority failed to provide statistical data for that quarter.

*Source:*
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System quarterly 100 per cent. caseload stock-count taken each May from 1998 to 2001

### Correspondence

**Mr. Kaufman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) when he intends to reply to the letter of 7 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. L. J. Sullivan; [22187]

(2) for what reason he has not replied to the written question (ref 22187) from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to correspondence relating to Mr. I. J. Sullivan. [23697]

**Mr. Darling:** A reply has already been sent to my right hon. Friend about Mr. Sullivan.

**Mr. Kaufman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to reply to the letter of 2 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. M. Willingham. [22188]

**Mr. Darling:** I replied to my right hon. Friend on 12 December.

### Incapacity Benefit

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of appeals against the rejection of applications for incapacity benefit were successful in each year since 1997. [22984]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The available information on the number of appeals against an incapacity benefit 'Personal Capability Assessment' decision found in the appellants favour is given in the table:

| | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* | *2001*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of appeals heard | 50,360 | 56,920 | 53,215 | 35,305 | 15,305 |
| Number of appeals found in appellants favour | 21,925 | 23,410 | 22,500 | 14,575 | 6,365 |
| Proportion of appeals heard found in appellants favour (percentage) | 43.5 | 41.1 | 42.3 | 41.3 | 41.6 |

[1] To June

*Notes:*
Figures may be subject to change.
Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
Decision making and appeals legislation was changed from 6 September 1999.
The 'All Work Test' was replaced by the 'Personal Capability Assessment' test from April 2000.

*Source:*
100 per cent. download of Generic Appeals Processing System.

### National Insurance Contribution Credits

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how long his Department keeps records of people who have signed on as unemployed and in respect of which they have received national insurance contribution credits. [23111]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Information relating to an individual jobseeker is kept for a minimum of two years after they have ceased to register as unemployed. National insurance records are maintained for the lifetime of each individual.

### Pension Service

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on preparation for the introduction of the Pension Service with particular reference to *(a)* access to services for users and *(b)* development of partnership working. [23119]

**Mr. McCartney:** The Pension Service will offer an improved service for pensioners. It will be customer focused and will give pensioners a modern, personalised and efficient service designed to meet their needs. It will be accessible by telephone, post, in time the internet and locally where pensioners need to do so. It will also provide information for future pensioners to help them make decisions about their future pension arrangements.

The Pension Service is committed to providing a seamless service to its customers. The local service will develop relationships with third parties and other local service providers, and will be looking to use other premises, particularly to enable them to hold surgeries, either for appointments or for drop-in sessions. This negotiation will be done at a local level.

### Job Centre Plus

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employees of the Benefits

Agency and job centres have been assaulted at work in each of the past three years; and what impact the introduction of Job Centre Plus offices has had on the level of assaults. [23240]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** For information on incidents in the Benefits Agency and Jobcentres I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 176W.

We estimate that over a quarter of a million people have passed through the Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices during the first month of their operation. To date there have been no serious incidents in these offices. While it is still early days, this experience from the Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices so far confirms our belief that the new service and the new environment which we are offering in these offices promotes better behaviour in our customers. This, along with improved risk management arrangements, will we believe lead to fewer incidents of verbal and physical assaults on staff.

### Staff Safety

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what reasons underlay his decision not to engage in discussions with the PCS Union on their concerns about the safety of staff; and if he will make a statement. [23241]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Since the beginning of September 2001, my officials have engaged in over 60 hours of talks with the PCS union about their concerns on the safety of staff. Proposals for settling the current dispute were put to the PCS on 17 October, but were narrowly rejected by the PCS national executive committee. These proposals reflected the fact that the safety of staff has been our number one concern in developing the Jobcentre Plus offices. Security measures are stronger than ever, underpinned by comprehensive risk assessments which were developed in conjunction with PCS. In November, following further discussions, the PCS were asked, if they were still unable to accept the previous proposals, to put forward their own tangible and detailed proposals on which the dispute could be settled. We have made it clear to the PCS that we are willing to have further discussions on this basis.

### Employment (Over-50s)

**Mr. Denis Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress is being made to help the over-50s find work in areas of high unemployment; and what incentives are available to potential employers in this respect. [19931]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** We are firmly committed to tackling the high levels of economic inactivity among people over 50 in all areas of the country. The employment rate of older workers is up for the fourth year running, by 1.3 percentage points on last year's figures. In 2001–02 our range of nationally available new deals, including new deal 50 plus, new deal 25 plus and now new deal for disabled people, is expected to help some 50,000 over-50s into employment. In areas of particularly high unemployment people of all ages may be able to benefit from the additional support available through action teams for jobs and employment zones.

Older people can offer a wealth of talent and expertise to employers. Additional incentives for employers include the new deal 25 plus employer subsidy, and the new deal 50 plus in-work training grant, which can both be paid to the employer.

### Patients Forums

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he intends to allow clients *(a)* receiving means tested benefits and *(b)* subject to work and availability tests to participate fully in the proposed patients forums and receive support for reasonable costs. [19489]

**Malcolm Wicks** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* People of working age in receipt of benefit can do unlimited voluntary work, as long as the usual entitlement conditions are met. Payments in respect of expenses incurred or to be incurred in connection with voluntary work are wholly ignored in the calculation of income-related benefits. Where someone receives remuneration in respect of his or her participation in a patients forum the normal rules concerning paid work would need to be considered.

Cases are decided on an individual basis, so it is necessary for people to let the Jobcentre or benefits office know about their participation.

## HEALTH

### Cholera Vaccine

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions since 1971 children have been injected with cholera vaccines in place of ones relating to whooping cough, diphtheria and tetanus; and if he will make a statement. [22991]

**Jacqui Smith:** The Department is not aware of any incidences of children being vaccinated with cholera vaccine in place of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccines.

### Beta Interferon

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 24 August from the hon. Member for North Shropshire, concerning the issue of beta interferon and multiple sclerosis sufferers. [22392]

**Ms Blears:** A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 13 September.

### Orthopaedic Surgeons

**Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* average and *(b)* maximum waiting times were (i) to see an orthopaedic surgeon and (ii) between seeing an orthopaedic surgeon and having an operation where that was necessary in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [23244]

**Mr. Hutton:** The average (median) waiting times for in-patient and out-patient treatment as at September 2001 are given in the tables. The data collected for waiting times by specialty are available by quarter only, the latest data being quarter ending September 2001. Data on

maximum waiting times are not collected; however the number of patients waiting over 26 weeks for out-patient treatment and the number of patients waiting over 18 months for in-patient treatment are given.

We are committed to reducing waiting times. We have allocated £75 million to tackle this in a number of specialties (ophthalmology, ear, nose and throat, dermatology and orthopaedics), through the action on programmes.

*Trauma and orthopaedics out-patient waiting times*

| | *Average (median) waiting time (Weeks)* | *Of those seen, number who waited 26+ weeks* | *Percentage who waited 26+ weeks* |
|---|---|---|---|
| September 2001 | 10.01 | 18,694 | 10.2 |

*Note:*
Data refer to patients who have been seen during quarter for a first out-patient appointment following GP referral. All data are HA based.
*Source:*
QM08R, QF01 quarterly waiting times returns

*Trauma and orthopaedics in-patient waiting times*

| | *Average (median) waiting time (Months)* | *Number still waiting 18+ months* | *Percentage of total list waiting 18+ months* |
|---|---|---|---|
| September 2001 | 4.24 | 73 | 0.03 |

*Note:*
All data are HA based
*Source:*
QM08R, QF01 quarterly waiting times returns

**Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what use is being made in the NHS of orthopaedic physicians to reduce waiting times for orthopaedic surgeons. [23183]

**Mr. Hutton:** The Modernisation Agency's national health service orthopaedic service collaboratives programme shows a number of NHS trusts have developed innovative solutions to improving waiting times, access and throughput of patients. Trusts such as Gloucester Royal, Isle of Wight and Addenbrookes use orthopaedic physicians. These tend to be orthogeriatricians or rehabilitation physicians who focus on the care of the more elderly, anaesthetically vulnerable population after their operations.

The Modernisation Agency is also leading on the action on orthopaedics programme that has been developed by the Government. The aim of the action on orthopaedics programme is to significantly encourage and disseminate best practice; improve access to care; and reduce variations in waiting times.

## Correspondence

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 5 October (his ref POH(4)5332/24) from the hon. Member for Northavon regarding a constituent, Mr. Wilcox. [18027]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* I regret the delay. A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 12 December.

**Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Broxbourne of 6 August, 21 September, 25 October and 29 November relating to correspondence about her constituent, Mrs. Doris May Johnston, of Belmont View. [20912]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on the 13 December.

## Youth Helplines

**Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what money the Government have made available to UK-wide youth helplines in the last 12 months. [16979]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* The information requested is not collected centrally. However, the Department's records of its funding of voluntary organisations reveal that a number of organisations currently receiving core funding provide helpline-type services as part of their core activities. These include Kidscape, the Children's Legal Centre, the National Youth Advocacy Service and ChildLine.

In addition, the Department provided project grant assistance specifically for helpline services designed for young people in the year ending 31 March 2001 as follows:

| *Name of organisation* | *Name/type of helpline* | *Amount of funding (£)* |
|---|---|---|
| ChildLine | Childline for children in care | 50,000 |
| Child Psychotherapy Trust | Professional call back advice | 20,000 |
| Youth Clubs UK | Youth Listens to Youth | 35,000 |
| After Adoption | TALKadoption | 30,000 |

## Falls (Older People)

**John Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis and the management of hip fractures will be included in the clinical guidelines on the assessment and prevention of falls to be published by NICE; and if he will make a statement; [18863]

(2) what discussions he has had recently with NICE on the implementation of section 6 of the National Service Framework for Older People regarding standards for services related to falls and osteoporosis. [18862]

**Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will ensure that the clinical guidelines on the assessment and prevention of falls in older people will include specific guidance on osteoporosis; [19635]

(2) when he expects NICE to publish clinical guidelines on the assessment and prevention of falls in older people. [19641]

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if osteoporosis will be included in the NICE clinical guideline on the assessment and prevention of falls in older people. [20102]

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if NICE will issue clinical guidance on the assessment and prevention of falls that mentions osteoporosis; [19920]

(2) if *(a)* the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis and *(b)* the management of hip fractures will be included in NICE's clinical guidelines on the assessment and prevention of falls. [20015]

**Jacqui Smith:** In July we announced that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) would produce clinical guidelines for the assessment and prevention of falls including recurrent falls in older people, with an associated clinical audit dataset, database and methodology. NICE is currently looking at what this guidance will cover and has written to organisations with an interest to seek their views. No discussions have taken place with NICE on this issue of scope but as a consultee the Department will send its views to NICE shortly. NICE has indicated a provisional publication date of August 2003 for these guidelines.

## Care Homes

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the private care homes industry. [18358]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* I have met and corresponded with representatives of the independent care home sector on a number of occasions to discuss matters of mutual concern, and have had similar discussions with hon. Members.

We are committed to working with the independent care home sector to make sure that we use capacity and resources to achieve the best possible outcomes for service users and their carers. To this end, I chair a strategic commissioning group to give greater direction to the commissioning of care services, in particular those for older people. Membership of the group includes representatives of the independent care home sector. Recently the group published an agreement—"Building Capacity and Partnership in Care"—that focuses on councils and independent sector providers entering into long-term agreements about placing people into care homes or giving them other forms of support.

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportions of the provision of residential and nursing home bed spaces are *(a)* public sector and *(b)* private sector in (i) England and (ii) Staffordshire. [22681]

**Jacqui Smith:** The table shows the percentage of places in residential care homes that are in the public and private sector as at 31 March 2001. All of the registered nursing beds in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics are in the private sector (186,800 in homes in England and 5,200 in the health authorities of north and south Staffordshire).

*As at 31 March 2001*
*Rounded numbers and percentages*

| | *England* | *Staffordshire*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| Total places in residential care homes | 341,200 | 6,800 |
| Public sector[2] (percentage) | 15 | 26 |
| Private sector[3] (percentage) | 85 | 74 |

[1] Information presented for Staffordshire shire county and Stoke-on-Trent unitary authority. These areas equate to the health authorities of north and south Staffordshire.
[2] Residential places in local authority staffed homes
[3] Residential places in voluntary, private, small homes (with less than four places), including dual registered homes

## Nurses Accommodation

**Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with local authorities on housing for nurses; and if he will make a statement. [18887]

**Mr. Hutton:** The importance of affordable, appropriate accommodation for national health service health care workers in areas where property prices are high is an important factor in the recruitment and retention of staff and in particular nurses. In recognising difficulties experienced by staff, an NHS housing co-ordinator has been appointed and the NHS plan set a target to provide an additional 2,000 extra units of accommodation in London within three years. In addition suitable accommodation is being sourced outside of London in appropriate locations.

The NHS co-ordinator, together with NHS trusts, had dialogue with a range of local authorities throughout the country to ensure that NHS key worker needs are reflected in local plans for housing and opportunities maximised for affordable housing secured through section 106 planning obligations. The identification of bids and subsequent commencement of implementing the starter home initiative has been a further example of successful joint co-operation.

## Protection of Children Act

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many individuals have been vetted under the Protection of Children Act 1999; [19096]

(2) how many individuals from organisations which may vet but are not required to do so under the Protection of Children Act 1999 have been vetted. [19098]

**Jacqui Smith:** Over 972,000 individual checks have been made against the Protection of Children Act List since this part of the Act came into force in October 2000. Information is not collected in a way that allows the Department to identify the number of checks that are made where there is no requirement to do so.

## Abortion

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the start dates for those commissioning abortion services; and if he will monitor the process. [19451]

**Jacqui Smith:** From April 2002, primary care trusts will be able to commission abortion services, taking over the current role of health authorities. We will closely monitor any impact of this change, in particular the percentage of women accessing national health service funded abortions.

The sexual health and HIV strategy has set a target that from 2005, commissioners should ensure that women who meet the legal requirements have access to abortion within three weeks of the first appointment with the general practitioner or other referring doctor. An implementation plan for the strategy will be decided following the current consultation, which closes on 21 December. This will include monitoring of progress towards each of the new targets set by the strategy.

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources have been committed to the improvement of abortion services following the National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV. [19452]

**Jacqui Smith:** We have committed £47.5 million to support initiatives in the sexual health and HIV strategy over the first two years. The precise breakdown of this funding for the next financial year will be decided in light of responses to the consultation on the strategy, which closes on 21 December. Future spending on specific activities will be set by the 2002 spending review.

Most abortion services are currently—and will continue to be—funded from main national health service allocations. As part of the implementation plan for the strategy, we will need to work with health commissioners to ensure that there is sufficient investment to meet the level of need locally; and towards achieving the new target set by the strategy that, by 2005, women who meet the legal requirements should have access to abortion within three weeks of the first appointment with the general practitioner or other referring doctor.

## Public Inquiries

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the criteria which have to be met before a public inquiry is set up within the health service. [19456]

**Jacqui Smith:** There are no set criteria that have to be met. When considering whether an inquiry (in public or private) is appropriate, our main concern is to ensure that the full range of relevant issues is identified and subjected to proper and effective scrutiny. This would include consideration of the depth and nature of any earlier investigations, for example, an inquest or internal review. In making a decision we would also bear in mind the need for effectiveness, fairness, speed and economy.

## NHS Walk-in Centres

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the number of NHS walk-in centres in Lancashire. [19922]

**Jacqui Smith:** National health service walk-in centres are one of a range of new initiatives designed to improve access to primary care. Forty-one pilot centres are currently open. The Department has commissioned an independent evaluation of these national pilots. The final report is due shortly and this will inform the future development of NHS walk-in centres.

## Terrorism

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment of the psychological effects of terrorism on the general public he has commissioned; and if he will make a statement. [20264]

**Jacqui Smith:** No formal assessment of the psychological effects of terrorism on the general public has been commissioned. However, we are very well aware of the consequences, including a range of long-term effects for a proportion of those directly involved. Following the tragic events of 11 September, Government Departments worked together to ensure support would be available.

A dedicated helpline was set up; support for family liaison officers was provided; and the Department issued a leaflet to all general practitioners on the management of acute stress disorder and post traumatic stress disorder. We have embarked on a radical programme of modernisation to improve access to effective treatment and care, reduce unfair variation, raise standards, and provide quicker and more convenient services across the spectrum of mental health services. The National Service Framework for Mental Health, published in September 1999, sets out general standards for treatment and care. In addition, the Allen Report 1989 and 'Planning for Major Incidents: the NHS guidance' 1998 were issued to help those involved in the provision of support for people with post traumatic stress disorder to identify psycho-social support, and disseminate messages about good practice.

## General Practitioners

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve the retention of general practitioners in the national health service. [20658]

**Mr. Hutton:** We are improving retention in general practice by developing policies designed to improve working lives. Measures include increasing general practitioner numbers, improving the standard of GP premises, cutting bureaucracy, introducing an occupational health service for GPs and their staff and adopting a range of family friendly policies. We are working with the profession to identify further measures to boost GP numbers and make general practice a better place to work.

## Cleft Lip and Palate Services

**Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 November 2001, which single north-west regional centre for cleft lip and palate services the clinical implementation group recommended to Ministers in accordance with the Clinical Standards Advisory group standards. [20411]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Proposals were submitted by the two regional tertiary paediatric trusts in the north-west, which reflected a service model based on one single regional centre providing all primary surgery to children with cleft lip and palate. A cleft review panel considered these proposals and recommended that the Royal Liverpool Children's Trust should go forward as the preferred option in the consultation document.

However, Ministers sought reassurance as to whether the proposed single site options to be consulted upon would provide the best quality service. Further work is currently being undertaken which is exploring the possible merits of a twin-site centre and whether this could offer greater potential for maximising access to skills and attracting applications from a range of high quality technicians.

Positive discussions are now progressing between the two trusts in Liverpool and Manchester and it is anticipated that as a result of these joint discussions a number of options, together with a clear recommendation, will go to public consultation in January 2002.

### Xenotransplantation

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement of the possible use of GM animal tissue and organs for xenotransplantation. [20917]

**Jacqui Smith:** We are assisted in the consideration of issues about xenotransplantation by the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority (UKXIRA). The authority was established in 1997 and, in addition to advising the Government on the acceptability of specific applications to undertake xenotransplantation procedures, it also acts as a focal point for xenotransplantation issues. Organisations undertaking research into xenotransplantation in the UK are required to comply with all relevant legislation. No clinical trials involving humans have yet been approved in the UK. Our position remains that clinical trials in xenotransplantation involving humans will only be allowed to take place when we are fully satisfied that the risks associated with such procedures are acceptable taking account of all the available evidence at the time.

### Haemophilia

**Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether a safer recombinant treatment product will be made available to haemophilia sufferers in England and Northern Ireland. [21720]

**Mr. Hutton:** We are actively considering extending the provision of recombinant clotting factors to all haemophilia patients in England when supplies allow. Currently the policy is to provide recombinant (synthetic) clotting factors for new haemophilia patients and children under 16.

Questions relating to Northern Ireland are a matter for the devolved Administration.

### Trainee Nurses

**Mr. Denis Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* female and *(b)* male trainee nurses have been recruited into the NHS in the last 12 months. [21599]

**Mr. Hutton:** 20,021 nurses entered nurse and midwifery training in 2000–01. The breakdown by sex is not collected centrally.

The non-medical work force census records changes in the size and composition of the nursing work force employed in the national health service. In 1999, 31,070 male and 279,080 female nurses were employed in hospital and community health services (HCHS) (the breakdown by sex is not collected for practice nurses). In 2000 there were 32,380 male and 284,370 female HCHS nurses.

### Medical Robotics

**Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice is available to NHS trusts on the medical and cost benefits of using medical robotics; [22145]

(2) what assessment he has made of the cost benefits of expanding the use of medical robotics in the national health service; [22144]

(3) if he will make a statement on the use of medical robotics in the national health service. [22143]

**Jacqui Smith:** The application of robotics to diagnosis and clinical care in the national health service, as in other health care systems, is at an early stage. The safety, cost effectiveness and acceptability of robotics in medicine will need to be evaluated by the NHS Technology Assessment programme, the Medical Devices Agency and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, before large scale introduction.

### Betts Way Children's Residential Centre

**Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the NSPCC's report on Betts Way Children's Residential Centre, SE20; and what plans he has to review the law on evidence given by children with severe learning difficulties. [21762]

**Jacqui Smith:** The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children investigation into allegations of abuse at Betts Way Residential Centre was conducted with the full co-operation of Bromley Social Services Department, the Ravensbourne National Health Service Trust and local police. A copy of the NSPCC's summary report has been made available to departmental officials. In the context of the terms of reference established for this investigation the NSPCC concluded that no young person at the centre could be identified as having suffered significant harm or abuse. The report also found no evidence that there had been, or was, widespread poor practice or that there was a culture of institutionalised risk for services users at Betts Way.

However, the report did recommend a review of policy and practice. Bromley Social Services Department and the other relevant agencies are taking this forward together. The London borough of Bromley has also recently commissioned an independent review of the investigation process to identify what further lessons can be learned from the Betts Way case about conducting investigations of this nature with service users whose needs are complex. Officials from the Department have asked to be kept informed about progress.

Part II of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 sets out a range of special measures to assist vulnerable or intimidated witnesses to give evidence in court. These include the use of video-recorded statements, screens, live TV links, clearing the public gallery and an intermediary to put questions to a witness. The categories of persons eligible to apply for special measures under the first chapter of Part II of the Act are: children under the age of 17; those who suffer from a mental or physical disorder, or have a disability or impairment that is likely to affect their evidence; and those whose evidence is likely to be affected by their fear or distress at giving evidence in the proceedings. The special measures are part of a much larger programme to implement the "Speaking Up For Justice" report, which contains over 70 recommendations designed to encourage and support vulnerable or intimidated witnesses to give their best evidence in criminal proceedings.

The Act also changes the law on competency. It will allow someone who is unable to understand the implications of taking the oath to give unsworn evidence,

providing that they can understand questions asked of them in court, and can answer in a way that can be understood.

### Childhood Obesity

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to tackle obesity in children; and if he will make a statement. [22111]

**Jacqui Smith:** We are committed to tackling the current trend of rising obesity among children. The NHS plan makes a commitment to wide-ranging action to improve diet and nutrition, and local action to tackle obesity and physical inactivity, informed by advice from the Health Development Agency on what works.

The National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease requires that all national health service bodies will have agreed and be contributing to the delivery of local programmes of effective policies on overweight and obesity and will have quantified data on the programme by April 2002.

There are major programmes of work under way to tackle poor diet and physical inactivity. 80,000 children are now receiving a free piece of fruit every day as part of the national school fruit scheme. We recently announced that the scheme will benefit from an extra £42 million from the New Opportunities Fund and will be extended to cover the whole of the West Midlands region from the summer term 2002—extending its reach to over 250,000 children. In addition, £2 million is being invested in the food in schools programme which brings together under one umbrella all food-related initiatives in schools and after school clubs to improve health and learning.

We are also working across Government to ensure that children have opportunities to participate in a wide range of physical and sporting activities, including high quality physical education and walking and cycling to school. This is backed up by significant investment, including £581 million of New Opportunities Fund money for the physical education and sports programme, which is being used to improve school sports facilities.

Following the publication of the National Audit Office report "Tackling Obesity in England" which was published earlier this year, we are awaiting final recommendations from the Public Accounts Committee. Their conclusions will shape future work in this area.

### Learning Disabilities

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has given to the learning disability partnership boards regarding the need to establish intentional community provision in Hampshire under the provisions of the Valuing People Paper. [22275]

**Jacqui Smith:** On 31 August 2001, the Department issued statutory guidance on implementing the proposals set out in "Valuing People". This confirms that local councils must give people with learning disabilities a genuine opportunity to choose between a range of housing, care and support options that include village and intentional communities. Copies of the guidance (Health Service Circular 2001/016: Local Authority Circular (2001)23) are available in the Library.

The guidance also states that learning disability partnership boards should work with councils and other bodies to ensure that a local housing strategy for people with learning disabilities and related plans for commissioning care and support packages is developed by winter 2002–03.

### Wanless Report

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the identified spending for mental health referred to in the Wanless report will be allocated to *(a)* preventive interventions, *(b)* increased use of atypical antipsychotic drugs, *(c)* increased staffing and *(d)* spending on capital projects; and if he will make a statement. [22619]

**Jacqui Smith:** My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's pre-Budget statement has made clear the need to secure substantial additional resources to ensure a modern health service across all clinical areas. There is no doubt that increases in national health service expenditure over the next decade will see substantial increases in spending on mental health including preventive interventions, increased use of atypical antipsychotic drugs, increased staffing, and spending on capital projects. We are studying the Wanless report with great interest and it will be an important source of analysis and information in the allocation of resources to the service.

### Mental Health (Children)

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many school-age children suffer from mental health problems; and if he will make a statement. [22489]

**Jacqui Smith:** A survey of the mental health of children and adolescents in Great Britain was carried out in 1999 by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of the Department, the Scottish Health Executive and the National Assembly for Wales. The intention was to provide up-to-date baseline information on the prevalence of mental disorders among 5 to 15-year-olds. Prevalence rates were produced for the three main categories of mental disorder, for example conduct disorders, hyperactivity and emotional disorders.

Key findings on prevalence were:

about 10 per cent. of children aged 5–15 in Great Britain had a mental disorder in 1999;

5 per cent. had conduct disorders (eg aggressive and antisocial behaviour), 4 per cent. had emotional disorders (eg anxiety, depression) and 1 per cent. were hyperkinetic (inattention, overactivity);

mental disorders were significantly more common in boys than girls in both the 5–10 and the 11 to 15-year-old age groups.

### Diabetes

**Mr. Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the proposed funding for diabetes care outlined in the interim Wanless report is broken down; and if he will make a statement. [R] [22766]

**Jacqui Smith:** We published the standards for the Diabetes National Service Framework on 14 December, with the delivery strategy to follow in summer 2002. Funding decisions for the period 2003 to 2005 are the subject of the current spending review.

### Anti-TNF Therapy

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the availability of anti-TNF therapy within the NHS. [22739]

**Jacqui Smith:** The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently appraising the two main drugs involved in this therapy, etanercept (enbrel) and infliximab (remicade). Until NICE has completed its appraisal, national health service bodies have been advised to use existing arrangements to determine local prescribing policies, using the publicly available evidence to inform their decision.

### Health Pay Review

**Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reports and recommendations of the health pay review bodies. [24096]

**Mr. Milburn:** I am responding on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the reports of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (DDRB) and the Review Body on Nursing staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine (NPRB), which are published today. I understand that a similar announcement is being made by the Minister for Health and Community Care in Scotland, and the Minister for Health and Social Services in Wales. Copies of the reports are available in the Vote Office and the Library. I am grateful to the chairmen and members of both Review Bodies for their hard work.

The pay recommendations of the two Review Bodies are being accepted in full and without staging.

Nurses, midwives and health visitors are to get an across the board increase of 3.6 per cent. Some 45,000 of the lowest paid nursing support staff on grade A will benefit from a minimum cash uplift of £400 giving them pay rises of up to 4.3 per cent. Non registered staff on grades A and B will also have access to an additional incremental point if they achieve National Vocational Qualifications.

On call and standby payments increase by 50 per cent. while Psychiatric and Regional Secure Unit Allowances are increased by 32 per cent. Other cash based allowances are increased by 3.6 per cent.

London Allowances will be increased by 3.6 per cent. and the earnings related element will be consolidated into a new rate of £3,228 for all nursing staff working in inner London irrespective of their earnings.

This year additional action has been targeted to support clinical leadership in the national health service. Staff undertaking matron roles will have access to an increased maximum salary up to £32,760. The lowest three incremental points on the Nurse Consultant scales will be deleted giving a new minimum rate of £33,940. Nurse Consultants will potentially be able to earn up to £46,675.

On top of these increases the extension of the geographic coverage of Cost of Living Supplements from 1 April 2002 to a further six health authorities will result an estimated 20,000 more qualified NPRB staff benefiting from additional increases worth between £400 and £600.

The minimum starting pay of a newly qualified nurse will rise to £16,005, in Inner London starting pay for a new nurse will be £19,873, including London Weighting and the Cost of Living Supplement.

The NPRB has also recommended an across the board increase of 3.6 per cent. for physiotherapists, radiographers and other allied health professionals within its remit. The lowest increment of the basic grade will be deleted with the assimilation arrangements for all existing basic grade staff. Starting pay for newly qualified staff will increase by 7.5 per cent. on 1 April 2002 to £17,115 or £21,028 in London, inclusive of London Weighting and the Cost of Living Supplement. Cash based allowances are increased in line with awards made to nursing staff.

The Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body (DDRB) has recommended an overall pay increase of 3.6 per cent. for salaried doctors and dentists and general dental practitioners. In addition the DDRB has recommended adjustments to the pay scales, including increases in the scale maxima, for senior house officers, associate specialists, staff grade practitioners, and dental officers, and an extension in the dentists' commitment scheme worth around an extra £5 million per year.

For general medical practitioners it has recommended an increase in the amount to be delivered through the fee scale of 4.6 per cent, together with an increase in the out of hours supplement for GP registrars from 30 per cent. of basic salary to 50 per cent.

The pay rise recommended by the DDRB takes the starting consultant salary to £52,640 and that of a consultant on the maximum of the scale with maximum distinction award to £133,585. The number of distinction awards has also been increased by 186 which will support the Government's proposals to reform the existing schemes to give more opportunity to reward consultants for their commitment and contribution to the NHS.

These above inflation increases are fair and reflect the important contribution that these key staff are making to delivering the modernisation agenda outlined in the NHS Plan.

### Psycho-geriatricians

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psycho-geriatricians there were in England in each of the last five years; and how many will be in post by 2004. [23290]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*Hospital medical staff within the old age psychiatry specialty—England at 30 September*

*Number*

| | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All staff | 640 | 710 | 760 | 820 | 860 |
| *of which:* | | | | | |
| Consultants | 230 | 240 | 270 | 310 | 330 |

*Note:*
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
*Source:*
Department of Health medical and dental work force census.

The number of trained specialists in old age psychiatry is projected to increase by at least a third by 2004.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Tuesday 18 December 2001*

## DEFENCE

### Sierra Leone

**Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has concerning the deployment of British troops in Sierra Leone. [24369]

**Mr. Hoon:** Our military training and assistance programme continues to make good progress towards its goal of developing a professional, accountable and effective Sierra Leone army, able to protect the security and integrity of Sierra Leone on its own. I announced in September that, following the completion of the work of British short-term training teams, our military presence would reduce to 360 shore-based personnel by January 2002, remaining at that level until April. Since then, it has been announced that presidential and parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone are to be held on 14 May 2002. I have therefore decided to maintain our presence at the force levels announced in September over the period of the elections. The International Military Advisory and Training Team will continue the military training and assistance task with the Sierra Leone army.

### Tankers

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decision his Department has reached with regard to a replacement for the *(a)* Rover and *(b)* Leaf class tankers; when these replacements will be ordered; and how many are planned to be ordered. [23623]

**Dr. Moonie:** I refer the hon. Member to the answers given on 28 March 2000, *Official Report*, column 77W, to the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford (Mr. Duncan-Smith) and on 3 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 717W, to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies).

### Harrier

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is planned that the *(a)* Sea Harrier FA2 and *(b)* Harrier GR7 will be able to operate from the CVFs; and if he will make a statement. [23619]

**Dr. Moonie:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 8 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 380–81W to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle).

### Cruise Missiles

**Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many cruise missiles have been fired by Britain since 1983 *(a)* in conflicts and *(b)* for testing purposes; [21552]

(2) if he will list the conflicts in which the UK has used cruise missiles since 1983. [21553]

**Mr. Hoon** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* UK submarines launched a number of Tomahawk land attack missiles during the Kosovo campaign and also during current operations in Afghanistan.

I am withholding the precise number of cruise missiles fired in conflicts and for testing purposes in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information which relates to Defence, Security and International Relations.

### Trident

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the annual running costs of the Trident submarines; and if he will make a statement. [18810]

**Mr. Hoon** *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the Strategic Defence Review Supporting Essay 5 dated July 1998, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

### Joint Strike Fighters

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Joint Strike Fighters the United Kingdom is planning to buy; what the projected cost and final delivery date is; and if he will make a statement. [23226]

**Mr. Hoon:** Our current planning assumption is that 150 Joint Strike Fighters will be purchased to meet our requirement for a Future Joint Combat Aircraft. Final numbers will depend on the choice of variant and on the outcome of work to confirm future UK fast jet requirements. The estimated procurement cost would be up to £10 billion, dependent on numbers of aircraft required, variant selected and how it is to be supported through life. Under current planning assumptions, the last of the 150 aircraft would be delivered by the end of 2024.

### Eurofighter

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much British involvement in the design, development and production of the Eurofighter has cost; what plans his Department has to purchase Eurofighters; and if he will make a statement. [23224]

**Mr. Hoon:** The United Kingdom Ministry of Defence investment in the design, development and production of the Eurofighter programme, to 31 March 2001, totals £5,444 million. The order for the first tranche of aircraft, placed in 1998, includes 55 for the United Kingdom. Orders for the remaining aircraft are expected to be placed during 2003 and 2007. These orders will include 89 and 88 aircraft, respectively, for the United Kingdom, bringing our total purchase to 232 aircraft.

### Porton Down

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the report produced by the chemical defence establishment,

Porton Down in 1973, entitled "Wind Speed and Miosis from Nerve Agents"; [22930]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the report produced by the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down, in 1971 entitled "Estimation of the concentrations of nerve agent vapour required to produce measured degrees of miosis in rabbit and human eyes". [22933]

**Dr. Moonie:** No. This document is classified Confidential. It contains an assessment of the effectiveness of nerve agent in field situations and the release of this report would assist potential proliferators. I am therefore withholding this information in the interest of national security under category 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates the Health and Safety Executive has conducted formal inspections of the chemical and biological defence establishment, Porton Down, since 31 May 2000. [22934]

**Dr. Moonie:** Since May 2000 there have been five occasions when representatives of the Health and Safety Executive have visited Dstl (formerly DERA) Porton Down. These are as follows:

| *Date* | *Area visited* | *Issues* |
|---|---|---|
| May 2000 | Explosives handling area | Formal inspection of explosive handling activities |
| August 2000 | Safety cell | Introduce new HSE Inspector |
| October 2000 | Biomedical sciences | Routine preventative visit |
| November 2000 | Biomedical sciences | Routine preventative visit |
| November 2001 | Biomedical sciences | Routine visit to discuss high containment facilities |

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer 9 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 364W, on Porton Down, if former service volunteers invited to visit Porton Down to view the original record books and discuss their experiences with current members of Porton Down staff are refunded for their travel expenses by his Department. [22875]

**Dr. Moonie:** It is not Ministry of Defence policy to do so. However, some travel expenses were refunded when the Porton Down helpline was established in February 1998. Since November 2000, MOD policy has been to not refund volunteers' travel expenses on the ground that visiting Porton Down to view original records is a matter for the individual concerned and adds no further information to that previously communicated in writing.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 824W, on Porton Down, if he will place in the Library copies of the *(a)* minutes, *(b)* agendas and *(c)* papers of the meetings between his Department's staff and the Medical Research Council on 2 and 3 August to discuss the epidemiological study into volunteers who took part in experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down. [22873]

**Dr. Moonie:** These meetings were not of a kind to require formal documentation of this type. The only formal document relating to either of these meetings is a note of the meeting of 3 August which was included in the pack of papers distributed in advance of the Medical Research council seminar on 9 October to those who had shown an interest in putting forward proposals for research into the health of Porton Down volunteers. I will place a copy of my note in the Library of the House.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel who took part in experiments at the chemical defence establishment at Porton Down have been given copies of technical reports relating to their own experiments since the establishment of the Porton Down helpline in February 1998. [22931]

**Dr. Moonie:** There is no definitive list of the number of the volunteers who have received copies of technical reports. Volunteers who visit Porton Down are given copies of records that refer to them personally and copies of other documentation, including technical reports, where they add relevant information to that already located in the volunteer record books. This is decided on a case-by-case basis. In addition, copies of reports are included with the letter sent to the volunteer, detailing their attendance, where deemed appropriate.

### Third Airport (Paris)

**Mr. Dodds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made to the French authorities about the proposed building of a third airport for Paris on the Somme battlefields. [23598]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ministry of Defence has made no representations to the French Government about any proposals for a third airport for Paris.

### Warships

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost to the taxpayer in respect of the construction, including the amount paid to the shipyard and the cost of weapons and sensor systems, incurred by his Department of *(a)* HMS Argyle, *(b)* HMS Marlborough and *(c)* HMS Lancaster. [23621]

**Dr. Moonie:** The information is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Military Bases

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* Airforce bases (i) whose closure has been announced since 1997 and (ii) where significant amounts of land or buildings have been sold since 1997. [24019]

**Dr. Moonie:** I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has with other Government Departments when considering the *(a)* closure, *(b)* partial sale and *(c)* move of a military base. [24018]

**Dr. Moonie:** While there are normally no formal discussions, as part of the decision making process for the closure, partial sale or move of a military base officials consider, where appropriate, the views of other Government Departments. However, as such decisions are primarily determined by operational requirements, the final decision rests with the Ministry of Defence.

Officials are fully aware of the impact of such changes on local communities and it is the MOD's policy to initiate an early and close dialogue with the local authorities and the regional government offices concerned. While it is for local authorities to deal with local concerns, officials seek to take local aspirations into account as far as possible in identifying alternative uses.

### Sea Wolf

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Sea Wolf systems are to be upgraded as part of the Sea Wolf MLU programme. [23617]

**Dr. Moonie:** We currently plan to upgrade up to 46 systems.

### Royal Ordnance Factories

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role the Royal Ordnance factory in Chorley will play in defence contracts; and if he will make a statement. [23552]

**Dr. Moonie:** Royal Ordnance Chorley passed from Government ownership in 1988 and now forms part of Royal Ordnance Defence (ROD), itself a division of BAE Systems. The Chorley site presently provides ROD with munitions sub-component manufacture, assembly and testing facilities. Although the future use and utilisation of any ROD site is a matter for the company, I can confirm that ROD is currently reviewing its overall manufacturing strategy and I understand that the company has recently made an announcement to this effect to its employees.

### Shegaird Radar Tests

**Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the Shegaird radar tests affected low flying in west Somerset; and how many low flying aircraft were caught. [23550]

**Dr. Moonie:** The RAF police use a Skyguard radar system to undertake covert monitoring of military low flying aircraft and to record their heights and speeds. The results of this monitoring show that military aircrew operate in a professional manner. Data from the Skyguard deployment to the Minehead area between 3–7 December are still being evaluated. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Somalia

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what deployment of British military personnel there is in Somalia; and if he will make a statement. [23640]

**Mr. Hoon:** There are no British personnel deployed in Somalia.

### Exercise Saif Sareea II

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the operational welfare package for servicemen and women not based at camps South and Sha'ata during Exercise Saif Sareea II. [21743]

**Mr. Ingram:** We have completed a First Impressions Report into the conduct of Exercise Saif Sareea II, which noted that there were some difficulties in delivering the Operational Welfare Package (OWP) to isolated detachments and to some units during the manoeuvre phases of the exercise. The report concludes that we should examine the requirement for a more mobile operational welfare capability but that, because there will always be limitations imposed by the essential nature of operations and exercises we should aim to deliver an OWP that can be provided within these constraints.

Work to address these issues is under way and the conclusions will be incorporated into an evaluation and review of the OWP, which starts in February 2002.

### MOD Police

**Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Quinquennial Review of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency. [24370]

**Dr. Moonie:** I announced terms of reference for Stage 1 of this review on 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 307–08W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Regents Park and Kensington North (Ms Buck). The conduct and outcome of the review have not been connected with proposals relating to the MDP's jurisdiction in the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill.

In line with central guidance on Quinquennial Reviews (QQRs), the central question for the review to date has been how far the Ministry of Defence continues to require the services of an in-house civil police force. The clear conclusion from Stage 1 of the review is that the MOD has a strong need for the MDP's services. Following careful analysis of the spectrum of crime risks facing the MOD, it is clear that the MDP provides by far the most cost-effective means of dealing with the most serious threats, of armed attack, public disorder, major theft and financial fraud. The study has clarified that the core role of the MDP is to apply civil police training and constabulary powers to combat these risks.

The MDP will, however, continue to provide other policing services both within MOD, and as now to external customers on repayment terms. They will also continue for the foreseeable future to provide a source of trained police manpower to deploy overseas, where required, in support of foreign policy objectives, as currently in Kosovo.

Although the new articulation of the MDP's core role focuses on specific categories of crime, this does not in any sense preclude the involvement of its officers in dealing with other types of offences on the Defence Estate, where it makes sense for them to do so.

We have also concluded that the MDP should remain an Agency within the MOD, in view of the benefits of improved management and increased visibility and accountability which this has already delivered. Important work continues in Stage 2 of the QQR, including an

examination of the role of the MDP in providing policing support to MOD married quarters, the number and day-to-day employment of officers held in reserve to deal with unforeseen contingencies, and the operation of the Ministry of Defence Police Committee.

The QQR has underlined very clearly the vital importance of the MDP in helping to counter the risks to MOD of public disorder and armed attack. Sadly, the need for both these outputs has been highlighted recently by increased protest activity at certain Defence sites, and of course by the events of 11 September. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the officers of the force, and civilians who support them, for the crucial work they are doing during these challenging and dangerous times.

I am placing a copy of the Stage 1 report in the Library of the House.

### Medical Downgrading

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what he attributes the increase in servicemen medically downgraded between August 2000 and November 2001; and if he will make a statement. [21739]

**Dr. Moonie:** I assume that the figures to which the hon. Member refers are those given in my recent reply to him on 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 369–70, and in a letter in response to a question from the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) in September 2000, *Official Report*, column 749W, dated 27 July 2000. The key figures are as follows:

| | *RN/RM* | *Army* | *RAF* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 August 2000 | 2,510 | 9,144 | 3,796 |
| 1 August 2001 | — | 9,718 | 3,871 |
| 20 November 2001 | 3,678 | — | — |

Further work has now revealed that the November 2001 figure inadvertently included a group of some 850–900 personnel who do not fall within the 'medically downgraded' definition.

Regrettably it is not possible, from data currently held centrally, to provide an analysis of the causes of the increases. Improving data and analysis in this area is a high priority, on which action is already in hand.

### Far East Prisoners of War

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) pursuant to his answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 861W, on prisoners of war in the Far East, if he will state the assumptions on which budgetary provision was made for his ex-gratia payment scheme for former British civilian internees of the Japanese; [23768]

(2) if he will place in the Library the *(a)* working assumptions and *(b)* calculations that his Department made regarding the number of potential claimants in respect of the ex-gratia scheme for former civilian internees of the Japanese. [23769]

**Dr. Moonie:** When the scheme was announced on 7 November 2000, *Official Report*, columns 159–70W, I advised the House that it was estimated that up to 16,700 people might be eligible for the ex-gratia payment for former Far East prisoners. This figure was the best estimate available and was based on an assessment of the numbers of those who had been held captive in each of the groups covered by the scheme and of the likely number of surviving members of those groups or surviving spouses where the former prisoner had subsequently died. The data were gathered from official records and from the associations representing former Far East prisoners. The estimate made for the number of surviving civilian internees and surviving spouses of deceased internees was 3,700 based on data provided by the Association of British Civilian Internees—Far East Region.

I am withholding the further detail requested under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

### Aldermaston

**Mr. Salter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will establish an inquiry into the suspension of private contractors working at the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston, following a police investigation and drug-testing among those working on the decommissioning of nuclear warheads. [23394]

**Dr. Moonie:** Safety at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), Aldermaston is paramount, and we are confident that it has not been compromised by the incident to which my hon. Friend refers. The decommissioning activities in this case related not to nuclear weapons, but to a redundant building. None the less, work was halted pending the outcome of a Ministry of Defence police investigation into allegations relating to drugs. This is now complete. No drugs were found during searches and no evidence emerged to support either further investigation or legal proceedings. AWE plc expect to resume the decommissioning shortly.

## SCOTLAND

### Departmental Staff

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many employees of *(a)* her Department and *(b)* agencies sponsored by her Department work in (i) London, (ii) areas benefiting from EU Objective 1 status, (iii) areas with Objective 2 status and (iv) other areas. [16115]

**Mrs. Liddell** *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* My Department employs 30 staff in London, 32 staff in an EU Objective 2 status area and 52 in other areas. No staff work in an EU Objective 1 area.

### Public Bodies

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if she will list those public bodies which are the responsibility of her Department and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000; [17604]

(2) if she will list those public bodies to which her Department appoints members and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000. [17603]

**Mrs. Liddell:** Public Bodies 2000 sets out information on non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), certain public corporations (including nationalised industries) and NHS

bodies. There are four types of NDPB: executive NDPBs; advisory NDPBs; tribunal NDPBs; and boards of visitors to penal establishments. The next edition will be published around the end of the year. Information about task forces, annual reports and ad hoc advisory groups is set out in an annual report, published by the Cabinet Office. Copies of Public Bodies 2000 are in the Library of the House and this publication may be accessed via Cabinet Office's website (http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/caboff/pb00/pb00.htm). Copies of the annual report on task forces and similar bodies have also been placed in the Library of the House and the annual report is being made available on Cabinet Office's website.

The only public body for which my Department has responsibility is the Boundary Commission for Scotland, details of which are in Public Bodies 2000.

### Abortion

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to propose legislation to permit the Scottish Parliament to amend the abortion law in Scotland. [22879]

**Mr. Foulkes:** None.

### Scottish Parliament

**Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her answer of 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 91, to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), when she plans to launch her consultation exercise on the size of the Scottish Parliament. [24542]

**Mrs. Liddell:** I have today issued the document "The size of the Scottish Parliament—a consultation". Copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and are being sent to all MPs representing Scottish constituencies and Members of the Scottish Parliament. Views are sought on the case for retaining or ending the linking of Westminster and Holyrood constituency boundaries as provided in the Scotland Act 1998, in the light of the experience now gained of the Scottish Parliament. I am inviting responses by 29 March 2002.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Child Support Agency

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what his estimate is of the money owed to parents by absentee parents in the City of Durham; [13606]

(2) what his estimate is of how many CSA assessments will be being processed at the end of this financial year; [13607]

(3) how many cases in the Durham area have been dealt with by the CSA since it was established. [13609]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 12 December 2001:*

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency, promised a substantive reply by me.

You asked three questions; our estimate of the money owed to parents with care by non resident parents in the City of Durham, our estimate of how many CSA assessments will be processed at the end of this financial year and how many cases in the Durham area have been dealt with by the CSA since it was established.

I am sorry but we don't collect information in a way that will permit me to make a sensible estimate of the amount of maintenance that is owed to parents with care by non-resident parents in the Durham area. I can, however, provide answers to your other questions.

I estimate that around 16,500 cases in the Durham area have been dealt with by the CSA since November 1995. This is drawn from a sampling exercise which only started in November 1995 so my figures cannot precede that date.

During the current financial year the Agency is expecting to process 380,000 assessments arising from new maintenance applications and 715,111 assessments arising from changes to existing maintenance arrangements.

I hope this is helpful.

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out an action plan to address the concerns expressed by the Comptroller and Auditor General in qualifying the 2000–01 accounts of the Child Support Agency. [15244]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Mark Todd, dated 12 December 2001:*

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency, promised a substantive reply by me.

I take the concerns that the Comptroller and Auditor General have expressed very seriously and have created an action plan which has two key components:

An enhanced focus on corporate governance to ensure that basic checks are carried out, that risk management processes are fully embedded and that lessons learned from audit reports are implemented.

The implementation of the Child Support Reforms, which should obviate many mistakes which have led to the qualifications having previously been made.

I hope this is helpful.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01 of compensation payments for maladministration by the CSA. [18994]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. John Bercow, dated 17 December 2001:*

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You asked for a statement on the cost in (a) 1999–2000 and (b) 2000–2001 of compensation payments for maladministration by the CSA.

The amount of compensation paid by the Agency for maladministration was:

£3,075,000 for the financial year 1999–2000

£3,053,000 for the financial year 2000–2001

Deferred debt is also classed as a compensatory payment because we compensate the parent with care for the amount of deferred debt that we do not collect from the non-resident parent. The amounts that were paid were:

£2,024,000 for the financial year 1999–2000

£3,693,000 for the financial year 2000–2001

Advance payments are another form of compensation. They are lump sum payments of arrears paid to a parent with care when the Agency has delayed actioning a case. The arrears are however recovered from the non-resident parent over a period of time. The following amounts have been paid:

£862,000 for the financial year 1999–2000

£1,153,000 for the financial year 2000–2001

In 1999/2000, 2.58% of the total Agency budget was paid in compensation for maladministration and in 2000/2001 3.46% was paid. In both years the amount of compensation for maladministration paid was lower than the amount allocated towards these payments.

I hope this is helpful

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the performance target was for the CSA to reduce its outstanding work by 31 March; and if it was achieved. [19125]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. John Bercow, dated 12 December 2001:*

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You asked what the performance target was for the CSA to reduce its outstanding work by 31st March; and if it was achieved.

The Performance targets were published in the Annual Report and Accounts 2000/2001 and are set out in the attached annex. During the year, these targets were set aside in order to prioritise those elements of work which best supported successful implementation of the Child Support Reforms.

I hope this is helpful.

*Targets for reduction of outstanding work for year 2000–01*

*Weeks*

| *Outstanding work* | *Target* | *Performance* |
|---|---|---|
| Pre-maintenance assessment | 18 | 30.5 |
| Revisions, supersessions and case checks | 6.2 | 10.8 |
| Account advice | 4 | 5 |
| Interim maintenance assessment | 49 | 276.0 |
| Account maintenance | 1.4 | 1.5 |
| Debt management | 12 | 20.1 |
| Enforcement | 30 | 46.7 |

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the CSA met its performance target in 2000–01 for the accuracy of the cash value of all assessments. [19124]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. John Bercow, dated 12 December 2001:*

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You asked if the CSA met its performance target in 2000–01 for the accuracy of the cash value of all assessments.

Our target measures the accuracy of our assessments to the nearest penny and requires us to revisit the whole of the current assessment including those elements which may have been in place for some considerable time. The measure therefore reflects historical mistakes rather than current performance. On that measure we achieved 67.4 per cent. accuracy against a target of 78 per cent. However if we look solely at the most recent action accuracy was 78.5 per cent.

In the current year we have continued to improve that latter figure and in October we achieved 82.4 per cent. accuracy.

I hope this is helpful.

## Ring-fenced Funds

**Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what funds allocated by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its executive agencies are ring-fenced for specific purposes; and if he will list the allocations of funds involved. [22953]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** In the 2000 Spending Review, and in subsequent discussions with HM Treasury, it was agreed that the following expenditure areas should be ring-fenced in respect of the current financial year:

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| Welfare Modernisation Fund | 404 |
| Employment Opportunities Fund | 1,055 |
| European Social Fund | 608 |
| European Regional Development Fund | 27 |
| Invest to Save | 24 |

With the formation of the Department for Work and Pensions the Chief Secretary to the Treasury decided to review the EOF arrangements, mainly on the grounds that as the overwhelming majority of the fund fell within DWP it presented the perfect opportunity to simplify arrangements. The EOF has now been transferred into the Department's DEL and the unallocated element transferred into a new Employment Development Fund, within the DWP's DEL.

## Independent Living Fund

**Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the report of the Quinquennial Review of the Independent Living Fund will be published. [24544]

**Maria Eagle:** My right hon. Friend has received the report of the Quinquennial Review of the Independent Living Fund and I am pleased to announce that we are accepting all the recommendations made. In addition to the removal of the earnings rule and the increased capital limit announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 28 November, the report contains a number of other recommendations which we believe represent a significant improvement in ILF provision for severely disabled people. Along with the revised earnings and capital rules, the other recommended changes will be introduced in April 2002. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Criminal Justice Review

**Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Government intend to publish a Bill to implement the recommendations of the report of the Criminal Justice Review of Northern Ireland, published in March 2000; and if he will make a statement. [22459]

**Mr. Browne:** A Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill to implement most of the recommendations of the Criminal Justice Review Group in its report, "Review of the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland", is receiving its First Reading today and will be published tomorrow.

### Paramilitary Attacks (Hospital Treatment)

**Mrs. Iris Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the number of patients treated at hospitals in Northern Ireland as a result of paramilitary attacks, broken down by type of injuries and *(b)* the number and type of operations carried out on patients whose injuries have been received as a result of paramilitary attacks in each of the past five years, indicating the cost of treating such patients. [24101]

**Dr. John Reid:** Responsibility for this matter has been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and is therefore no longer a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

## WALES

### Child Poverty

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the level of child poverty in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the United Kingdom. [23982]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** Child poverty and social exclusion are complex and multi-dimensional concepts, affecting many aspects of children's lives—including their living standards, health, housing, the quality of the environment, and opportunities to learn. The Government are committed to ending child poverty within 20 years. The Government's strategy for tackling child poverty and social exclusion is set out in the annual "Opportunity for all" reports. The third "Opportunity for all" report (Cm 5260) presents the latest information on the indicators used to monitor progress against this strategy.

The National Assembly is seeking to complement UK measures with a range of policies and programmes designed to meet the specific circumstances and priorities of Wales.

### Health Consultation Document

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish an analysis of the responses to the consultation document, "Improving Health in Wales—Structural Change in the NHS in Wales". [22962]

**Mr. Touhig:** No. That is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. I understand that the assembly has prepared a summary of responses and deposited a copy in the Library of the House.

### Government of Wales Act

**Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales in respect of section 1 Part 1(1) of the Government of Wales Act 1998. [22826]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** None.

### Public Bodies

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list those public bodies which are the responsibility of his Department and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000; [17616]

(2) if he will list those public bodies to which his Department appoints members and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000. [17615]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** "Public Bodies 2000" sets out information on non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), certain public corporations (including nationalised industries) and NHS bodies. There are four types of NDPB—executive NDPBs, advisory NDPBs, tribunal NDPBs, and boards of visitors to penal establishments. The next edition will be published around the end of the year. Information about task forces, annual reports and ad hoc advisory groups is set out in an annual report, published by Cabinet Office. Copies of "Public Bodies 2000" are in the Library of the House. It can also be accessed via the Cabinet Office website (http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/caboff/pb00/pb00.htm). Copies of the annual report on task forces and similar bodies have also been placed in the Library of the House and it is being made available on the Cabinet Office website.

I make appointments to the following public bodies which are not listed in "Public Bodies 2000":

Reference Committee Panels (Wales)
Council of St. David's University College, Lampeter
Court of Cranfield University
Court of University of Wales, Bangor
Court of University of Wales, Swansea.

My Department does not have sponsorship responsibility for any public bodies.

**Mr. Collins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many appointments he has made to public bodies since 7 June; and how many are in his gift. [15488]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** Information about numbers of ministerial appointments to public bodies is included in the Cabinet Office's annual report, "Public Bodies". Copies are placed in the Library of the House and the report is published on the Cabinet Office website. The next edition, which will include numbers of appointments at 31 March 2001, will be published around the end of the year.

While there is no central record of appointments falling to me, the total is thought to be around 20. I have made no such appointments since 7 June.

### Objective 1 Funding

**Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of whether the distribution of grants is proceeding at a sufficient rate to ensure that

all objective 1 money allocated to west Wales and Valleys will stay in Wales and will not have to be returned to the EU structural fund under the conditions of the mid-term target review in 2003. [22173]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** I meet the Assembly Finance Ministers regularly and discuss progress on the objective 1 programme. I am told there is no question of money having to be returned to the European Commission. The Assembly expects to exceed the target of drawing down £176 million from the Commission by the first decommitment date of 31 December 2002.

In addition, the Assembly has recently put in place new monitoring procedures to ensure that projects' sponsors claim their grant as quickly as possible after receiving approval. This will speed up the rate of programme spend.

**Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary on which projects in the Cynon Valley have been funded by west Wales and Valleys objective 1 funding since October 2000. [22174]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary on the amount of EU objective 1 budget for west Wales and the Valleys that has been *(a)* committed and *(b)* spent on projects in the Cynon Valley since October 2000. [22175]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** The administration of structural fund programmes in Wales and individual project approvals under those programmes are matters for the National Assembly for Wales and its executive agency, the Welsh European Funding Office.

**Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary as to whether sufficient match funding can be allocated to enable the full use of objective 1 funding to west Wales and the Valleys over the project period 2000 to 2006. [22176]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** It is a condition of structural fund programmes that grant recipients meet a proportion of their project costs, in addition to the grant provided by the European Commission. This "match funding" does not all come from the Assembly budget but can be found from a wide range of different sources, for example, local authorities, voluntary organisations, lottery funding, colleges and training organisations and other public and private sector bodies.

Nevertheless, the Government have allocated an additional £1.4 billion to the Assembly budget over the three year spending review period from 2001–04 to ensure that the Assembly has sufficient funds to provide match funding for the portion of objective 1 projects which require Assembly support. It is for the Assembly to decide how this additional funding is allocated among its programmes, but the First Minister has assured me on numerous occasions that no other Assembly budget has suffered to provide match funding for the objective 1 programme. The Assembly's budget for 2002–03 makes specific provision for match funding across a number of policy areas.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Burma

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to support non-Burman ethnic groups in Burma. [22447]

**Clare Short:** British and European Community (EC) assistance in Burma is provided for a wide variety of humanitarian needs including the needs of refugees. DFID also provides funding for HIV/AIDS interventions. We are currently increasing our funding through selected INGOs and UN agencies to assist the most needy in Burma.

The total UK humanitarian assistance provided to Burma in 2000–01 was £0.8 million. We have committed up to £2 million for humanitarian purposes for 2001–02. This includes funding for the needs of refugees/returnees and the war-affected, including ethnic minorities in the Thailand border areas. Last year we spent £0.2 million on HIV/AIDS; our commitment for this financial year is £1.6 million.

Assistance provided to Burma through ECHO for the calendar year 2000 was euro 2 million or approximately £1.3 million (the same amount has been allocated for 2001). Assistance is delivered through European NGOs and focuses on health including HIV/AIDS, water and sanitation. Some assistance is provided to Burmese refugees in Thailand and for the protection of detainees in prison. The UK EC attribution for 2001 is 19 per cent.

### Afghanistan

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the number of Afghan children in danger of dying this winter; and what steps she has taken to provide assistance. [23043]

**Clare Short:** Afghanistan has one of the worst infant mortality rates in the world with one in four children dying before the age of five. Every effort is being made to minimise the suffering of all vulnerable Afghans, including children. Humanitarian agencies, particularly the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF, continue to make good progress in transporting essential relief supplies to Afghanistan. However, some areas of Afghanistan are proving difficult to access because of continuing insecurity.

My Department has so far allocated £7 million to UNICEF and other aid agencies to support their activities in the region, which are specifically focused on children.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the security situation in Afghanistan and its effect on the delivery of humanitarian aid. [22686]

**Clare Short:** United Nations agencies, particularly the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF, the Red Cross movement and NGOs continue to make good progress in transporting essential relief supplies into Afghanistan. Over the past month, WFP has delivered over 68,000 tonnes of food, exceeding its monthly target. International staff of humanitarian agencies have now returned to some areas of the country and are working with national staff to reach those in need of assistance. However, progress is heavily dependent on improved security. Some areas of Afghanistan are still proving difficult to access because of continuing insecurity.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the *(a)* protection and *(b)* assistance her Department is providing for Afghan refugees. [22688]

**Clare Short:** My Department is in regular contact with UNHCR at both field and headquarters level to try to ensure that resources are used effectively for the provision of assistance to Afghan refugees and the protection of their rights. We continue to do all we can to ensure that Afghan refugees are properly cared for and give neighbouring countries the necessary support to cope with the burden of refugees, for whom they have provided over a long period.

We have committed £3 million to UNHCR's operations for refugees in response to the current crisis. This has included technical personnel, material and financial support. At the request of UNHCR, my Department has provided three relief flights to Iran and Pakistan transporting tents, shelter material and communications equipment. We have also provided a specialist site planner to UNHCR in Pakistan to assist with the setting up of new refugee campsites. In addition we are supporting a number of NGOs assisting refugees, including Christian Aid, Islamic Relief, Oxfam, and Save the Children.

We have also provided £11 million to support communities in Pakistan most affected by influxes of refugees.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the outcome of the Reconstruction Afghanistan Conference in Islamabad; and if she will make a statement on the future of Afghanistan. [22687]

**Clare Short:** The recent 'Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction' was attended by over 350 people including a large number of Afghans, as well as officials from my Department.

The conference highlighted the need for security and stability to underpin reconstruction. We are fully committed to supporting Ambassador Brahimi and the United Nations system in their central role to help the people of Afghanistan and the new Interim Authority. A copy of our updated "Emergency Plan to Initiate Recovery" has been placed in the House Library. Further details of the conference can be found at www.reliefweb.int.

## Staff Numbers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people were employed in her Department in each of the last four years. [23798]

**Clare Short:** The numbers of staff employed by DFID in each of the last four years were as follows:

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 1,007 |
| 1998–99 | 1,095 |
| 1999–2000 | 1,280 |
| 2000–01 | 1,313 |

These figures do not include staff employed on contract terms in the UK and overseas.

## Child Soldiers

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which countries that allow child soldiers to be used in conflict within their countries receive financial assistance from the UK for aid projects. [22971]

**Clare Short:** It is difficult to say which countries "allow" the use of soldiers. Where non-state actors use children in armed conflict, this is usually in opposition to the Government of that country. Other countries may state that they do not use children, yet there are reports of children being used.

The UK provides development assistance to countries that are committed to poverty reduction and who will use our assistance effectively. The protection of children caught up in armed conflict is an important aspect of our development assistance programmes, which can include, among other things, working with Governments to improve their human rights record. DFID is contributing, over a three-year period, £3 million to UNICEF to build its capacity to implement programmes which will prevent children becoming involved in, or otherwise being affected by, conflict, and £3 million to the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Children to support his work in reducing the impact of conflict on children, including the involvement of children in armed conflict. The work of these two institutions spans a wide range of countries in Africa, Asia and Europe.

We also encourage the ratification of important international instruments such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child covering the involvement of children in armed conflict.

## Street Children

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the countries with which her Department works on the issue of street children. [22974]

**Clare Short:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 4 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 214W.

## Children (Welfare and Protection)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions her Department has had with the Council of Europe to develop joint policies for the welfare and protection of children. [22973]

**Clare Short:** My Department has not had any recent discussions with the Council of Europe on child protection.

## Sri Lanka

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial assistance has been given by her Department to Sri Lanka in each of the last two years; for what projects; and where in Sri Lanka they were. [22975]

**Clare Short:** Full details of DFID's programme are contained in the table.

*DFID expenditure in Sri Lanka 1999–2000 and 2000–01*

Total Bilateral Aid:

1999–2000: £7,827 million

2000–01: £7,282 million

DFID has financed projects targeting primary education, improving the livelihoods of those people affected by the conflict, mother and child health, promoting social cohesion and reconciliation, poverty reduction, capacity building of community based organisations, child soldiers, micro enterprise, mental illness and promoting human rights. Activities of these projects have been undertaken in Vavuniya, Puttalum, Horowpahana, Mannar, Colombo, Mahaweli, Jaffna, Kurunegala, Gampaha, Kilinochi, Mullaitivu, Trincomalee, Pudukudyirrapu, Meerakerny, Okewala, Villachiciya and country wide.

| *Projects/description* | *Start date* | *End date* | *Region* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Primary Education Planning Project*<br>To strengthen capacity of the national and provincial authorities to plan, manage, monitor and evaluate primary education programmes within an agreed policy framework | October 1996 | March 2001 | Country wide |
| *Primary English Language Project*<br>To improve the quality of teaching of basic English Language skills in Sri Lankan primary schools | April 1996 | August 2002 | Country wide |
| *Primary Mathematics Project*<br>To improve the quality of teaching and learning of mathematics in primary schools in Sri Lanka | March 1998 | March 2003 | Country wide |
| *Education Co-ordination Project*<br>To ensure that DFID funding TC projects in the education sector in Sri Lanka are well co-ordinated with those funded by the World bank and other donors | March 1997 | August 2003 | Country wide |
| *Relief and Reconciliation Programme—SCF/Oxfam*<br>To help meet the basic survival and emerging rehabilitation needs of communities affected by the civil conflict | April 1997 | March 2001 | Refugee camps |
| *Oxfam Support to Country Programme*<br>To build on Oxfam's emerging competencies in conflict analysis and grass roots work to facilitate the practical application of tools for transforming community dynamics. To enable people affected by poverty and conflict are better able to cope with, challenge and overcome the barriers sustaining their condition | April 2001 | March 2002 | Country wide |
| *SCF Support to Country Programme*<br>To ensure that the voices of marginalised and vulnerable children are heard and acted upon, in policy and practise, for the best interest of these children, in education, social protection, inclusion and emergencies | April 2001 | March 2002 | Country wide |
| *Mother and Child Reproductive Health Project for Displaced Persons*<br>Provision of three static clinics which also provide mobile health services to the displaced population | October 1995 | December 2003 | Vavuniya, Puttalum, Horowpathana |
| *Mother and Child Reproductive Health Care in Mannar*<br>Increase access to and utilisation of reproductive health services (in co-ordination with Government services among the displaced population and host community in Mannar) | September 1998 | June 2003 | Mannar |
| *Strengthening Prospects for Peace in Sri Lanka*<br>To enhance the prospects for a sustainable negotiated settlement by strengthening the capacity of senior cross party parliamentarians and other significant actors to contribute to the peace process | August 2000 | August 2003 | Colombo |
| *International Humanitarian Law—A Peace Building Measure in Sri Lanka*<br>To establish and support a respected group from within the international Buddhist community who will engage with senior Buddhist Clergy in Sri Lanka in International Humanitarian Law, trust-building, de-escalation and wider peace processes | November 2000 | October 2001 | Colombo |

| Projects/description | Start date | End date | Region |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Environmental Management and Sustained Development in the Upper Mahaweli Catchment Area* | | | |
| To improve the operational capacity of the EFCD so that it more effectively serves the needs of its customers who are the major users of the land in the Upper Mahaweli Catchment Area | December 1995 | September 2001 | Mahaweli |
| *Urban Poverty Reduction in Colombo Municipality* | | | |
| To reduce poverty in the city of Colombo by developing a participatory and sustainable institutional framework within the municipal structure that is close to the poor and where the community can be effectively organised for livelihood and environmental improvement | June 2000 | October 2003 | Colombo |
| *Greater Colombo Sewerage Project* | | | |
| To provide background information relating to technical and policy issues required to enable a major World bank project to proceed | August 1997 | February 2000 | Colombo |
| *Jaffna Power Rehabilitation* | | | |
| To restore power to the Jaffna area in a sustained manner | June 1996 | November 2000 | Jaffna |
| *ICRC* | | | |
| Ongoing humanitarian assistance and implementation of the ICRC mandate | January 1998 | December 2001 | Country wide |
| *UNICEF Programme of Special Assistance for Children and Women Affected by Conflict* | | | |
| Promote the civil empowerment and participation among families and communities to build capacities for coping with the effects of the conflict and continue to strengthen child survival, protection and development to serve as a platform for reconciliation and conflict resolution | January 1998 | June 2002 | Refugee camps |
| *Capacity Building on Community Based Organisations in Jaffna* | | | |
| To strengthen 20 CBOs to enable them to provide sustainable financial services in a post conflict situation | July 2000 | June 2002 | — |
| *Light Engineering in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh* | | | |
| To learn through action research about the cost effectiveness of the different approaches to increasing technological capability and capacity within the particular socioeconomic environments of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka | April 1998 | March 2001 | Kurunegala, Gampaha |
| *Sri Lanka: Save The Children From Violence Campaign* | | | |
| To increase awareness at all levels of Sri Lankan society that armed conflict has an unacceptable impact on all Sri Lankan children | November 1999 | March 2000 | Country wide |
| *UNHCR Displaced Persons* | | | |
| Facilitate Internally Displaced People to their place of origin or their resettlement in other designated locations in Sri Lanka | February 1998 | December 2001 | Kilinochi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Jaffna |
| *Vulnerable Groups in Conflict Areas (VOICE)* | | | |
| To increase the opportunities for all sectors of the conflict affected population to represent their needs and rights to the authorities | December 2000 | March 2004 | North and East |
| *Micro Enterprise* | | | |
| To increase the number and profitability of small scale food processing businesses in Sri Lanka and thereby stimulate rural employment, income levels, self sufficiency and entrepreneurial activities | March 2000 | March 2004 | Pudukudyirrapu, Meerakerny, Mangalagama, Okanda, Villachciya |
| *Establishment of Continuum of Care for the Mentally Ill* | | | |
| To establish a residential rehabilitation institution/therapeutic community to prepare those who are recovering from mental illness for independent living in the community | April 1999 | March 2002 | Colombo |

DFID's bilateral programme in Sri Lanka is increasingly focused on the relationship between poverty and conflict. The objectives of the programme are to: improve livelihood security of the poor in conflict areas; explore processes for intercommunual reconciliation; and improve the quality of education, particularly at primary level.

## Land Mines

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is giving to countries in the clearance of anti-personnel land mines; and if she will list the countries concerned. [22977]

**Clare Short:** DFID's humanitarian mine action strategy is directed towards widening support for the anti-personnel land mines ban and helping developing countries to develop their own capacity to meet their Ottawa Convention obligations; supporting mines awareness and clearance programmes including, in particular, encouraging practical innovation to enhance safety and efficiency in operations; and strengthening international systems for co-ordination.

DFID has allocated £10 million in the current financial year on humanitarian mine action. Additional resources are available for unforeseen emergency responses such as Afghanistan, for which we have committed a further £2 million for mine action. DFID funding is channelled increasingly towards international organisations (core funding as well as country-specific programmes). Additionally we fund projects bilaterally through NGOs and to a limited extent commercial demining organisations. The profile of expenditure in 2001–02 is expected to be:

| *Country/organisation* | *Amount (£ million)* |
|---|---|
| *Core funding* | |
| United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) | 1.0 |
| United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) | 0.6 |
| Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) | 1.0 |
| International Testing and Evaluation Programme (ITEP) | 0.4 |
| Consultancy/advice | 0.2 |
| Mine Action Research | 0.25 |
| *Kosovo, Cambodia, Georgia* | |
| HALO Trust | 0.8 |
| *N. Iraq, Cambodia, Laos* | |
| Mines Action Group (MAG) | 2.0 |
| *Bosnia* | |
| International Trust Fund | 0.5 |
| *Cambodia, Laos* | |
| UNDP | 1.0 |
| *Croatia* | |
| International Trust Fund | 0.125 |
| *Kosovo* | |
| Bilateral via NGO and commercial demining organisations | 2.0 |
| *Afghanistan, Ethiopia/Eritrea* | |
| UNMAS | 2.0 |
| *Nicaragua* | |
| Organisation of American States | 0.2 |
| Total | [1]12.0 |

[1] Rounded

## HIV/AIDS

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial aid and advice her Department gives to countries to counter the spread of HIV/AIDS; and if she will list *(a)* the countries and *(b)* the financial help being allocated. [22972]

**Clare Short:** My Department supports comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention, control and mitigation programmes. We continue to give greatest priority to prevention, but we also place emphasis on reducing the personal, social and economic impact of illness and death caused by the disease. We seek to support the development, strengthening and implementation of national strategies to combat HIV/AIDS and to provide assistance in the framework of such strategies.

In 2000–01, my Department spent over £120 million on HIV/AIDS-related bilateral programmes in many countries, including:

Bangladesh
Bolivia
Brazil
Burma
Cambodia
China
Cuba
Ecuador
Ethiopia
Ghana
Haiti
Honduras
India
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Mali
Malawi
Mongolia
Montserrat
Mozambique
Nepal
Nicaragua
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Russian Federation
Rwanda
Senegal
Serbia and Montenegro
Sierra Leone
Republic of South Africa
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Swaziland
Tanzania
Togo
Uganda
Ukraine
West Bank and Gaza
Zambia
Zimbabwe.

We also made significant contributions in 2000–01 to support the HIV/AIDS programmes of a number of multilateral organisations, including the EC, UNAIDS and the United Nations Population Fund.

## TREASURY

### Mr. Graham Mills

**Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times Mr. Graham Mills, a professional clay pigeon competitor has *(a)* been stopped by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and *(b)* had his house raided by Customs and Excise. [18534]

**Mr. Boateng** *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* It would be inappropriate to disclose information about enforcement or investigation matters as provided in Exemption 4 (Law enforcement and legal proceedings) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

### Comprehensive Spending Review

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out spending plans for the NHS beyond 2005–06 in the 2002 Comprehensive Spending Review; and if he will make a statement. [20335]

**Mr. Andrew Smith** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Arrangements for the 2002 Spending Review are set out in Chapter 6 of the pre-Budget report.

### Income Tax

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the yield from the upper rate of income tax for each of the years *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, *(c)* 2001–02, *(d)* 2002–03, *(e)* 2003–04, *(f)* 2004–05 and *(g)* 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [22477]

**Dawn Primarolo** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to "Inland Revenue Statistics", table 3.4, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he plans to take in order to avoid avoidance of income tax liabilities by individuals who pay tax at the upper income tax rate of 40 per cent. by use of capital gains tax; and if he will make a statement. [23246]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Inland Revenue will continue to apply existing legislation which ensures that income is charged to income tax.

In addition, we will keep the position under close review and will not hesitate to take action to protect the income tax yield if new tax avoidance schemes for turning income into capital are introduced.

### Climate Change Levy

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to allow the maturation, bottling and packaging of Scotch whisky to qualify for the climate change levy rebate scheme. [23254]

**Mr. Boateng:** Eligible sectors are those covered by Parts A1 and A2 of Schedule 1 to the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) Regulations. These sectors have a regulatory requirement to use energy efficiently, unlike other sectors. There are no current plans to change this definition.

### Holding and Movements Directive

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to seek an amendment to the Holding and Movements Directive to permit spirits producers a defence of due diligence when consignments are lost. [23255]

**Mr. Boateng:** The Scottish Affairs Committee, in its report published in November 2001, recommended that the Government look at a defence of due diligence when excise consignments are lost. The Government are considering their response to this report and will reply in due course.

### Employee Share Schemes

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the capital gains taper relief announced in the pre-Budget report will operate in relation to employee share schemes. [23763]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Where there is a chargeable gain on the disposal of shares acquired through an employee share scheme, taper relief is available for the qualifying holding period.

This period usually starts when the shares are acquired. For shares acquired under options granted under Enterprise Management Incentives, it starts with the date of grant. For shares acquired under the Share Incentive Plan, it starts when the shares leave the plan.

The business assets rate of taper relief is available to employees of trading companies who dispose of shares in their companies and to employees of non-trading companies who do not have a material interest in the company. Such employees will be able to benefit from the improvements to the taper which were announced in the pre-Budget report.

### Tax

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he has taken in response to the 1998 IMF Article IV, Consultation Concluding Statement, regarding tax expenditures; and if he will make a statement. [23757]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Estimates of the costs of the main tax reliefs in 2000–01 and 2001–02 are published twice a year: in the Budget and, at the time of the pre-Budget report, in the "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs". Both documents are available in the Library of the House.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the 2001 IMF Article IV consultation, Concluding Statement, regarding broadening the tax base; and if he will make a statement. [23756]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Government keep all taxes under review and any changes will be made as part of the normal Budget process.

### Inheritance Tax

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reform inheritance tax. [23762]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Government keep all taxes under review and any changes will be made as part of the normal Budget process.

### Health Expenditure

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the expected cost to public funds is of raising United Kingdom expenditure on health to the EU average by 2005–06. [23597]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 329W, in response to his previous question on health expenditure.

### Economic Stability Document

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of printing, publishing and distributing the HM Treasury publication, "Reforming Britain's Economic and Financial Policy: Towards Greater Economic Stability"; how many copies of this publication are to be produced; what sales proceeds are anticipated; what the net estimated cost is; and if he will make a statement. [23245]

**Ruth Kelly:** "Reforming Britain's Economic and Financial Policy" has been published commercially by Palgrave, the academic publishing division of Macmillan. Publication was on the basis that there would be no net cost to the Treasury.

### Tax Credits

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of each tax credit for each of the years 2001–02 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [23248]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The projected costs of all tax credits, and the elements attributable to the R&D tax credit and the tax credit for clearing contaminated land, are shown in Table B11 of the pre-Budget report. Figures for working families' tax credit and disabled person's tax credit are shown in Table B15.

The projected costs of the children's tax credit are shown in Tables A.11 and A2.1 of the Financial Statement and Budget report issued in March 2001.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* two parent families and *(b)* lone parents (i) claimed and (ii) were eligible for child care tax credit in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [24031]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Estimates of the number of families receiving the child care tax credit within working families' tax credit (WFTC) are shown in the WFTC Quarterly Enquiries, copies of which are in the Library.

No estimate is available of the number eligible for the child care tax credit.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many households ceased to claim WFTC during 2000–01 due to an increase in income. [23990]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The reasons for families not renewing working families' tax credit awards are not known.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many recipients of *(a)* the WFTC and *(b)* DPTC worked (i) 30 hours and over and (ii) 16 hours and over in (A) 1999–2000 and (B) 2000–01. [23994]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Estimates of the number of hours per week worked by the main earners in families receiving working families' tax credit are shown in Table 6.2 of the WFTC Quarterly Enquiries, copies of which are in the Library.

The total number of recipients of the disabled person's tax credit are shown in the DPTC Quarterly Enquiries, copies of which are in the Library. All recipients worked for at least 16 hours per week. The proportion working for at least 30 hours per week was 42 per cent. in 1999–2000 (including disability working allowance awards still current) and 46 per cent. in 2000–01.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost will be of replacing the national income from savings and investment with actual income earned in the calculation of tax credits. [24002]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Entitlement to the new tax credits proposed by the Tax Credits Bill will be governed by income measured over a tax year, rather than, as with existing tax credits, by the income of a much shorter period. The new tax credits will also be more flexible and responsive to change. There is therefore no direct comparison between the way in which the existing and the new credits treat income derived from capital. The detailed definition of the income to be taken into account for the purposes of the new tax credits will be set out in regulations under clause 7(8) of the Bill which will be laid before Parliament in due course.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment of the cost of child care he has used to determine the rate of the child care tax credit. [23996]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The current limits for eligible child care costs in the child care tax credit accord with available evidence on the costs of child care across the United Kingdom.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost will be of extending the child tax credit to those who cannot claim the children's tax credit. [23992]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The costs associated with the child tax credit will depend on the rates of and thresholds for that credit. These are a matter for the Chancellor's Budget statement.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of *(a)* WFTC , *(b)* DPTC and *(c)* child tax credits on (i) wage rates and (ii) incentives for those in work to move to higher paid jobs. [23991]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Working families tax credit, disabled person's tax credit and the child tax credit are designed to make work pay and thereby help to provide employment opportunity for all. Independent estimates suggest that these and other measures such as the national minimum wage, the 10p rate of income tax and reforms to national insurance contributions will improve work incentives. The Government have put in place a comprehensive programme of monitoring and evaluation of these tax credits.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the child care tax credit on child care costs. [23995]

**Dawn Primarolo:** A comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit—which will include an assessment of the impact of the child care tax credit element of both credits—is in progress. The programme of work spans several years and comprises qualitative and quantitative research and analysis.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the cost of new *(a)* IT and *(b)* telephone systems to deliver the proposed new tax credits. [24003]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The administrative costs associated with the child tax credit and the working tax credit will reflect the number of people receiving those credits. The number of people receiving the credits will depend on the rates of and thresholds for the tax credits, which are a matter for the Chancellor's Budget statement.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions the regulatory impact assessment on the Tax Credits Bill made about the number of claimants of *(a)* the working tax credit and *(b)* the child tax credit. [23999]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Regulatory Impact Assessment assumes, for illustrative purposes only, that the current systems of support for children and workers are replicated.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of administering *(a)* the child tax credit and *(b)* the working tax credit. [24004]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The cost of administering the child tax credit and the working tax credit will depend on decisions about the rates of and thresholds for those credits. These are a matter for the Chancellor's Budget statement.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the fiscal impact of the Tax Credits Bill in accordance with section 23(b) of the Code for Fiscal Stability. [23993]

**Dawn Primarolo:** As stated in the pre-Budget report (paragraphs 2.43 and 2.44), the interim forecast does not take account of proposals where final decisions have yet to be taken on rates. This is consistent with the requirements of the Code for Fiscal Stability. The rates of and tapers for the child tax credit and the working tax credit are a matter for the Chancellor's Budget statement.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors he will take into consideration when determining *(a)* the taper and *(b)* rates of the different elements of the working tax credit and child tax credit as set out in clauses 9 and 11 of the Tax Credits Bill. [23997]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Chancellor will take all relevant factors into account in reaching a view about the rates of and thresholds for the child tax credit and the working tax credit, as part of the wider Budget process.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he made of the number of reassessments a claimant of *(a)* working tax credit and *(b)* child tax credit would make in a year, in calculating the impact on businesses of the Tax Credits Bill. [24005]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The child tax credit will be paid direct to the main carer by the Inland Revenue and any adjustments to the amounts paid will not affect businesses. The extent to which payments of tax credits will be adjusted in the course of a year will be determined by the circumstances of claimants in individual cases and by the rates of and thresholds for the tax credits. Those rates and thresholds are a matter for the Chancellor's Budget statement.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of the Tax Credits Bill on the targeting of support for families with children. [24001]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The contribution that the proposed measures in the Tax Credits Bill will make to support families with children is considered in chapter 5 of the pre-Budget report.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact on the number of claimants of *(a)* increasing and *(b)* decreasing by 10 per cent. the top rate for (i) WFTC, (ii) DPTC and (iii) child tax credit. [23989]

**Dawn Primarolo:** There is no top rate for the working families tax credit or the disabled person's tax credit.

It is estimated from household survey data that increasing or decreasing the level of the child tax credit by 10 per cent. would result in a change of something less than 30,000 in the number of eligible families.

The sample size is too small to yield a more precise estimate.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the level of discrimination suffered as a consequence of employees claiming DPTC. [24000]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The notification and forms sent to employers use the generic term "tax credits" and do not contain any references to DPTC. Employers are therefore unable to distinguish between payments of DPTC or WFTC. Employers who discriminate against employees, are acting illegally.

## Wanless Report

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received on the interim conclusions of the Wanless report on health funding; what representations he has received from other Government Departments; and if he will make a statement. [23249]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Consultation on Derek Wanless' interim report "Securing our future health: taking a long-term view" began on 27 November 2001. Several representations have already been received from a range of organisations and individuals. The Government will publish a full list of responses to the consultation when Mr. Wanless' final report is published.

### Civil Service Pay

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in respect of the harmonisation of civil service pay and conditions; what proposals he is considering in respect of the reform of civil service pay scales; and if he will make a statement. [21454]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** I have received representations from the Council of Civil Service Unions (CCSU), proposing a national framework agreement on civil service pay. Discussions between the Treasury, the Cabinet Office and the CCSU are continuing to explore whether this would be useful in the context of existing pay arrangements which delegate responsibility for pay and grading to Departments and agencies. I have also received correspondence from hon. Members forwarding more than a hundred representations on this issue from their constituents. Departments and agencies have put forward proposals for reform of their pay scales during the current pay round, which are now being implemented.

### Phone Bills (VAT)

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will reduce the VAT payable on telephone bills for pensioners; and if he will make a statement. [23330]

**Mr. Boateng:** Long-standing agreements with our European partners permit reduced rates of VAT only for a prescribed list of goods and services. Telephone services are not included on this list.

### Tax Law Rewrite Project

**Barbara Follett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further developments there have been in the Tax Law Rewrite Project. [24319]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Tax Law Rewrite Project continues to make good progress. It will shortly be publishing its twelfth exposure draft, containing more draft rewritten clauses on employment income, pension and social security income. This will be published on the internet towards the end of this month and will be available in paper form early in the new year.

The project has also now started work on rewriting the PAYE Regulations. Representative and professional bodies have suggested in discussion that it would be more helpful if the timetable for this work were revised to allow more time for consultation; and the regulations to be made well before the start of the tax year. In order to meet these suggestions I have agreed the project should now plan for the rewritten regulations to be made in the autumn of 2003, to come into force in April 2004.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Listed Places of Worship

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the estimated cost of administering the listed places of worship grant scheme over its first year. [20990]

**Dr. Howells:** The precise details of the contract for the running of this scheme, which could result in approx £30 million going to listed places of worship, are a matter of commercial confidence between ourselves and our appointed contractor, CSL Group Ltd. The contract is set up so that costs are dependent on the success of the scheme, the number of claims processed and the rate at which they are received. As an example, if we were to receive in the region of 10,000 claims over the period to June 2003 we would expect to see costs of around £500,000.

### Apsley House

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when Apsley house was handed to the nation by the Wellesley family; and how much has been spent out of public funds to *(a)* maintain and *(b)* refurbish Apsley house in the last 30 years. [20872]

**Dr. Howells** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]*: Apsley house was given to the Government by the 7th Duke of Wellington under the terms of the Wellington Museum Act 1947. The following amounts have been spent on the maintenance and refurbishment of Apsley house:

| *Year* | *£* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 135,792.00 |
| 1997–98 | 221,940.40 |
| 1998–99 | 178,488.23 |
| 1999–2000 | 330,008.13 |
| 2000–01 | 631,095.15 |
| 2001–02 (to date) | 71,127.25 |

The information for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Tourism

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she is taking to encourage UK holiday makers to take holidays in the UK over the coming year. [22905]

**Dr. Howells:** The Government are working urgently with tourism and other rural stakeholders on an inclusive approach to attracting visitors back to the countryside throughout spring and summer 2002. This is in addition to the strategic advertising and marketing campaigns of the regional tourist boards, such as the Greater London Authority, which has been authorised to switch £500,000 of this year's marketing budget for use in attracting domestic visitors to London. Ministers will continue to attend important domestic events to increase tourism's profile and make people aware of the many good reasons to consider taking their holidays within the UK.

For the longer term, the Government are reviewing the options for stimulating better co-ordination of the public and private sector funds currently spent on marketing tourism in England. Matters relating to the taking of holidays in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland are a fully devolved matter.

### Libraries

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what efforts she has made to increase the use of book-lending facilities in public libraries; and if she will make a statement. [23197]

**Dr. Howells:** The Government have encouraged better planning, accountability and performance in public library services through the introduction of Annual Library Plans (ALPs) in 1998 and Public Library Standards on 1 April this year. In addition the Government, in partnership with the Wolfson Foundation, have helped to support the reader development work of organisations like Launchpad and the Library Association through the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund, which is administered by Resource. Reader development programmes, for both children and adults, help foster a love of reading and assist in broadening individuals' reading horizons.

### Government Art Collection

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of the Government Art Collection is open for viewing by members of the public. [23074]

**Dr. Howells:** The role of the Government Art Collection is to promote British art and culture in British Government buildings. In fulfilling this brief some 75 per cent. to 80 per cent. of its holdings are on display in several hundred Government buildings in the UK and around the world, where they are seen by a large number of visitors.

Access to central Government buildings by members of the public to see specific works of art is possible by appointment, depending on current security circumstances. A number of Government buildings in London, as well as the Government Art Collection's premises, are open as part of the Open House scheme during a weekend in September every year. Additionally the Government Art Collection gives regular tours around its premises to specialist groups. The Government Art Collection also lends works of art from its holdings to public exhibitions.

### New Opportunities Fund

**Gillian Merron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact of boundary changes on eligibility for deprivation related funds, with particular reference to the New Opportunities Fund; and what was the outcome of that assessment. [23089]

**Mr. Caborn:** We have contacted the New Opportunities Fund to request the information required, and I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as it is available, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

**Mr. Keetch:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what basis the average funding per pupil under the New Opportunities for PE and Sport Fund was determined in respect of *(a)* Herefordshire council and *(b)* Birmingham council; and if she will make a statement. [23816]

**Mr. Caborn:** The New Opportunities Fund has provisionally allocated funding to each local education authority (LEA) based on the size of the school population and on the levels of deprivation within the individual LEA.

### Free Television Licences

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pensioners over 75 in the Epsom and Ewell constituency received free television licences. [23424]

**Dr. Howells:** Everyone aged 75 or over is entitled to benefit from a free television licence. TV Licensing, which administers this concession for the BBC as Licensing Authority, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 8,700 people aged 75 or over in the Epsom and Ewell constituency.

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pensioners over 75 years in Hamilton, South constituency receive a free television licence. [23359]

**Dr. Howells:** Everyone aged 75 or over is entitled to benefit from a free television licence. TV Licensing, which administers this concession for the BBC as Licensing Authority, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 2,800 people aged 75 or over in the Hamilton, South constituency.

### Arts Bodies

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimates she has made of the savings to be made by making changes proposed in "Working Together for the Arts"; what evidence she has received that the savings proposed in "Working Together for the Arts" are deliverable; and if she will make a statement. [23571]

**Dr. Howells:** "Working Together for the Arts" set a savings target of £8–10 million. We will expect the Arts Council to achieve this. How it does so is an operational matter for the Arts Council.

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what criteria she has set for the Arts Council of England to meet to ensure her Department's continued support for the proposals ACE sets out in 'Working Together for the Arts'; which of those criteria are being met; and if she will make a statement. [23569]

**Dr. Howells:** Our approval of the Arts Council's plans for the reorganisation of arts funding in England will be conditional upon it demonstrating to our satisfaction that it will indeed involve the delegation of more power and funding to the regions, and the delivery of savings, as promised. The Arts Council is still working on the details of the reorganisation, but a recent progress report confirms that it is addressing both issues.

### Performing Arts

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last met representatives of *(a)* Equity, *(b)* the Writers Guild and *(c)* other bodies representing the performing arts. [23610]

**Dr. Howells:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has yet to meet formally representatives of Equity or the Writers Guild although she has met many individual artists and arts administrators over the past seven months, both formally and informally.

### Network Q Rally

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she plans to have with the Motor Sports Association in connection with their investigation into the accident during the Brechja stage of the Network Q Rally of Great Britain. [23961]

**Mr. Caborn:** Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I have had discussions with the Motor Sports Association in relation to their investigation into the accident during the Brechfa stage of the Network Q Rally of Great Britain. I understand that the Motor Sports Association is undertaking a full inquiry into the accident and that it is its intention to publish a summary of the findings. I will ensure a copy of the summary is placed in the House Library as soon as my Department receives it.

### British Grand Prix

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations have been made by the Government to secure the continuation of the British Grand Prix at Silverstone. [23906]

**Mr. Caborn:** I met representatives of Octagon Motorsports, the British Racing Drivers' Club, and the Motor Sports Association on 11 December to hear at first hand Octagon's proposals for improving arrangements for the 2002 British Grand Prix at Silverstone as well as wider proposals for the long term development of Silverstone Following that meeting I met Max Mosley, President of the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile, on 12 December to inform him of the Government's commitment to motor sport and the British Grand Prix. My right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister also wrote to Mr. Mosley on this issue.

### New Millennium Experience Company

**James Purnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when a liquidator will be appointed for the New Millennium Experience Company. [24402]

**Dr. Howells:** Following the orderly winding down of operations by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), the company's directors today took steps to commence a Members Voluntary Liquidation. The Minister for Housing and Planning, NMEC's sole shareholder, has formally appointed Richard Heis and Stephen Treharne, two partners of KPMG, as liquidators.

NMEC's final annual report and financial statements for the period 1 January 2001 to 18 December 2001 will be available tomorrow and I will arrange for copies of the report to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Gibraltar

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to discuss the issue of Spain's access to the airport in Gibraltar with the Governor of Gibraltar. [23765]

**Peter Hain:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 471W. The Foreign Secretary is in regular contact with the Governor of Gibraltar on all issues relating to Gibraltar. These exchanges are confidential and in accordance with exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

### China

**Mr. Ivan Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was discussed at the human rights dialogue held between the United Kingdom and China in November. [24367]

**Mr. MacShane:** The seventh round of the UK-China Human Rights dialogue took place in London on 19–21 November.

We discussed a wide range of human rights concerns including: Tibet and Xinjiang; freedoms of expression, religion and association; Falun Gong; the abuse of psychiatry; criminal justice issues, including the death penalty, torture and re-education through labour; North Korean refugees; co-operation with UN human rights mechanisms, including visits by Special Rapporteurs; the ratification of the two Human Rights Covenants and International Labour Organisation Conventions; the blocking of the BBC World Service website and Mandarin Service. We also discussed the programmes of practical co-operation between the UK and China to promote human rights and the rule of law.

We raised 22 individual cases of concern.

As well as the formal talks, we organised two sessions involving outside experts to discuss the role of the media and on the administration of criminal justice. We also arranged for the Chinese delegation to visit the BBC World Service and the Central Criminal Courts.

### Tajikistan

**Mr. Ivan Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to open an embassy in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. [24368]

**Peter Hain:** We will open an embassy headed by a Chargé d'Affaires on 20 December 2001. Until then our Ambassador in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) will remain cross-accredited to Tajikistan.

### Somalia

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representatives of which *(a)* governmental and *(b)* quasi-governmental organisations his officials are in contact with in Somalia; and if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards relations with Somalia. [23642]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Officials at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London, and in our diplomatic missions in Addis Ababa and Nairobi, are in contact with a wide range of governmental and quasi-governmental representatives in Somalia. Since the collapse of the Republic of Somalia in 1991 we have had no formal diplomatic relations with Somalia.

### Iraq

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts his officials have had with *(a)* representatives of Iraqi Kurdish groups, *(b)* the Kurdish Parliament and *(c)* the Government in Baghdad covering the future of the northern part of Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [23641]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** FCO Ministers and officials have regular contact with Iraqi Kurdish groups. I recently met Nechirvan Barzani and Kosrat Rasoul, senior representatives of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) respectively. FCO officials have also met members elected to the Kurdish Parliament in 1992. Although HMG do not have diplomatic relations with Iraq, officials in New York are always available to speak to the Iraqis if they wish to do so.

HMG are committed to the maintenance of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its current borders. The only long-term future for Iraq's Kurds is as part of a stable, peaceful Iraq which gives them a negotiated degree of autonomy.

### Victims of Homicide

**Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps UK posts abroad are taking to ensure that copies of the Home Office pack for Victims of Homicide, 3rd edition, are being made available to families of UK subjects murdered abroad. [23386]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The FCO does all it can to help the families of British nationals murdered overseas. The needs of each family are different. We will usually give the families leaflets published by the FCO on "Victims of Crime Abroad" and "Death Overseas" and put them in touch with relevant agencies in the UK who may be able to help them (such as the local police and victim support). The Home Office pack Victims of Homicide, 3rd edition is designed for the relatives of those murdered in the UK and is handed out at the discretion of the police.

### Entry Applications

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will investigate the application for entrance to the UK made by an individual whose name has been communicated to him, to the Istanbul Embassy; and if he will make a statement. [23328]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I will investigate the circumstances of this application and write to the hon. Member.

### Weapons of Mass Destruction

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries *(a)* hold and *(b)* are suspected of holding stocks of (i) chemical weapons, (ii) biological weapons and (iii) nuclear weapons. [22865]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** There are four states parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (the US, Russia, India and another state party) that have declared possession of chemical weapons, to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). They are currently in the process of destroying them, in accordance with their obligations under the Convention. Information received in confidence from Foreign Governments is exempt under Exemption 1c of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The development, production and stockpiling of biological weapons was prohibited by the Biological Weapons Convention of 1972.

The UK recognises five nuclear weapon states as defined by the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT-1968) (UK, US, France, Russia, China). India and Pakistan have announced that they have a nuclear weapons capability. The UK continues to encourage Israel to resolve concerns about its nuclear programme by acceding to the NPT as a non-Nuclear Weapon State. We have also encouraged Israel to sign a full scope safeguards agreement and supported United Nations General Assembly Resolutions on a Middle East nuclear weapons' free zone. A large number of other states have the technical capacity to produce nuclear weapons, but have committed themselves not to do so by adhering to the NPT.

It has been the policy of successive Governments not to comment on specific intelligence matters or assessments.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the use of a scorecard approach in pursuit of the Public Service Agreement target for building a modern NATO. [22586]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been using the current set of scorecard targets since the start of the Spending Review 2000 triennial.

We have made good progress towards our target of a modernised NATO to improve Europe's security. This year's scorecard measure is to re-engage Russia in the full range of PJC co-operation. The UK has been proactive in transforming the new NATO/Russia relationship and on 6 December the North Atlantic Council launched a process to establish new mechanisms for working with Russia at 20.

We have continued to press the case for NATO modernisation and have actively supported Lord Robertson's NATO Plus initiative. NATO Plus is a programme for reform of working methods at NATO HQ and bringing them in line with best practice in the public and private sectors elsewhere.

### Zimbabwe

**Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the present relationship between the Zimbabwean Government and the Southern African Development Community. [23092]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Mindful of the economic damage that Zimbabwe is inflicting on the region, the countries of the Southern African Development Community have set clear benchmarks against which they will measure the Zimbabwe Government's conduct. We welcome SADC's efforts to encourage stability in Zimbabwe and a change of direction in Zimbabwe Government policy.

**Mrs. Browning:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking in conjunction with the international community to ensure those engaged in violence and murder in Zimbabwe are brought to justice. [23533]

**Mr. Bradshaw** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* We and other members of the international community regularly remind the Zimbabwe Government of their obligations under the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, the Cotonou Agreement, the Abuja Agreement and other international instruments to uphold the rule of law and protect the rights of the individual.

### Moluccas

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation of Christians in the Moluccas Islands. [23142]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We continue to monitor events in the province closely. The United Nations has made several assessment visits to Maluku since 1999. They have found concrete evidence of only a small number of forced conversions, including the most highly reported cases in Kasiui and Tior. Many of the Christians evacuated from the province in January are now reported to be voluntarily returning to their homes. Also, many Muslims and Christians who fled their villages to escape the violence are returning, and Muslim leaders in some villages have asked for help in encouraging Christians to return.

The Department for International Development (DFID) has pledged more than £4 million to help establish the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Conflict Prevention and Recovery Unit in Jakarta. The unit will build up capacity in conflict reduction and recovery in the provinces torn apart by ethnic conflict, particularly in North Maluku. These new initiatives will complement DFID-supported humanitarian relief programmes by addressing the causes underlying conflict, abuse of power, alienation and loss of access to and control of resources essential for everyday life. The embassy in Jakarta has also recently funded a series of conflict reporting training workshops for journalists in various provinces in Indonesia, including North Maluku. We will continue to work with the Indonesian authorities and UNDP to promote reconciliation, begin wider reconstruction work and to offer practical assistance where appropriate.

The UK's message to the Indonesian Government has been consistently clear: a long-term solution to regional conflicts can only be achieved through political negotiation and consultation with the people. On 29 November, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Jakarta raised our concerns about recent violence in Maluku with Manuel Kaisiepo, the Minister for Eastern Indonesia.

### European Journalism

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on UK participation in *(a)* the European Journalism Centre Maastricht, *(b)* l'Association pour la Formation au Journalisme Européenne, Bordeaux, *(c)* la Foundation Journalisme en Europe, Paris and *(d)* the European Journalists' Association. [22936]

**Peter Hain:** We are not aware of any recent FCO participation in these organisations.

### Association Jean Monnet

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy towards European Community *(a)* financial and *(b)* other support towards the Association Jean Monnet; and if he will deposit a list of Community-funded material published by this body in the Library. [22888]

**Peter Hain:** I understand that the Association Jean Monnet has received community funding in the past. For further details I suggest the hon. Member contact the Commission directly.

### EU Info-Points

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the locations of *(a)* EU Info-Points and *(b)* Rural Information and Promotion Carrefour in the UK; what (i) EU and (ii) UK funding they receive; and if he will make a statement on their activities. [22937]

**Peter Hain:** There are no EU Info-Points in the UK. There are six Carrefours in the UK, in Preston, Cirencester, Inverness, Clogher (Northern Ireland), Llangefini (Anglesey, North Wales) and Carmarthen (West Wales).

The EU has provided 20,000 euros to each Carrefour for the financial year 2000–01. The centres do not receive UK Government funding.

Carrefours are rural advice and information centres, supported by the European Commission. Their activities are outlined in the European Commission Representation to the UK's website at www.cec.org.uk.

### Afghanistan

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to ensure that the protection of children's rights is incorporated into the international communities action regarding Afghanistan. [23045]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Bonn Agreement states the commitment of the participants in the peace talks to promote national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability and respect for human rights in Afghanistan.

The international community is fully committed to the restoration of the rights of children in Afghanistan. The Government fully support the work of UNICEF and other NGOs working to achieve this.

UNICEF's operations to date have focused on immediate relief requirements. 1.7 million children remain in need of urgent assistance. The international coalition has made it clear that the humanitarian action in Afghanistan is as important as miliary action. The Taliban were one of the main obstacles to getting humanitarian relief through. Now that their grip on most of the country has gone, many more aid convoys are reaching the people who need them.

Under the Taliban, women were not allowed to teach. When the Taliban came to power in 1996, in Kabul alone, 100,000 girls and 150,000 boys were forced to leave school. The provision of education will be key to the protection of children's rights in Afghanistan. UNICEF is currently planning for the start of the next school year in March. They hope to get 30,000 teachers and as many children as possible back to school then.

### Pakistan

**Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made on the use of capital punishment against people who transgress blasphemy laws in Pakistan. [23125]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 966W.

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Government Ministers have visited Pakistan in each of the last three years. [23713]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The following Government Ministers have visited Pakistan in each of the last three years:

*1999:*

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development;

*2000:*

There were no ministerial visits in 2000;

*2001:*

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister;

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs; and

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development.

### Permanent Secretary

**Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of persons who were on the shortlist for the position of Permanent Secretary of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. [23232]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Sir Michael Jay was selected to follow Sir John Kerr as head of the Diplomatic Service, and Permanent Under-Secretary of State, following consideration of all members of the Service who had the requisite experience and were willing to run. It is not our normal practice to make public the names of unsuccessful candidates as to do so would be a breach of the non-disclosure provision of the Data Protection Act 1998. Exemption 15A of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information refers.

### Race Discrimination

**Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many race discrimination cases there have been against his Department in the last four years. [23229]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Six claims have been lodged with the Employment Tribunal in the last four years which have cited race discrimination. Only one case proceeded to a full hearing, which was found in favour of the FCO. The other five cases were either withdrawn or settled out of court.

### International Criminal Court

**Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent progress has been made in ratifying the statutes establishing the International Criminal Court. [23393]

**Peter Hain:** The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court was open for signature between 17 July 1998 and 31 December 2000. During this period 139 states signed the statute of which 46 have since ratified. The United Kingdom deposited its instruments of ratification on 4 October 2001, the 42nd state to do so. One state has acceded to the statute. The statute will come into force upon receipt of the 60th ratification or accession.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Refreshment Department

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, (1) how many people have been employed by the Refreshment Department in each year since 1990; [21657]

(2) how many of those employed by the Refreshment Department in each year since 1990 have been managers. [21658]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** The hon. Member will recall that by 1990, when Sir Robin Ibbs made his recommendations for the future management of House services, there was considerable dissatisfaction with the catering services provided by the Refreshment Department. Since then, the House has not only invested in its catering premises, but also in the training and development of the staff and management of the Refreshment Department. The management task has increased over this period in order to maintain and improve the standard of catering provided in a larger number of outlets, while modern business management techniques have required the employment of managers with specialist skills, such as IT, training, and procurement expertise.

The authorised staffing levels and senior management posts in the Refreshment Department since 1990 were as shown in the table.

| Financial year | Authorised staff complement[1] | Senior management posts[2] |
|---|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 263 | 8 |
| 1990–91 | 266.5 | 8 |
| 1991–92 | 305.5 | 8 |
| 1992–93 | 309.5 | 8 |
| 1993–94 | 318.5 | 8 |
| 1994–95 | 318.5 | 10 |
| 1995–96 | 317.5 | 12 |
| 1996–97 | 316.5 | 14 |
| 1997–98 | 310 | 15 |
| 1998–99 | 314.5 | 15 |
| 1999–2000 | 313.5 | 16 |
| 2000–01 | 300 | 16 |

[1] Staff numbers are stated as full-time equivalent posts as at the end of each financial year, except for 2000–01, which is calculated as the average across the year.
[2] Senior management is defined as Band B (previously Grade 8) and above in the main House of Commons service.

In addition to the senior manager posts listed in the table, the Refreshment Department employs a team of Assistant Managers and supervisory staff (sous chefs, head waiters, cafeteria and restaurant supervisors, etc.) who undertake management responsibilities as part of their duties. As at the end of November 2001, the Department employed 36 such management staff in addition to the 16 posts reported in the table. No figures are available for previous years, as this information was not recorded.

### Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

**Peter Bottomley:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, (1) what information is available to the Commission of the average standard days worked each week by the Parliamentary Commissioner; [21979]

(2) if he has made available to hon. Members the assessment that led the Commission to decide to reduce the Parliamentary Commissioner's days of pay to three days a week. [21978]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** The Chairman of the Committee on Standards and Privileges has indicated to the Commission that the Commissioner for Standards has worked on average about five days a week.

In setting an appropriate time commitment for the Commissioner, and resources to support the Commissioner's work, the long-term need must be established. The Commission has instructed the House's Internal Review Service to carry out a new assessment of the workload and resources required. The Commission will also seek the advice of the new Commissioner and the Chairman of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, and has undertaken to provide what resources are judged to be required.

**Peter Bottomley:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, whether the Commission intended to make the contents of the recent letter from the Parliamentary Commissioner available to hon. Members and to the public. [21982]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** It is not the practice of the Commission to make public letters written to the Speaker by Officers of the House.

## TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

### Housing (London)

13. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the total cost of necessary capital works in public sector housing in *(a)* the London borough of Southwark and *(b)* Greater London; and how much has been allocated for expenditure in the (i) current and (ii) next financial years. [21569]

**Ms Keeble:** Southwark have estimated that, as at 1 April 2001, they need to spend £232 million on capital repairs and improvements on their own housing stock. The estimate for all authorities in Greater London is £5,380 million. Southwark's combined Housing Annual Capital Guideline and Major Repairs Allowance allocations for the current and next financial years are £52.636 million and £54.547 million respectively. The equivalent allocations for Greater London are £716.010 million and £723.013 million.

### Rural Services

14. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to improve the ability of rural local authorities to provide services. [21570]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Government have recently published a new Local Government White Paper, which sets out measures that should increase the ability of all local authorities to deliver services. These include some initiatives, such as new powers for local authorities to work together, which will particularly benefit rural authorities.

### Planning

15. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reform the planning system. [21571]

**Mr. Byers:** I launched last week our Green Paper proposing fundamental reforms to the planning system. We want to deliver a faster, fairer system, that places communities at the heart of the planning process. At the same time I published a consultation paper on fundamental reforms to arrangements for compulsory purchase.

This week I have published consultation papers on Parliamentary Procedures associated with planning applications for major infrastructure projects and on reform of the system of planning obligations.

### Local Government Finance

16. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reform local government finance. [21572]

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Government have set out radical proposals for reforming local government finance in the local government White Paper "Strong Local

Leadership—Quality Public Services". Copies of the White Paper which has been very well received, have been placed in the House Library.

19. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reform local government finance. [21575]

20. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reform local government finance. [21576]

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Government have set out radical proposals for reforming local government finance in the local government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services". Copies of the White Paper, which has been very well received, have been placed in the House Library.

### Roadworks (Utilities)

18. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives to local authorities on minimising traffic disturbance connected to roadworks undertaken by utilities; and if he will make statement. [21574]

**Mr. Byers:** Authorities must co-ordinate works to minimise inconvenience to road users, and utilities must co-operate with them. Guidance is given in a code of practice on co-ordination and in "Best Practice in Street Works and Highway Works", published by my Department in conjunction with the Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee.

### Train Delays

21. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of trains were subject to delay in *(a)* September and *(b)* November. [21577]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The rail industry is monitored by four-weekly periods, not calendar months. In the period from 19 August to 13 October, 78.7 per cent. of services were punctual. In the period from 14 October to 10 November, the last period for which figures are available, 72.3 per cent. of services were punctual.

### Council House Sales

22. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to allow the phased release of receipts from council house sales to the appropriate local authorities. [21578]

**Ms Keeble:** The requirement for a proportion of housing capital receipts to be set-aside to offset debt allows a greater share of new investment to be targeted at areas of highest need. Last week's Local Government White Paper set out our intention to retain this requirement in England. The National Assembly for Wales will be consulting separately on changes to the Welsh local government finance system, which will cover this issue.

### Housing (Deprived Areas)

23. **Mr. Anthony D. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to improve public housing in areas of high deprivation. [21579]

**Ms Keeble:** We have made a commitment to bring all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010 with a reduction of one third being made by 2004. Most of the reduction in the period up to 2004 will be in deprived areas. This objective is supported by the substantial element of targeting of resources to deprived areas incorporated within the needs indices which underpin resource allocation.

### Transport (Christmas)

24. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to maintain the effective operation of the transport system during the Christmas period. [21580]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is a matter for operators of public transport services. I understand that most public transport services will not operate on Christmas day, and very restricted services will run on Boxing day. For the rest of the holiday period, services will operate either normal or reduced timetables, according to the anticipated demand. No problems are expected on the road network.

### Rail Investment

25. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of the progress made with investment programmes within the rail sector. [21581]

**Mr. Jamieson:** We believe that our current public expenditure plans will deliver the rail investment programmes provided for in the 10-Year Plan for Transport.

### Business Rates (Domestic Properties)

26. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to exempt office space in domestic properties from business rates. [21582]

**Dr. Whitehead:** None. Business rates will be payable only where part of a domestic property is separately identifiable as being used as office space or for other non-domestic purposes. The remainder of the property will remain subject to council tax, although a reduction may be made to the property's banding to reflect the change in use of part of it.

### Unitary Authorities (Coastal Towns)

27. **Mr. Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of the performance of unitary authorities in seaside and coastal towns. [21583]

**Dr. Whitehead:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made no assessment of the performance of unitary authorities. We are putting in place a comprehensive performance assessment framework for all councils building on existing audit, inspections and assessments,

including assessments of corporate capabilities. These assessments will be compiled by the Audit Commission with assistance from other inspectorates.

### Electoral Reform

29. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to establish an independent body to review the electoral system for local government elections in England. [21585]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Government have already established the independent Electoral Commission. This will be looking at various aspects of the electoral system for local elections, including the effective and efficient conduct of such elections and the use of innovatory pilot schemes. From 1 April 2002, the Electoral Commission will also take responsibility for the review of local electoral area boundaries and the number of councillors elected by those areas.

### Car Free Day

30. **Mr. Challen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what involvement his Department had in European car free day 2001. [21586]

**Ms Keeble:** On 19 September the UK Government signed a pledge, drawn up by the European Commission, to promote European "In town without my car" day to local authorities. On 20 September we wrote to the Local Government Association and to the Devolved Administrations setting out our position.

### Train Services

32. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on levels of reliability of train services; and what the levels were *(a)* one and *(b)* two years ago. [21589]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Reliability of train services may be defined as the percentage number of services that ran against the published timetable. On that basis:

97.5 per cent. of trains operated for the 12 months up to 13 October 2001.

98.6 per cent. of trains operated for the 12 months up to 14 October 2000.

99 per cent. of trains operated for the 12 months up to 16 October 1999.

### Trunk Roads (Norfolk)

33. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for upgrading Norfolk's trunk roads; and if he will make a statement. [21590]

**Mr. Jamieson:** We recently announced the preferred routes for schemes to dual the last two single carriageway sections of the A11 trunk road between the M11 in Cambridgeshire and the city of Norwich. Studies have been commissioned to look at safety, congestion and other transport related problems along the A47 corridor in Norfolk. A £4.5 million scheme to improve the A47 Hardwick roundabout is programmed to start in the next financial year.

### Railtrack

34. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will release the minutes of the meetings that took place between 1 July and 30 September between the Government, Railtrack and Credit Suisse First Boston. [21591]

**Mr. Jamieson:** My right hon. Friend informed the House about relevant discussions with Railtrack and its advisers in his statement of 15 October.

There is no commitment under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information that pre-existing documents, as distinct from information, will be made available in response to requests.

It is not, in any case, the Government's practice to release information the disclosure of which may be an issue in legal proceedings. Such information is exempted from disclosure under section 4 of Part II of the Code.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the sum that would need to be granted to *(a)* Railtrack plc and *(b)* Railtrack Group to give the bonds an A Credit rating. [19426]

**Mr. Spellar:** The credit rating of the proposed Company Limited by Guarantee would depend upon its structure and financial framework.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what were the sums *(a)* agreed in 2000 and *(b)* at the latest date for which information is available for payments to Railtrack in (i) 2001–02, (ii) 2002–03 and (iii) 2003–04 by the (A) Government and (B) Strategic Rail Authority. [22118]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 555W.

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what legal requirement will be placed on the administrators of Railtrack under the strategic plan drawn up by the Strategic Rail Authority. [23363]

**Mr. Byers** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The Strategic Plan will be published on 14 January.

### Air Traffic

35. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to limit the vectoring off from approved routes by National Air Traffic Control when residential areas are affected. [21592]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Government have no such plans. While the balance of environmental advantage generally lies in concentrating departing aircraft along routes that avoid densely populated areas where possible, the vectoring of aircraft from such routes once they have climbed above agreed minimum altitudes is necessary for efficient and safe management of aircraft.

### Rail Franchises

36. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what response he has given to proposals from train franchisees to acquire and run vertically integrated operations. [21593]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I have not responded to any specific proposals.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance his Department gave to the Strategic Rail Authority on the renewal of rail passenger franchises in *(a)* September 1999 and *(b)* July 2001; what plans there are to make any amendments to this guidance; and if he will make a statement. [23511]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Secretary of State's Instructions and Guidance to the Franchising Director, issued on 29 September 1999, addressed this issue. A revised approach was set out in the draft Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority and the draft Statement of Policy on Passenger Rail Franchising issued for consultation on 29 June and 16 July respectively.

The consultation responses received on the draft Franchising Policy statement are being considered and a revised version will be published very shortly.

37. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the rail franchise renewal process. [21594]

**Mr. Jamieson:** A revised approach to franchising was set out in the draft Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority and the draft Statement of Policy on Passenger Rail Franchising issued for consultation on 29 June and 16 July respectively. The responses received are under consideration.

The Strategic Rail Authority's franchising programme will be reviewed in the light of this. An announcement will be made in due course.

### East of England Development Agency

38. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with the East of England Development Agency on the region's transport infrastructure. [21595]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Secretary of State has had no specific discussions with the East of England Development Agency on the state of the region's transport infrastructure. Ministers are, however, aware of the Agency's transport priorities as set out in their Regional Economic Strategy, published in June this year.

### Euston-North Wales Rail Service

**Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department last met the office of the Rail Regulator to discuss the quality of the service provided by Virgin trains between Euston and North Wales; and if he will make a statement. [21584]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Strategic Rail Authority monitors train operators for both performance and quality of service. The Authority has regular contact with the operators, including official quarterly meetings with senior management to discuss areas of concern. My Department are in regular contact with the authority over these matters.

### Regional Rail Services

**Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority on devolving rail services on a regional basis. [21567]

**Mr. Spellar:** There have been no such discussions. Special arrangements apply in Scotland following devolution. But the Government's general view is that the GB railway is a national network and should be operated as such.

### Antisocial Tenants

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what interdepartmental co-ordination there is on speeding up the eviction of antisocial tenants. [21573]

**Ms Keeble:** My officials are liaising with colleagues in other Government Departments, in particular the Home Office, Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service.

### Local Authority Grant Settlement

**David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from local authorities in country districts on the grant settlement for 2002–03. [21587]

**Dr. Whitehead:** By midday on 11 December, we had received 15 representations from shire district councils concerning the 2002–03 grant settlement. Of these, 11 relate to the data used for the authority concerned. The other four relate to the methodology used or level of funding provided by the settlement.

### Millennium Dome

**Ian Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in relation to the future use of the Millennium Dome. [24724]

**Mr. Byers:** Meridian Delta Ltd. have today been appointed exclusive partners with English Partnerships for the regeneration of the Greenwich peninsula and to take over ownership of the Millennium Dome, through a 999 year lease.

Once legally concluded the deal will provide a 20,000 seat arena inside the Dome, surrounded by an urban entertainment complex. The total investment in and around the Dome will be £200 million. The deal also provides for the regeneration of the Greenwich peninsula through a joint venture between EP and MDL which, over its 20 year lifetime, will provide a total investment of around £4 billion, at least 5,000 new homes and an estimated 20,000 full-time jobs.

Meridian Delta Ltd. is a consortium that includes Lend Lease (developers of the Sydney Olympic Village and the Bluewater shopping centre), Quintain Estates and Development and Anschutz Entertainment Group—the second largest entertainment company in the world.

English Partnerships expects to conclude a legally binding contract with MDL by the end of May 2002, but it is intended that it will provide both a guaranteed minimum price for the land that English Partnership is putting into the joint venture and a substantial share of the overall remaining profits of the joint venture.

The precise amount to be received by EP over the lifetime of the deal depends on the final details of the deal and the amount of development ultimately undertaken. However, it will amount to several hundred million pounds and is structured in such a way that it is likely to generate better value for the public sector than could have been achieved through either of the deals with Nomura or Legacy. The deal also provides for MDL to take on all of the risks associated with operating and maintaining the Dome. The public sector's only remaining interest will be to receive a share of profits once they exceed a threshold, still to be determined.

We welcome the fact that the National Audit Office is scrutinising the sale process and will report to Parliament. We have kept the NAO informed throughout and will continue to do so.

### Lincolnshire County Council

**Gillian Merron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the National Standards Board is investigating complaints about the establishment of a local standards committee by Lincolnshire county council; and if he will make a statement. [22216]

**Dr. Whitehead** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The Standards Board is not investigating the matter. However, I understand that the Chairman of the Standards Board has written to the Chief Executive of Lincolnshire asking the council's views regarding the composition of its standards committee.

### London Underground

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will give the total investment in the core London Underground infrastructure in each year since 1990–91; and if he will give an estimate for 2001–02. [22701]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Keith Hill) to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 8 May 2001, *Official Report,* column 23W. The actual level of investment in 2000–01 was set out in London Transport's annual report 2000–01, published in July of this year.

London Underground has been set a target of delivering total investment expenditure of at least £410 million in 2001–02.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the comparative international data available to London Underground as a result of their membership of the CoMet group of international metros. [22758]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is a matter for London Underground (LU) which is a member of CoMet. I am advised by LU that all members of CoMet are required to sign a written confidentiality agreement; information between operators within the group is exchanged on a confidential basis.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 14–15W, if his Department *(a)* is testing and *(b)* has asked Ernst and Young to test alternative discount rates for the London Underground PPP; and if he has asked Ernst and Young to conduct Monte Carlo simulations as an element of their robustness assessment. [23270]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 5 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 10W. Ernst and Young's terms of reference are available in the Libraries of the House.

### Cherished Number Plates

**Pete Wishart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the income generated by the sale of cherished plates is distributed among *(a)* Government Departments and *(b)* nations and regions of the United Kingdom. [22771]

**Mr. Jamieson:** After the administrative costs of running the Sale of Marks Scheme have been met, the remaining receipts are paid to the Exchequer to be allocated to spending programmes in line with the Government priorities for public services.

### Rough Sleepers Unit

**Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the rough sleepers unit has to improve support and services provided during the day for street homeless people. [22982]

**Ms Keeble:** The RSU has already invested over £2 million from its Special Innovation Fund to put in place education, training and employment schemes around the country that have helped over 2,500 former rough sleepers to make the move to independent living.

The RSU has also funded the development of a website showing employment, advice and training resources available for homeless people in London and is working with Business Action on Homelessness and the Employment Service to deliver tailored solutions to help former rough sleepers back into employment.

This work is backed up by 23 Tenancy Sustainment Teams (TSTs) in areas across England that give former rough sleepers the help they need to keep their new home and to route former rough sleepers into education, training and employment.

The Unit also funds a range of day centres around the country and has developed 10 learning zones linked to hostels and day centres to provide work based training in businesses, to help former rough sleepers back into paid employment.

In the future the new Homelessness Directorate of the DTLR will ensure that schemes that rebuild the lives of former rough sleepers will help to sustain the reductions already made in rough sleeping since 1998.

### Rents (London)

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many properties *(a)* in London as a whole and *(b)* in each London borough have rents above the relevant rent cap for their size; and what percentage these properties represent of the relevant categories of housing stock in both local authority and RSL sectors. [23078]

**Ms Keeble:** Estimates based on the 1996 English House Condition Survey (the latest suitable data available) suggest that in London as a whole around 30,000 local authority properties and 15,000 RSL properties currently have rents above the relevant rent cap for their size. These properties represent around 5 per cent. of the local authority housing stock and 7 per cent. of the RSL stock in London in 1996. We expect the number of properties with rents above the relevant cap to be reduced by rent restructuring. We do not have equivalent information at an individual London borough level.

**Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many RSL tenants in *(a)* Battersea and *(b)* Wandsworth (i) pay rent above £100 per week and (ii) would have their rent reduced under rent restructuring in April 2002. [22947]

**Ms Keeble:** The information is not available. To avoid excessive administrative burden, information is not collected centrally on the rents of individual properties owned by local authorities and RSLs. Moreover, individual landlords retain responsibility for rent-setting.

### Rent Restructuring

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the oral statement of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 136WH, *(a)* how he has calculated his assessment that the rents of one council tenant in five will fall under his rent restructuring proposals, *(b)* what assessment he has made of the regional variations in this figure and *(c)* what proportion of tenants in RSL properties he estimates will see a fall in real term rents as a result of his policies. [23077]

**Ms Keeble:** *(a)* The assessment that the rents of one council tenant in five will fall in real terms under our restructuring proposals was an estimate based upon modelling using the English House Condition Survey (EHCS) database.

*(b)* Estimates from the EHCS database suggest that the proportion of council tenants whose rents fall in real terms varies from around one in 15 in Yorkshire and the Humber to almost one in three in London.

*(c)* We expect the proportion of tenants in RSL properties who see a fall in rents in real terms as a result of our policies to be somewhat higher than that of council tenants.

For both sectors the actual figure will depend upon the rent-setting decisions of individual landlords.

### West Coast Main Line

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 383W, on the west coast main line, whether the Government have given financial guarantees to an organisation in relation to the Hartwell agreement on *(a)* the west coast main line and *(b)* the Virgin cross country franchise; what is the total cost estimated by the Strategic Rail Authority for the Virgin cross country franchise upgrade; and how dependent this upgrade is on (i) completion of Phase I west coast main line upgrade and (ii) Phase 2 west coast main line upgrade. [22796]

**Mr. Jamieson** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The Government have given no financial guarantees in relation to the Hartwell agreement. Financial support to the cross country franchise is set out in the annual report of the Strategic Rail Authority, which was placed in the Library of the House in July. Various enhancements of the cross country route have been undertaken by Railtrack; the costs are a matter for Railtrack. Improvements to journey times for cross country trains operating on the west coast main line are dependent on work to be carried out by Railtrack which will permit 125 mph operation with tilting trains at certain locations.

### Planning Applications

**Ms Atherton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many planning applications were called in by him in the last 12 months. [23688]

**Ms Keeble:** 127 planning applications were called in in the last financial year (1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001).

**Ms Atherton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of planning applications served with an article 14 holding direction have been subsequently called in by him in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [23687]

**Ms Keeble:** 29 per cent. of the planning applications subject to an Article 14 Direction during the last financial year (1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001) were subsequently called in.

### Channel Tunnel

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact of the security situation at Frethun on railfreight traffic through the channel tunnel; and what steps he is taking to *(a)* reduce interruption to traffic and *(b)* mitigate the financial impact on British rail terminal operations. [23115]

**Mr. Jamieson** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* Rail freight through the channel tunnel is currently being disrupted due to repeated intrusions by would-be illegal immigrants to this country. This is a matter of considerable concern to the Government. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has raised the issue with the French Prime Minister. My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister for Transport have both made representations to the French Transport Minister emphasising the need for a speedy resolution so that normal levels of service can resume, free of intrusion from illegal immigrants. The UK Immigration Service held a meeting with the head of security for the French railways on 3 December to investigate the scope for speeding up the implementation of additional security measures at the Frethun freight yard, and to offer assistance and advice on those security measures.

The question of compensation is one for the French railways, as it is their decision to reduce services that has resulted in the financial impact to British operators.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has made to his French counterparts on security measures on rail freight using the channel tunnel. [23316]

**Mr. Jamieson:** My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has raised the issue with the French Transport Minister; and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport have both made representations to him emphasising the need for a speedy resolution so that normal levels of service can resume, free of intrusion from illegal immigrants. The UK Immigration Service held a meeting with the head of security for the French railways on 3 December to investigate the scope for speeding up the implementation of additional security measures at the Frethun freight yard, and to offer assistance and advice on those security measures.

### Rail Industry

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* the documentation related to the railway safety cases for mark 1 passenger carriages submitted to the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* the assessment of these safety cases by the Health and Safety Executive since December 2000. [23526]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Every railway operator is required to have a railway safety case setting out the arrangements for its management of health and safety across the board. These are lengthy and detailed documents covering a wide range of health and safety issues including those relating to passenger rolling stock. They are available for public inspection at the relevant operators' premises.

### Social Housing

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of social housing built in 2000–01 was funded entirely by the public sector. [23406]

**Ms Keeble:** 1.29 per cent. of social housing new build units approved for building in 2000–01 was funded entirely by the public sector.

### Housing Targets (South-East)

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the basis on which applications for new housing resulting from Government housing targets for the south-east will be permitted on green belt land. [23416]

**Ms Keeble:** Our policy in PPG3 on Housing and in Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9) is clear that applications for housing should follow a search sequence, starting with the use of previously developed land and buildings within urban areas identified by the use of housing capacity, the urban extensions, and finally new development around nodes in good public transport corridors. It is for local authorities, in their development plans, to identify sites to be allocated for housing in accordance with the guidance in PPG3 and RPG9.

Our policy in PPG2 on green belts continues to place a presumption against inappropriate development such as housing in the green belt. We consider that green belts in the south-east are important in preventing urban sprawl, in preventing the coalescence of settlements and in protecting the countryside. Indeed RPG9 recognises that there is no regional case for reviewing the boundaries of green belts.

### Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre

**Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has responsibility for civil contingency facilities underneath the QE2 Conference Centre. [23368]

**Dr. Whitehead:** No.

### Council Tax

**Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the anticipated average percentage increase in Band D council tax across England for 2002–03, based on this year's local government finance settlement. [23365]

**Dr. Whitehead:** I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 30W.

### Planning Applications (East Devon)

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many outstanding planning applications there are in the East Devon constituency. [23754]

**Ms Keeble:** The latest information available to the Department is that there were 683 planning applications outstanding at the end of September 2001 by East Devon district planning authority.

### Departmental Publications

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list each new publication issued by his Department since 1997; and what the total cost to the Department is of each publication. [23755]

**Dr. Whitehead:** DTLR has a very wide range of policy responsibilities and therefore publishes a large number of publications. The cost of tracing and listing the total costs of each individual publication would thus be disproportionate. A list of the titles of the main publications produced through DTLR's Directorate of Communication between June 2001, when the Department was created, and November 2001 has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

## Major Road Schemes

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the major existing road schemes in the Local Transport Settlement that are due to be carried out in 2002–03; which additional schemes have been *(a)* postponed because work is still progress and *(b)* rejected; and which authorities will receive the additional funding provided for road maintenance in 2002–03. [23987]

**Ms Keeble:** Work is planned to start during the financial year 2002–03 on the following local major road schemes accepted for funding in previous year's Local Transport Settlements. The exact timing of the work is the responsibility of the relevant local authority and may depend on the satisfactory completion of any remaining statutory procedures. Construction work on a further 32 schemes is already in progress.

Baldock Bypass—Hertfordshire

Nar-Ouse Regeneration Project—Norfolk

South Lowestoft Relief Road—Suffolk

W. Thurrock Regeneration Ring Road—Thurrock

Arlesey Bridge Replacement—Bedfordshire

A142 Fordham Bypass—Cambridgeshire

A1073 Spalding to Eye Improvement—Lincs/Peterborough

A617 Mansfield Ashfield Regeneration Route—Nottinghamshire

Eastern Transport Corridor—Darlington

A689 Sedgefield to Wynard Improvement—Durham

Bridgefoot Environmental Enhancement—Warrington

East Kent Access Phase 1—Kent

Semington to Melksham—Wiltshire

NW Taunton Package—Somerset

Cradley Heath Town Centre—Sandwell

A53 Hodnet Bypass—Shropshire

Barford Bypass—Warwickshire

Rugby Western Bypass—Warwickshire

Biddulph Inner Bypass—Staffordshire

Rugeley Bypass—Staffordshire

Coalfields Link Road Phases 2 and 3—Barnsley

Glasshoughton Coalfields Link Road—Wakefield.

Of the 45 bids for new local major schemes for which bids were received this year, 15 have been provisionally accepted subject to the satisfactory completion of all remaining statutory procedures; the following 25 require further work before a decision can be reached:

A165 Reighton Bypass—N. Yorkshire

A171 Burniston/Cloughton Bypass—N. Yorkshire

A19 Shipton/Beningbrough Bypass—N. Yorkshire

A228 Leybourne and West Malling Bypass—Kent

A24 Horsham-Capel Improvement—W. Sussex

A260 Hawkinge Bypass—Kent

A350 Westbury Bypass—Wiltshire

A36 Codford-Heytesbury Improvement—Wiltshire

A38/A390 Link Dobwalls—Cornwall

A391 Corridor—Cornwall

A418 improvements inlcuding a Rowsham Bypass—Buckinghamshire

A418 Wing Bypass—Buckinghamshire

A57 Cadishead Way—Salford

A605 Stanground Bypass—Peterborough

A61 Killingshall Bypass—N. Yorkshire

A684 Leeming/Aiskew/Bedale Bypass—N. Yorkshire

Ashton Northern Bypass (phase 2)—Tameside

Botley Bypass—Hampshire

Central Route—Sunderland

Chickenhall Lane Link Road—Hampshire

East Middlesbrough Corridor—Middlesbrough

Northern Gateway Stage 2—North Tyneside

Roscommon Way Extension—Essex

Wylye Valley Relief Road—Wiltshire

A1 SE Northumberland Link Road (Central Section)—Northumberland.

The following four were rejected:

A52 Grantham East-West Bypass—Lincolnshire

A182 East Durham Link Road—Durham

Central Somerset Access Package—Somerset

East Middlesbrough Transport Corridor—Middlesbrough.

No decision has yet been announced on the following scheme which is being considered as part of the South East Manchester Multi Modal Study:

Alderley Edge Bypass—Cheshire.

The following local authorities will receive the additional £10 million provided for road maintenance in 2002–03:

Birmingham

Wolverhampton

Brighton and Hove

Cheshire

Isle of Wight

Warwickshire

Oldham

East Riding of Yorkshire

Coventry

Thurrock

Stockport

Poole

Bournemouth.

## Rail Safety

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with *(a)* the HSE, *(b)* Railtrack plc, *(c)* the administrator of his staff and *(d)* Mr. Alan Cooksey concerning issues of rail safety since Railtrack was put into administration. [23985]

**Mr. Jamieson:** My officials have regular meetings with HSE, Railtrack plc and the administrator and his staff at which a variety of matters are discussed.

### Road Schemes

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to fund by PFI *(a)* new and *(b)* existing major road schemes announced in the Local Transport Capital Settlement 2002–03. [23984]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Local authorities are asked, as part of their Local Transport Plans, to examine whether individual major road schemes would be suitable for PFI procurement. Based on this information, the Department has identified a number of schemes which appear to be suitable for PFI procurement. In these cases, we expect each of the local authorities to evaluate whether the scheme would demonstrate better value for money as a PFI deal. Advice and assistance is available from the Department to help local authorities carry out this evaluation. Conventional funding would not be available as an alternative source of funding for schemes that demonstrate better value for money through PFI. At present, a number of existing schemes are undergoing, and new ones have been asked to carry out, such an evaluation. Final decisions on the most appropriate procurement route will be taken when those evaluations are complete.

### Regeneration Projects, Islington

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the regeneration projects *(a)* wholly and *(b)* partly funded by the Government in Islington since May 1997, with the expenditure to date on each project by central Government. [23643]

**Ms Keeble:** Central Government expenditure to date on Islington regeneration schemes is as follows:

£

| *Scheme* | *Expenditure* |
|---|---|
| *Single Regeneration Budget* | |
| Futures Gateway | 189,583 |
| Kings Cross | 30,523,806 |
| Finsbury Park | 4,365,254 |
| City Fringe | 8,000,000 |
| Total | 43,078,643 |
| *New Deal for Communities* | |
| 2000–01 | 10,000 |
| 2001–02 | 595,282 |
| Total | 605,282 |
| *Estates Action* | |
| Prior to 2001–02 | 7,853,895 |
| 2001–02 | [1]504,844 |
| Total | [1]8,358,739 |
| *Neighbourhood Renewal Fund* | |
| 2001–02 | 386,828 |
| *Capital Challenge* | |
| 1997–2000 | [1]9,500,0000 |
| Grand total | [1]61,548,219 |

[1] Estimate

### Jo Moore

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will reply to the letter of 16 November from the hon. Member for Maidenhead regarding his special adviser Jo Moore. [23925]

**Mr. Byers:** I wrote to the hon. Member yesterday.

### Ring-fenced Funds

**Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what funds allocated by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its executive agencies are ring-fenced for specific purposes; and if he will list the allocations of funds involved. [22951]

**Ms Keeble:** All funds allocated by the Department and its executive agencies to recipients in the private, public and voluntary sectors are issued for specific purposes. However, recipients may have more or less flexibility over the use they make of those funds depending on the conditions of the payment regime.

### Government Advisory Group for Motor Cycling

**Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the Government Advisory Group for Motor Cycling has been disbanded. [23699]

**Mr. Jamieson:** No. The advisory group met on 13 November and the next meeting is to be arranged for the spring.

### River Safety

**Mr. Pond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress he has made in implementing the recommendations of Lord Justice Clarke's inquiry into the Marchioness and River Safety; and if he will make a statement. [21588]

**Mr. Jamieson:** On 29 November I announced that I had, that day, placed in the Libraries of the House an updated summary of the action taken on each of Lord Justice Clarke's 74 recommendations. Further updates will be placed in the Libraries at about six monthly intervals.

### Multi-Modal Studies

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures are being taken to speed up delivery from multi-modal studies. [24259]

**Mr. Spellar:** I have asked the Highways Agency, in consultation with the relevant study steering group and Government Office, to identify trunk road schemes which would benefit from additional work to support and inform the study and the subsequent decision-making process. In concert with the Government Office, statutory advisory bodies and regional partners, the Agency will carry out such additional work as may be required to establish these schemes' feasibility. Where the Regional Planning Body and the Secretary of State subsequently agree to progress a scheme, this approach will also facilitate entry to the national Targeted Programme of Improvements. We are working closely with the Strategic Rail Authority to

ensure that consideration of rail schemes is similarly informed and robust and have asked steering groups and Government Offices to identify schemes that would benefit from early assessment. We are also encouraging steering groups to identify local transport schemes for which additional appraisal at an early stage would aid decision making.

### Boundary Commission for Wales

**Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he intends to invite the members of the Boundary Commission for Wales to serve a second term; and if he will make a statement. [24404]

**Mr. Byers:** I have today appointed, for a second term, Professor Kenneth George as a member of the Boundary Commission for Wales. His appointment is effective until 30 June 2005.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has also today appointed, for a second term, Mrs. Susan Smith, as a member of the Boundary Commission for Wales. Mrs. Smith's appointment is also effective until 30 June 2005.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Police Numbers

**Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian staff there are (i) in total and (ii) for each police force in England and Wales at the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [23919]

**Mr. Denham:** The tables show, for March 1997, September 2000, March 2001 and September 2001 total numbers of police officers and civilian staff for each police authority area in England and Wales, together with changes in numbers since March 1997 and September 2000.

On 30 September 2001 total police numbers, including secondments, in England and Wales were 127,231 an increase of 2,645 or 2.1 per cent., compared with the end of September 2000. This is the largest annual increase in police numbers since 1980–81.

Between 30 September 2000 and 30 September 2001 the number of civilian support staff increased by 2,788, or 5.2 per cent., to 56,644.

In total, there were 183,875 police officers and civilian support staff compared with 180,169 in March 1997.

The substantial investment we are putting into the police service is delivering the improvements that we promised. We are on track to meet our target of record police numbers by April 2002 and 130,000 officers by spring 2003.

Following concern about the quality of data in previous police personnel statistics publications, we established a task force to review the data requirement. The report of the task force proposes a comprehensive revision to the current requirements on police personnel statistics. Following consultation with the police service we will implement the necessary changes from September 2002.

*Police strength*

*Full-time equivalent*

| | *Strength* | | | | *Change—Number* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *GOR/police force* | *31 March 1997* | *30 September 2000* | *31 March 2001* | *30 September 2001* | *March 1997 to September 2001* | *September 2000 to September 2001* |
| North East | 6,597 | 6,820 | 6,859 | 6,927 | 330 | 107 |
| Cleveland | 1,459 | 1,421 | 1,407 | 1,434 | −25 | 13 |
| Durham | 1,461 | 1,581 | 1,595 | 1,600 | 140 | 19 |
| Northumbria | 3,677 | 3,818 | 3,857 | 3,893 | 216 | 75 |
| North West | 17,588 | 17,110 | 17,296 | 17,514 | −74 | 404 |
| Cheshire | 2,046 | 2,000 | 2,002 | 2,021 | −25 | 21 |
| Cumbria | 1,144 | 1,048 | 1,048 | 1,075 | −69 | 27 |
| Greater Manchester | 6,922 | 6,767 | 6,909 | 7,036 | 114 | 269 |
| Lancashire | 3,247 | 3,215 | 3,255 | 3,288 | 41 | 74 |
| Merseyside | 4,230 | 4,081 | 4,081 | 4,095 | −135 | 14 |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 11,750 | 11,189 | 11,234 | 11,463 | −287 | 274 |
| Humberside | 2,045 | 1,905 | 1,917 | 1,991 | −54 | 86 |
| North Yorkshire | 1,338 | 1,293 | 1,305 | 1,390 | 52 | 97 |
| South Yorkshire | 3,159 | 3,184 | 3,197 | 3,223 | 64 | 39 |
| West Yorkshire | 5,209 | 4,806 | 4,815 | 4,859 | −350 | 53 |
| East Midlands | 8,436 | 8,350 | 8,490 | 8,550 | 114 | 200 |
| Derbyshire | 1,791 | 1,780 | 1,823 | 1,851 | 60 | 71 |
| Leicestershire | 1,949 | 2,010 | 2,032 | 2,062 | 113 | 52 |
| Lincolnshire | 1,196 | 1,162 | 1,202 | 1,184 | −12 | 22 |
| Northamptonshire | 1,177 | 1,166 | 1,157 | 1,180 | 3 | 14 |
| Nottinghamshire | 2,323 | 2,232 | 2,275 | 2,273 | −50 | 41 |
| West Midlands | 12,290 | 12,324 | 12,429 | 12,474 | 184 | 150 |
| Staffordshire | 2,211 | 2,157 | 2,129 | 2,119 | −92 | −38 |
| Warwickshire | 926 | 912 | 926 | 930 | 4 | 18 |
| West Mercia | 2,040 | 1,906 | 1,951 | 1,994 | −46 | 88 |
| West Midlands | 7,113 | 7,350 | 7,423 | 7,432 | 319 | 82 |
| Eastern | 9,727 | 9,554 | 9,703 | 9,762 | 35 | 208 |
| Bedfordshire | 1,094 | 1,006 | 1,036 | 1,050 | −44 | 44 |
| Cambridgeshire | 1,302 | 1,266 | 1,296 | 1,350 | 48 | 84 |

*Police strength*

*Full-time equivalent*

| GOR/police force | Strength | | | | Change—Number | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *31 March 1997* | *30 September 2000* | *31 March 2001* | *30 September 2001* | *March 1997 to September 2001* | *September 2000 to September 2001* |
| Essex[1] | 2,961 | 2,818 | 2,897 | 2,937 | −24 | 119 |
| Hertfordshire[1] | 1,759 | 1,961 | 1,922 | 1,843 | 84 | −118 |
| Norfolk | 1,432 | 1,387 | 1,420 | 1,436 | 4 | 49 |
| Suffolk | 1,180 | 1,115 | 1,133 | 1,146 | −34 | 31 |
| London | 27,536 | 25,414 | 25,581 | 26,074 | −1,462 | 660 |
| City of London | 859 | 719 | 703 | 699 | −160 | −20 |
| Metropolitan police[1] | 26,677 | 24,695 | 24,878 | 25,374 | −1,303 | 679 |
| South East | 15,111 | 15,349 | 15,381 | 15,378 | 267 | 29 |
| Hampshire | 3,452 | 3,437 | 3,438 | 3,449 | −3 | 12 |
| Kent | 3,260 | 3,239 | 3,319 | 3,367 | 107 | 128 |
| Surrey[1] | 1,620 | 2,113 | 2,066 | 2,018 | 398 | −95 |
| Sussex | 3,085 | 2,812 | 2,855 | 2,837 | −248 | 25 |
| Thames Valley | 3,695 | 3,748 | 3,703 | 3,708 | 13 | −40 |
| South West | 9,424 | 9,354 | 9,576 | 9,693 | 269 | 339 |
| Avon and Somerset | 2,989 | 2,941 | 2,994 | 3,040 | 51 | 99 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 2,865 | 2,873 | 2,934 | 2,972 | 108 | 100 |
| Dorset | 1,284 | 1,299 | 1,354 | 1,360 | 76 | 61 |
| Gloucestershire | 1,133 | 1,142 | 1,173 | 1,169 | 36 | 27 |
| Wiltshire | 1,154 | 1,099 | 1,120 | 1,152 | −2 | 53 |
| Wales | 6,592 | 6,738 | 6,927 | 7,134 | 542 | 396 |
| Dyfed Powys | 1,005 | 1,045 | 1,055 | 1,098 | 94 | 53 |
| Gwent | 1,243 | 1,271 | 1,274 | 1,303 | 60 | 32 |
| North Wales | 1,369 | 1,393 | 1,444 | 1,491 | 122 | 98 |
| South Wales | 2,976 | 3,029 | 3,154 | 3,241 | 265 | 212 |
| England and Wales[2] | 125,051 | 122,203 | 123,476 | 124,969 | −82 | 2,766 |
| Total secondments | 2,107 | 2,383 | 2,206 | 2,261 | 154 | −122 |
| Total[3] | 127,158 | 124,586 | 125,682 | 127,231 | 73 | 2,645 |

[1] As of April 2000, the Metropolitan police force was reduced in size by transfer of responsibility for policing some areas to the surrounding forces of Surrey, Hertfordshire and Essex. These changes need to be borne in mind when comparing figures for these forces before and after April 2000.
[2] Excluding secondments
[3] Including secondments
*Note:*
Because of rounding, constituent parts may not necessarily sum to the totals

*Civilian staff (excluding traffic wardens)*

*Full-time equivalent*

| GOR/police force | Strength | | | | Change—Number | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *31 March 1997* | *30 September 2000* | *31 March 2001* | *30 September 2001* | *March 1997 to September 2001* | *September 2000 to September 2001* |
| North East | 2,557 | 2,583 | 2,496 | 2,562 | 5 | −21 |
| Cleveland | 609 | 598 | 586 | 604 | −5 | 6 |
| Durham | 583 | 573 | 566 | 612 | 29 | 39 |
| Northumbria | 1,365 | 1,413 | 1,344 | 1,346 | −19 | −67 |
| North West | 6,267 | 7,007 | 7,066 | 7,394 | 1,127 | 387 |
| Cheshire | 735 | 870 | 833 | 857 | 122 | −13 |
| Cumbria | 451 | 505 | 588 | 612 | 161 | 107 |
| Greater Manchester | 2,612 | 2,845 | 2,858 | 3,027 | 415 | 182 |
| Lancashire | 1,126 | 1,351 | 1,369 | 1,409 | 283 | 58 |
| Merseyside | 1,343 | 1,437 | 1,418 | 1,489 | 146 | 52 |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 4,762 | 4,923 | 4,939 | 5,221 | 459 | 298 |
| Humberside | 718 | 783 | 808 | 802 | 84 | 19 |
| North Yorkshire | 519 | 533 | 591 | 677 | 158 | 144 |
| South Yorkshire | 1,291 | 1,399 | 1,312 | 1,446 | 156 | 47 |
| West Yorkshire | 2,234 | 2,208 | 2,228 | 2,296 | 62 | 88 |
| East Midlands | 3,555 | 4,039 | 3,855 | 3,914 | 359 | −125 |
| Derbyshire | 723 | 865 | 875 | 874 | 151 | 9 |
| Leicestershire | 755 | 808 | 686 | 691 | −64 | −117 |
| Lincolnshire | 521 | 554 | 561 | 581 | 60 | 27 |
| Northamptonshire | 554 | 648 | 694 | 745 | 192 | 97 |
| Nottinghamshire | 1,003 | 987 | 1,039 | 1,023 | 20 | 36 |
| West Midlands | 4,819 | 5,132 | 5,261 | 5,463 | 644 | 331 |
| Staffordshire | 763 | 897 | 935 | 950 | 188 | 53 |
| Warwickshire | 376 | 388 | 412 | 428 | 52 | 40 |
| West Mercia | 942 | 1,026 | 1,095 | 1,192 | 250 | 166 |
| West Midlands | 2,739 | 2,821 | 2,819 | 2,893 | 155 | 72 |

*Civilian staff (excluding traffic wardens)*

*Full-time equivalent*

| | *Strength* | | | | *Change—Number* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *GOR/police force* | *31 March 1997* | *30 September 2000* | *31 March 2001* | *30 September 2001* | *March 1997 to September 2001* | *September 2000 to September 2001* |
| Eastern | 4,234 | 4,699 | 4,802 | 5,097 | 863 | 398 |
| Bedfordshire | 484 | 488 | 491 | 512 | 28 | 24 |
| Cambridgeshire | 607 | 543 | 614 | 668 | 61 | 125 |
| Essex[1] | 1,199 | 1,472 | 1,447 | 1,509 | 310 | 38 |
| Hertfordshire[1] | 818 | 948 | 935 | 990 | 172 | 42 |
| Norfolk | 603 | 651 | 694 | 759 | 156 | 108 |
| Suffolk | 522 | 592 | 621 | 659 | 137 | 67 |
| London | 13,840 | 10,382 | 10,273 | 10,469 | −3,371 | 87 |
| City of London | 347 | 235 | 233 | 229 | −118 | −6 |
| Metropolitan police[1] | 13,493 | 10,147 | 10,040 | 10,240 | −3,253 | 93 |
| South East | 6,399 | 7,292 | 7,462 | 7,957 | 1,558 | 665 |
| Hampshire | 1,316 | 1,467 | 1,424 | 1,507 | 191 | 40 |
| Kent | 1,384 | 1,670 | 1,796 | 2,022 | 638 | 352 |
| Surrey[1] | 727 | 865 | 897 | 957 | 230 | 92 |
| Sussex | 1,149 | 1,405 | 1,454 | 1,506 | 357 | 101 |
| Thames Valley | 1,825 | 1,890 | 1,891 | 1,965 | 140 | 75 |
| South West | 4,122 | 4,581 | 4,715 | 4,951 | 829 | 370 |
| Avon and Somerset | 1,438 | 1,437 | 1,452 | 1,531 | 93 | 94 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 1,159 | 1,391 | 1,453 | 1,516 | 357 | 125 |
| Dorset | 615 | 681 | 682 | 721 | 106 | 40 |
| Gloucestershire | 435 | 498 | 506 | 533 | 98 | 35 |
| Wiltshire | 475 | 574 | 622 | 650 | 175 | 76 |
| Wales | 2,455 | 2,686 | 2,706 | 2,829 | 374 | 143 |
| Dyfed Powys | 322 | 393 | 401 | 438 | 116 | 45 |
| Gwent | 452 | 490 | 537 | 564 | 112 | 74 |
| North Wales | 476 | 511 | 498 | 559 | 84 | 48 |
| South Wales | 1,206 | 1,293 | 1,270 | 1,268 | 63 | −25 |
| England and Wales[2, 3] | 53,011 | 53,147 | 53,573 | 55,856 | 2,845 | 2,709 |
| Total secondments | n/a | 708 | 765 | 789 | n/a | 81 |
| Total[3, 4] | 53,011 | 53,856 | 54,338 | 56,644 | 3,633 | 2,788 |

[1] As of April 2000, the Metropolitan police force was reduced in size by a transfer of responsibility for policing some areas to the surrounding forces of Surrey, Hertfordshire and Essex. These changes need to be borne in mind when comparing figures for these forces before and after April 2000.

[2] Excluding secondments

[3] In the March 1997 figures, civilian secondments were counted within the civilian figures for the forces from which they were seconded. The increase in civilians between March 1997 and September 2001 take account of this.

[4] Including secondments

*Note:*

Because of rounding, constituent parts may not necessarily sum to the totals

## Terrorism

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on plans to integrate *(a)* cultural exchanges with the Islamic world and *(b)* the Barcelona Process into the fight against terrorism. [22884]

**Peter Hain:** I have been asked to reply.

We are working closely with the British Council, which is designated as our cultural arm overseas. The council has developed a programme called "Open Minds", with proposals to build mutual understanding between young people of different cultures. These include school links and other youth exchanges, and networking between young professionals, future leaders and journalists. The project will focus initially on ten countries with large Muslim populations (Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories, Saudi Arabia and Turkey). It will also involve Muslim communities in the UK.

At the most recent Ministerial Meeting of the Barcelona Process, on 5–6 November, Ministers reiterated their condemnation of the terrorist attacks committed in the United States on 11 September. They underlined the importance of the Barcelona Process as an instrument for promoting a dialogue of equals between cultures and civilisations. Ministers agreed to work on deepening the existing dialogue between cultures and civilisations, focusing on youth, education and the media.

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the willingness of terrorists to commit suicidal acts to inflict substantial loss of life was taken into account in the drafting of the Terrorism Act 2000. [19776]

**Mr. Blunkett:** Such acts are covered by the definition of terrorism in Part One of the Terrorism Act 2000. Following the attacks of September 11 we decided to take stock and review our laws to see where they might need further strengthening. The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill contains proportionate and targeted measures which will ensure and safeguard our way of life against those who would take our freedom away. The Bill takes account of the threat from those helping to organise, fund or facilitate global terrorist acts, including the structures and systems needed by those prepared to undertake suicide attacks.

## Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851

**Mr. Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects to receive the next report of the Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851; [12251]

(2) if he will list the Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851. [12252]

**Mr. Blunkett** *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* I have been informed by the Secretary of the Royal Commission of 1851 that they are no longer obliged to report to Government and have not done so since 1961. Any enquiries should be addressed directly to the Commission.

## Neighbourhood Watch Scheme

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding was provided by central Government to the neighbourhood watch scheme in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [8451]

**Mr. Denham:** The Home Office pays for the production of a range of neighbourhood watch publications, including a training manual for scheme co-ordinators. We also support neighbourhood watch training events. In addition we have this year made up to £80,000 available to ensure that the neighbourhood watch annual conference can go ahead.

## PFI

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 288W, on PFI transactions, what is the *(a)* aggregate of cost savings estimated to have been made through PFI transactions overseen by his Department, *(b)* aggregate capital value of the PFI projects overseen by his Department and *(c)* individual capital value of each PFI project overseen by his Department in the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [13975]

**Mr. Blunkett** *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* The information is as follows:

*(a)* The aggregate of cost savings estimated to have been made through PFI transactions overseen by this Department is £641.63 million.

*(b)* and *(c)* from the best information available, the following table lists the capital value and aggregate value of PFI projects overseen by this Department in the last 10 years:

£ million

| *Transaction/project title* | *Capital value* |
|---|---|
| *2001* | |
| Rainsbrook (Onley) Secure Training Centre Expansion | 5.6 |
| Heat Energy Services Tranche 2 | 12 |
| *2000* | |
| HM Prison (HMP) Ryehill | 37 |
| HMP Dovegate | 64 |
| Quantum | 60 |
| Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) | Not applicable |
| IT2000 (Sirius Programme) | 24.7 |
| Public Safety Radio Communications Project (PSRCP) (Airwave) | 500 |
| *1999* | 0 |
| *1998* | |
| Rainsbrook (Onley) Secure Training Centre | 7.4 |
| Hassockfield (Medomsley) Secure Training Centre | 9.1 |
| HMP Forest Bank | 45 |
| HMPS Heat Energy Services Tranche 1 | 8 |
| HM Young Offender Institution (HMYOI) Ashfield | 26 |
| Passport Application Support System—Front End | 15 |
| Passport Application Support System—Back End | 15 |
| *1997* | |
| Medway (Cookham Wood) Secure Training Centre | 9.1 |
| *1996* | |
| Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) Casework Programme | 41 |
| HMP Parc | 47 |
| HMP Lowdham Grange | 25 |
| *1995* | |
| HMP Altcourse | 68 |
| 1994 | 0 |
| 1993 | 0 |
| 1992 | 0 |
| Aggregate value | 1,018.90 |

## Police Patrols (Private Minibuses)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of occasions on which private minibuses have been hired for police patrol purposes; and what assessment he has made of the cost compared with that of using police vehicles. [18908]

**Mr. Denham:** Decisions to deploy hired minibuses rather than other police vehicles for police patrol purposes are operational matters for Chief Officers.

## Forensic Laboratories

**Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total funding by his Department for the national forensic laboratories in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [12041]

**Angela Eagle:** The Department does not subsidise the Home Office Forensic Science Service in England and Wales. Their income is generated through the services they provide to police forces, the Home Office, the Crown Prosecution Service and the other law enforcement agencies in England and Wales.

The Forensic Science Service receives short-term loans from the Home Office, which are repaid within the same financial year. The Forensic Science Service has received the following aggregate short-term loans:

1999–2000: £5.8 million

2000–01: £2.5 million

2001–02: £4.5 million.

They also have a long-term trading fund loan of £17.92 million, which was made in March 2000 and is repayable over the next 25 years at commercial rates.

### Asylum Applications

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of initial refusals of applications for asylum on the grounds of non-compliance were upheld on appeal for each of the last six months for which data exists. [10723]

**Angela Eagle:** The information requested is not available. Figures regarding the outcome of all asylum appeals (regardless of the type of refusal) are published on the Department's website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/index.htm.

We are continually seeking to expand the information which we are able to publish but we will only do so once we are confident in the data's reliability.

### Assisted Prisoner Visits Unit

**Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual budget for the Assisted Prison Visits Unit in respect of visits to *(a)* British nationals and *(b)* foreign nationals; and under which vote the funds are provided. [22815]

**Beverley Hughes:** The assisted prison visits scheme for England and Wales exists to help prisoners maintain contact with their close family. To qualify for assistance the visitor must be in receipt of a low income or one of a number of benefits as set out in the rules of the scheme. Visitors who meet the qualifying criteria are eligible for assistance without regard to the nationality of the prisoner whom they wish to visit. The scheme provides financial assistance to meet the cost of visiting prisoners who are held in prisons in England and Wales but there are reciprocal arrangements in place with the prison services in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Channel Islands.

The opening budget for the assisted prison visits scheme for 2001–02 is £2.6 million. These funds are provided under Home Office Request for Resources 2 (RfR2): Protecting the public by holding prisoners in decent conditions and reducing re-offending after release.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for the number of offenders completing accredited programmes in the community. [17069]

**Beverley Hughes:** Encouraging progress has been made so far towards the Service Delivery Agreement target (30,000 offenders completing accredited offending behaviour programmes in the community by 2003–04—including 6,000 drug-related programme completions).

Nine offending behaviour programmes have been awarded full accreditation, and two have achieved provisional accreditation. All probation areas are now running accredited general offending programmes, and roll out of other accredited programmes is continuing. It is however too early to provide meaningful figures on the actual numbers of completions.

### Board of Visitors Reports

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Board of Visitors annual reports for prisons in England and Wales for 2001 have been received by his Department. [22481]

**Beverley Hughes:** As of 11 December 2001, annual reports had been received from 44 Boards of Visitors. Since the reporting period each year is staggered, some of the reports for 2001 are not due before the end of March 2002.

### High-risk Offenders

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for legislation to reduce the dangers posed to the public by people with a demonstrable history of high-risk offending. [15177]

**Beverley Hughes:** "Making Punishments Work", the report of a review of the sentencing framework (and known as the Halliday Report), was published on 5 July. One of the key recommendations in the report is that prison sentences of 12 months or more for 'dangerous' (violent and sex) offenders should be subject to special provisions which provide for discretionary release, subject to risk assessment, from the halfway point until the end of the sentence, coupled with the possibility of extended supervision.

We are currently analysing the responses to all the recommendations in the report with a view to formulating final proposals for legislation on a new framework for sentencing.

We also recently published a review of Part One of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 (the register of sex offenders) for public consultation. The consultation period ended on 19 October and we are currently analysing the responses to its recommendations for strengthening the legislation.

In addition, the Government plan to introduce new Mental Health legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows. This will provide a clear legal framework for the detention of those who pose a significant risk of serious harm to others as a result of a mental disorder, including a personality disorder.

These proposals will build on earlier measures we have taken to improve public protection including: implementation of the Sex Offenders Act 1997; provisions in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 for sex offender orders and extended supervision of sexual and violent offenders; and provisions in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 to ban unsuitable people working with children and to strengthen the Sex Offenders Act.

### Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act

**Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders have been sentenced under *(a)* section 109, *(b)* section 110 and *(c)* section 111 of the powers of the Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [21641]

**Beverley Hughes:** We have a record of 310 life sentences imposed under what is now section 109 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 (PCC(S)A). We only have reliable figures for sentences

imposed under what is now section 110 and 111 of the PCC(S)A for the period from December 1999 to June 2000. There were four offenders sentenced under section 110 for repeat drug offences. Current figures indicate that there have been no mandatory sentences imposed under what is now section 111 which deals with repeat burglars.

### Prison Estate Services (Privatisation)

**Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the inquiry into the scope for further privatisation of services within the prison estate; and if he will make a statement. [21638]

**Beverley Hughes:** I am considering the review commissioned by my predecessor on the private finance initiative (PFI) and market-testing in the Prison Service conducted by Pat Carter. I expect to publish it shortly.

### New Prisons

**Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for future contracts for new prisons to be agreed on the basis of private sector design and building and public sector management; and if he will make a statement. [21639]

**Beverley Hughes:** The only new programme currently planned are for prisons designed, constructed, managed and financed by the private sector at Peterborough and Ashford. Any requirement for new prisons beyond these will be for discussion in the current spending review.

### Probation Service

**Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to put to tender local probation service facilities; and what consultation has taken place with employers and employees concerning such reform. [21622]

**Beverley Hughes:** There is currently a phased procurement exercise taking place to put to tender National Probation Service facilities management functions on a property division basis. Consultation has taken place and will continue to do so, with employers and staff, including trades unions and employers groups.

**Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the criteria used are in assessing whether local probation services facilities should be the subject of tendering; and if he will make a statement. [21623]

**Beverley Hughes:** Facilities Management Services to be subjected to tendering are to be selected on the basis of those assessed as having the potential to provide better value for money. With the creation of a national service on 1 April 2001 there is greater need for consistency in service delivery and the opportunity to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of probation services through benefiting from economies of scale.

### Anti-terrorism Legislation

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what preparations he has made to accommodate suspected international terrorists in the event of legislation before the House being enacted; which prisons and other buildings have been identified for use; which body has been tasked to prepare the administration of accommodation for suspected international terrorists in detention; what arrangements have been made to provide separate secure accommodation for *(a)* women and *(b)* persons under 18 years of age; what security regime will be put in place at these institutions; what arrangements are being made for suspected international terrorists (i) to receive visitors and (ii) to maintain family relations; what preparations he has made to allow those in detention to practise their religion and to meet their dietary requirements; and what special training he has established to prepare prison officers to treat detainees in accordance with international best practice. [21309]

**Beverley Hughes:** The Prison Service will be responsible for the safe and secure custody of any such detainees. We have identified suitable secure facilities within the Prison Service Estate. Prison Service rules will apply in respect of all aspects of the detention.

### Northumbria Police

**Mr. Alan Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were in post in the Northumbria police area in *(a)* May 1997, *(b)* September 2001 and *(c)* each reporting period in between. [17990]

**Mr. Denham:** The information requested is set out in the table. Police numbers information is collected in March and September. Police strength figures for September 2001 are not yet available but Northumbria police have provided officer numbers for August 2001.

*Full-time equivalent*

| | *Police strength in Northumbria* | *Civilian support staff* |
|---|---|---|
| March 1997 | 3,677 | 1,365 |
| September 1997 | 3,689 | 1,385 |
| March 1998 | 3,769 | 1,362 |
| September 1998 | 3,802 | 1,430 |
| March 1999 | 3,840 | 1,443 |
| September 1999 | 3,800 | 1,482 |
| March 2000 | 3,788 | 1,417 |
| September 2000 | 3,818 | 1,413 |
| March 2001 | 3,857 | 1,416 |
| September 2001 | 3,908 | n/a |

*Source:*

Home Office Statistical Bulletins—Police Service Strength 1997–2001 (March and September figures)

Northumbria police has set a budgeted workforce total for 31 March 2002 of 4,000 officers.

### Policing (Merseyside)

**Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding has been allocated for policing in Merseyside in each year since 1997, broken down into budget headings. [18219]

**Mr. Denham:** The amount of funding allocated for policing in Merseyside is as follows.

*Annual police settlements*

*£ million*

| | *Police grant* | *Revenue support grant* | *National non domestic rates* | *Total Government funding* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 113.6 | 65.8 | 28.1 | 207.5 |
| 1998–99 | 119.1 | 66.5 | 27.6 | 213.2 |
| 1999–2000 | 118.7 | 67.1 | 29.5 | 215.3 |
| 2000–01 | 122.2 | 65.9 | 32.6 | 220.7 |
| 2001–02 | 126.7 | 70.3 | 32.2 | 229.2 |

*Crime fighting fund*

*£ million*

| | |
|---|---|
| 2000–01 | 1.6 |
| 2001–02 | [1]5.0 |

[1] It is expected that the force will receive this amount in respect of 124 Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) recruits from 2000–01 and a further 93 new CFF recruits projected for 2001–02

*Capital*

Under present arrangements, capital grant is paid to police authorities. Grant also continues to be paid towards the annual loan charges on capital sums borrowed under earlier grant rules.

*£ million*

| | *Capital grant* | *Loan charges grant* |
|---|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 3.8 | 0.48 |
| 1998–99 | 2.3 | 0.34 |
| 1999–2000 | 2.0 | 0.35 |
| 2000–01 | 2.5 | 0.32 |
| 2001–02 | 2.3 | [1]0.29 |

[1] Provisional

*Individual Payments*

Home Office accounts records show that the force has also received the following individual payments:

| | *Purpose* | *£* |
|---|---|---|
| August 1997 | Police Firearms grant | 66,556 |
| August 1999 | Police Beacon scheme | 83,000 |
| March 2000 | Police Beacon scheme | 8,880 |
| October 2000 | Anti-robbery grant | 1,800,000 |
| December 2000 | Execution of warrants | 145,987 |
| March 2001 | National Fuel Distribution Emergency | [1]320,939 |
| July 2001 | National Intelligence Model | 115,800 |

[1] A further estimated £36,000 will be paid in 2001–02, subject to audit of claims

*Crime Reduction Programme*

Under the Crime Reduction Programme over £10 million has been allocated since 1999 to Crime and Disorder Reduction partnerships for projects in Merseyside.

## Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much of the £11 million allocated for running costs and service development work in 2001–02 in respect of new places in the Prison Service High Security estate has been reallocated to other key Home Office priorities. [22091]

**Beverley Hughes** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The initial allocation in 2001–02 for running costs and service development was £11 million. This figure was necessarily an estimated projection of likely spend for the year because of the ground-breaking nature of this work. Project spend is carefully monitored and regular forecasting exercises are carried out.

Latest projections show that £5.67 million will be spent within this financial year, and £5.33 million reallocated to other key Home Office priorities.

## Police (North Wales)

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were employed in North Wales in each of the last 10 years; and how many he estimates will be employed over the next five years. [17957]

**Mr. Denham:** The historic information requested is set out in the table. At 31 March 2001 North Wales police numbers were at record levels. In addition, North Wales police employed 498 civilian support staff at 31 March 2001.

| *Year as at 31 March* | *Police officers in post*[1] |
|---|---|
| 1991 | 1,349 |
| 1992 | 1,347 |
| 1993 | 1,360 |
| 1994 | 1,352 |
| 1995 | 1,366 |
| 1996 | 1,378 |
| 1997 | 1,369 |
| 1998 | 1,396 |
| 1999 | 1,391 |
| 2000 | 1,403 |
| 2001 | 1,444 |
| 2002[2] | 1,506 |
| 2003[2] | 1,529 |

[1] Full time equivalents
[2] Estimate

The Chief Constable of North Wales police has provided the estimates for 2002 and 2003, but is unable to make an estimate for later years.

## Fingerprinting

**Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many errors in fingerprint identification have been discovered in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the Greater Manchester area in the last five years. [16950]

**Mr. Denham:** This information is not collated nationally.

During the last five years over 75,000 crime scene submissions have been received in the Greater Manchester Police Fingerprint Unit, which have produced nearly 19,000 identifications. In the last five years, two cases in which a person who was incorrectly identified.

Greater Manchester Police Fingerprint Unit has an excellent reputation and performance record and has taken all practical steps to mitigate the risk of any further occurrences.

## Terrorist Prison Sentences

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are serving a prison sentence *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in Northern Ireland for acts of terrorism. [20437]

**Beverley Hughes:** The number of people serving a prison sentence in the United Kingdom for acts of terrorism is not held centrally. If a person commits an act of terrorism, they are generally charged and convicted of an offence relating to the effect that the act has had. For example, if people are killed as a result, the prisoner is likely to be convicted of murder.

The latest figures show that between 1 January 2000 and 18 February 2001, 46 people were detained in Great Britain under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 of whom 26 were subsequently charged with an offence. Nine were charged with an offence under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 and 17 were charged with other offences (14 for kidnapping, including hijackings). Further information is contained within the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 'Statistics on the Operation of Prevention of Terrorism Legislation', 16/01, Great Britain 2001. This bulletin is available at the web address: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/hosb1601.pdf

The request for information on prisoners in Northern Ireland should be directed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

### Anti-crime Strategies (The Elderly)

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what strategies are in place to protect the elderly from becoming the victims of burglary and violent crime; and if he will make a statement. [19360]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The Government's Crime Reduction Strategy, which was published in November 1999, set out what we are doing to tackle various crimes including domestic burglary. Our publication "Fighting violent crime together: an action plan" sets out what we are doing to tackle violent crime. Neither is specifically targeted at elderly victims; crime statistics show that the elderly are generally at lower risk of victimisation. However, various initiatives have been aimed specifically at preventing elderly people becoming victims of these types of crime including:

A number of projects under the Reducing Burglary Initiative (part of the Crime Reduction Programme) with interventions specifically addressing burglary against the elderly.

Over £2 million allocated to three projects specifically designed to combat distraction burglary, which primarily affects the elderly, and a further £1 million for the work of the distraction burglary task force.

A home security scheme for pensioners, which provides security checks and, where needed, additional security measures for eligible pensioners.

Home Office publicity on crime prevention contains detailed advice to help the elderly reduce the risk of burglary, including burglary by fraudulent callers.

The Government approach to tackling violent crime includes:

providing the police with resources in terms of manpower and modern technology to enable them to develop more efficient intelligence-led policing and problem orientated policing;

more effective punishment, through the creation of a new sentencing structure;

dealing with the root causes of violent crime by looking at measures to divert young people from crime;

giving the courts new community disposals to curtail offending behaviour at an early stage;

the Crime Reduction expenditure includes Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) schemes to improve personal safety in public areas.

### Charity Check

**Mr. Letwin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will withhold grants to charities which do not comply with good practice as laid down by Charity Check. [20182]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* No. Charity Check is self-appointed to the role it aims to play in the control of fundraising. The Charity Commission is the regulatory body for charities and in the case of collections being made for charitable purposes the Commission has powers under the Charities Act 1993 to look into instances where it appears that funds raised for charitable causes may be at risk.

### Police Service (Devon and Cornwall)

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police stations were closed in Devon and Cornwall, in each year since 1997; and what plans he has to help rural communities benefit from locally-based police. [17276]

**Mr. Denham:** I understand from the chief constable that the numbers of police stations closed in Devon and Cornwall since 1997 are as follows:

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 5 |
| 1997–98 | 4 |
| 1998–99 | 3 |
| 1999–2000 | 4 |
| 2000–01 | 0 |
| 1 April to 22 November 2001 | 0 |

Police authorities are now required to undertake public consultation before closure of police stations in their area.

The Government fully recognise the special needs of rural policing, and the demands of delivering a high quality service to communities with a low population density. £15 million was made available in 2000–01 to enhance the policing service in rural areas. Financial provision for future years has been included in the SR2000 settlement. Forces that police sparsely populated areas benefit from a further £30 million in 2001–02, and similar provision exists for 2002–03 and 2003–04.

Devon and Cornwall was allocated more than £1.5 million Rural Funding in 2000–01, and £3.1 million for the current year. These sums are greater than the allocations to any other force area.Police authorities which are allocated a share of the fund are required to publish a statement in their Annual/Best Value Policing Plans on how the money has been, and will be, spent.

In addition, the White Paper "Policing a New Century", published on 5 December, set out plans for increasing the accessibility of the police service to the public.

### Rough Sleepers Unit

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what communications *(a)* his Department and *(b)* affiliated organisations have had in the last four years with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Rough Sleepers Unit concerning rough sleeping headcounts in London. [22051]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Regular contact is made between officials, but I am not aware of specific communication over the rough sleeping headcounts. I am also aware that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has met with Louise Casey.

### Prison Education

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the range and provision of education to prison inmates; and what type of work is made available in prisons. [20961]

**Beverley Hughes** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* All prisons must provide a core curriculum of basic skills, life and social skills and information technology skills. The main thrust of education in prisons is to provide opportunities for offenders to attain a range of nationally recognised qualifications up to level 2, which will enhance their employability on release. We are encouraging the integration of basic skills across prison regimes in areas such as physical education, kitchens, vocational training (VT) workshops and arts and crafts classes. Provision is also made for those with higher levels of ability, for example through distance learning.

Prisoners are employed in a range of work-related activities which include: industry workshops supplying goods and services for the Prison Service and outside commercial contractors and catering, cleaning, works and garden parties providing services within each establishment. Industries and training workshops offer prisoners opportunities to learn job skills and to achieve nationally recognised qualifications, such as NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) and construction awards. VT courses cover a wide range of learning areas such as, catering, industrial cleaning, construction skills, motor mechanics, engineering, hairdressing, and manufacturing.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters of 14 August and 3 October from the hon. Member for Putney on behalf of his constituent Ms Saeeda Dualeh Jibril (Ref. O 128662). [16767]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 18 December 2001. I am extremely sorry for the delay in replying.

### Travellers

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent guidance he has issued to police forces on the handling of travellers and traveller encampments. [21728]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) provides operational guidance to police forces on powers to direct travellers or other trespassers to leave land when the appropriate statutory requirements are met. The guidance is kept under regular review.

Research has been conducted to review the effectiveness of the current Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR)/Home Office Good Practice Guidance on Managing Unauthorised Camping. A summary of the findings was published by the DTLR on 2 November and a copy placed in the Library.

### Blantyre House

**Mr. Norman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the report on allegations of bullying at Blantyre House will be published before the end of the year; [21843]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* prison service officials, *(b)* inmates and *(c)* former staff interviewed as part of the investigation into allegations of bullying at Blantyre House; and on what dates they were interviewed. [21844]

**Beverley Hughes:** I am unable to provide a list of the people interviewed as part of this investigation. This is because all witnesses are assured that their participation in, and any information resulting from, interviews during the course of a prison service disciplinary inquiry is treated in the strictest confidence. However, these allegations are being thoroughly investigated. The report into allegations of bullying will be completed by the end of the year and submitted to the commissioning authority in the new year. It is not intended to publish the report.

**Mr. Norman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the budget was for education at Blantyre House in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* the preceding three years. [21842]

**Beverley Hughes:** The education budget for Blantyre House for the period 1997 to 2001 was:

£

| *Period* | *Total* |
|---|---|
| 1998–99[1] | 164,000 |
| 1999–2000[1] | 204,775 |
| 2000–01[1] | 197,820 |
| 2001–02[2] | 170,000 |

[1] Actual spend
[2] Projected budget

During the period 1999 to 2000 the actual spend included one-off provision of information technology equipment for a new course.

**Mr. Norman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours were spent by inmates at Blantyre House in colleges of further education outside the prison in 2001; and what the figures were in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 1999. [21841]

**Beverley Hughes:** The information requested can only be collected by manual collation of the data from prisoner records and databases and would be at a disproportionate cost. However, 21 prisoners at Blantyre House attended college in 1999–2000, 12 attended in 2000–01, and eight

are attending in 2001–02. Details of hours spent by these prisoners on courses at further education colleges is not collected.

**Mr. Norman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many resignations there have been by members of staff at Blantyre House in the last 12 months; and if he will list them. [21840]

**Beverley Hughes:** One member of staff, a plant attendant, resigned and was re-engaged as an Operational Support Grade. There have been no other resignations of Prison Service in the last twelve months. Teaching staff are provided under contract by the Kent Adult Education Service. During the last twelve months one full time tutor and one sessional tutor provided to Blantyre House under this contract have resigned from their employment.

**Mr. Norman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the ratio of short-term to long-term inmates at Blantyre House is; and what the ratio was in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 1999. [21839]

**Beverley Hughes:** Blantyre House only accepts prisoners with a minimum length of four years, and all its prisoners are therefore classified as long-term. This was also the case in 1999 and 2000.

It may be, however, that the hon. Member is interested in any change in periods prisoners have left to serve when coming to Blantyre House. To maximise the numbers of prisoners who can benefit from the resettlement opportunities available at Blantyre House, the establishment is now accepting prisoners with a minimum of two years left to serve, which is shorter than was formerly the case. In order to maintain a balance in the population, however, the number of life sentence prisoners held there is being increased. Historical data on the lengths of sentence remaining to prisoners at Blantyre House are not available.

## Police Funding

**Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the percentage change in funding allocation to each police authority per head of resident population in each police authority between 2001–02 and 2002–03. [21703]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The percentage change in provisional grant allocation for 2002–03 compared with 2001–02 to each police authority per head of resident population is given in the table. Grant allocation includes Home Office Police Grant, Revenue Support Grant (from DTLR), National Non Domestic Rates, Crime Fighting Fund allocations and, where applicable, rural policing fund grants. The 2002–03 allocations given here are provisional.

In 2002–03 the costs for National Crime Squad/National Criminal Intelligence Service will be paid directly from the centre rather than by the previous system of levies on police authorities. To provide a realistic comparison of funding for 2002–03 against 2001–02 provision for the NCS and NCIS levy has been deducted from the total allocation for 2001–02.

Resident population is one of a number of indicators used in the calculation of the police funding formula. Details of the indicators and their relative value in determining the allocation for individual forces are set out in The Provisional Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2002–03, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

| *Police force* | *Grant funding per head 2001–02 (£)* | *Grant funding per head 2002–03 (£)* | *Percentage change* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Avon and Somerset | 100.55 | 105.03 | 4.46 |
| Bedfordshire | 101.29 | 106.24 | 4.89 |
| Cambridgeshire | 93.75 | 97.33 | 3.82 |
| Cheshire | 99.69 | 104.23 | 4.56 |
| City of London | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Cleveland | 141.32 | 147.03 | 4.04 |
| Cumbria | 114.95 | 119.21 | 3.71 |
| Derbyshire | 96.27 | 101.56 | 5.49 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 100.17 | 105.32 | 5.14 |
| Dorset | 85.83 | 89.48 | 4.26 |
| Durham | 127.10 | 131.96 | 3.83 |
| Dyfed Powys | 102.47 | 107.16 | 4.57 |
| Essex | 92.13 | 96.54 | 4.80 |
| GLA all functions | 261.31 | 275.43 | 5.40 |
| Gloucestershire | 98.94 | 103.29 | 4.40 |
| Greater Manchester | 139.38 | 145.77 | 4.58 |
| Gwent | 116.74 | 121.90 | 4.42 |
| Hampshire | 98.50 | 103.75 | 5.33 |
| Hertfordshire | 92.30 | 97.04 | 5.14 |
| Humberside | 120.67 | 124.28 | 2.99 |
| Kent | 107.87 | 112.09 | 3.91 |
| Lancashire | 116.96 | 121.86 | 4.19 |
| Leicestershire | 100.51 | 105.13 | 4.60 |
| Lincolnshire | 92.50 | 96.21 | 4.01 |
| Merseyside | 162.87 | 168.27 | 3.32 |
| Norfolk | 96.95 | 102.25 | 5.47 |
| North Yorkshire | 91.81 | 95.88 | 4.44 |
| Northamptonshire | 96.02 | 99.68 | 3.81 |
| Northumbria | 143.05 | 147.73 | 3.27 |
| North Wales | 106.86 | 111.02 | 3.90 |
| Nottinghamshire | 114.20 | 117.92 | 3.25 |
| South Wales | 122.54 | 128.64 | 4.98 |
| South Yorkshire | 125.13 | 129.17 | 3.22 |
| Staffordshire | 96.58 | 100.12 | 3.67 |
| Suffolk | 92.72 | 96.47 | 4.05 |
| Surrey | 77.04 | 79.63 | 3.36 |
| Sussex | 96.94 | 101.43 | 4.62 |
| Thames Valley | 93.91 | 98.48 | 4.87 |
| Warwickshire | 92.21 | 95.42 | 3.48 |
| West Mercia | 90.12 | 93.65 | 3.92 |
| West Midlands | 139.62 | 144.64 | 3.59 |
| West Yorkshire | 128.84 | 133.40 | 3.54 |
| Wiltshire | 93.84 | 97.36 | 3.75 |

*Note:*

1. The Corporation of the City of London have grants calculated as a local authority with wider functions than police. The principal police grant is given in the Provisional Police Grant Report.

## Gulf War (Detentions)

**Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 350W, on detentions, how many of the *(a)* Iraqis and *(b)* Palestinians detained during the Gulf War were compensated. [18616]

**Angela Eagle:** No Iraqis or Palestinians have been paid compensation for their detention during the Gulf War.

An out of court settlement of £20,000 was made in the case of one Iraqi, who sued the Home Office for damages for false imprisonment.

### Public Bodies

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those public bodies which are the responsibility of his Department and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000. [17595]

**Angela Eagle:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 333W.

### Recidivism

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to collect and publish information on reoffending rates by penal institution. [22286]

**Beverley Hughes:** Reoffending rates are not normally measured as they rely on the self-reporting of offending by offenders. Such an approach can lead to questions over the reliability of data based on individuals' recollection and willingness to impart their offending behaviour to an official source.

Reconviction rates for all prisoners are published annually in Prison Statistics England and Wales, copies of which are available in the Library.

It is not appropriate, as a matter of routine, to publish reconviction rates by establishment. This is because the data source which enables prison reconviction rates to be measured only identifies the establishment from which an offender is finally discharged; a prisoner may have spent the majority of their time in custody in other establishments. The number of offenders finally discharged from individual establishments can be so small that any results produced would not be statistically robust.

### Child Pornography

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department is taking to tackle child pornography on the internet. [22113]

**Beverley Hughes:** The Government are committed to tackling child pornography on the internet. We are determined to ensure that there are effective measures to combat this exploitation of children. In January 2001 we raised the maximum penalties for taking, making, distributing or showing indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children to 10 years (from three years), and the maximum penalty for simple possession of such material to five years (from six months).

We have made substantial investment in law enforcement to enhance the capability of the police to investigate serious and organised crime committed via computers or computer networks, such as the internet. In April, the National Hi-Tech Crime Unit was established, within the National Crime Squad, to investigate or support the investigation of such serious criminal activity, including the production and distribution of child pornography.

In March, a task force on child protection on the internet was established to identify and implement the best ways in which children can be better protected when using the internet. Within the task force, Government, industry, the police and the children's charities have come together to, among other things, scope new legislative measures specifically to tackle 'grooming' of children by paedophiles online (and offline).

We support the work of the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), which was set up in 1996 by internet service providers to enable members of the public, via a hotline, to report child pornography and other potentially illegal material in a newsgroup or website. If the material is considered illegal, the foundation passes details to the United Kingdom police to initiate action against the originators and asks British internet service providers (ISPs) to deny access to the sites concerned. If the originators are abroad, the foundation passes the report to the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) who liaise with the enforcement agencies of the countries concerned. Since it was established, the IWF has asked United Kingdom internet service providers to remove nearly 30,000 illegal items from the internet.

Internationally, the Government actively support efforts within the European Union, and more widely, to combat child pornography on the internet. In November, we signed the Council of Europe convention on cybercrime, which will underpin co-operative action between signatory states in respect of computer-related crimes, including the making, distribution and possession of child pornography.

### Internet Chat Rooms

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department is taking to raise public awareness of the dangers of children being targeted by paedophiles using internet chat rooms. [22112]

**Beverley Hughes:** On 3 December the Government launched a £1.5 million advertising campaign to deliver clear and consistent messages to internet users so they can enjoy the massive benefits of the internet in safety.

The campaign is split in two discrete but complementary campaigns. One aimed at parents of 11 to 14-year-olds has begun. The other, aimed at 14 to 16-year-olds, starts in early January 2002. The whole campaign will run until March.

The parents campaign started on 3 December with press advertisements in the national press and women's weekly magazines. The adverts explain the benefits of the internet and offer advice to parents on how to help their children chat safely online. Parents who want further information can call the UKonline centre (0800 77 1234) for a booklet about chatrooms or download the leaflet online by visiting www.wiseuptothenet.co.uk.

The campaign for young people will involve cinema, radio, online and teen press advertising. A dedicated website (www.thinkuknow.co.uk) will provide further information and advice.

The campaign was initiated by the task force on child protection on the internet. Created by the Home Secretary in March this year, the task force is a partnership of Government, industry, police and charitable organisations working together to tackle the danger posed to children by online paedophiles. It has two simple but ambitious aims: to make the United Kingdom the best and safest

place in the world for children to use the internet; and to help protect children the world over from abuse fuelled by criminal misuse of new technologies.

### Crime Reduction Funding

**Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give *(a)* the reasons for the projected change in net provision of money for police and crime reduction in 2001–02, *(b)* details of those areas of action which have received less funding than was provided for at the commencement of financial year 2001–02 and *(c)* examples of measures which are funded under Request for Resources 1-A. [22131]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The projected change in net provision of £23,746,000 for policing and crime reduction in 2001–02 arises from:

the transfer of provision to other parts of the Home Office and to other government departments that administer policing, crime reduction and anti-drugs initiatives on behalf of the Home Office's Policing and Crime Reduction Group;

the uptake of End Year Flexibility in respect of the Crime Reduction Programme and the Confiscated Assets Fund;

the transfer from the Cabinet Office to the Home Office in June 2001 of responsibility for the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit; and

a transfer of provision from the Prison Service in support of police scientific development work.

The projected change in net provision for policing and crime reduction does not represent a reduction of available funding for any particular initiative, but rather a transfer of provision to areas undertaking these initiatives.

Request for Resources 1-A is intended to meet the cost of delivering a wide range of policing, crime reduction and anti-drugs initiatives. Examples include:

the recruitment and training of police officers under the Crime Fighting Fund;

Crime Reduction Programme funding to trial the effectiveness of a range of crime reduction initiatives;

the expansion of the database of DNA samples.

### Publicity Campaigns

**Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total costs to date are of publicity campaigns for *(a)* police recruitment and *(b)* vehicle crime prevention. [22134]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The total costs to date for the police recruitment and vehicle crime reduction publicity campaigns are as follows:

2000–01

Police £7.35 million

Vehicle crime reduction £8.67 million

April 2001 to date

Police £4.78 million

Vehicle crime reduction £4.26 million.

### Resource Allocation

**Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give *(a)* the reasons for the projected change in net provision of money for criminal policy and programmes in 2001–02, *(b)* details of those areas of action which have received less funding than was provided for at the commencement of financial year 2001–02 and *(c)* examples of measures which are funded under Request for Resources B1. [22133]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* *(a)* Reasons for the changes are set out in Command Paper 5514 Home Office Winter Supplementary Estimates, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

*(b)* No areas of action funded under B1 have received less funding than was provided for at the commencement of the current financial year other than for the reasons set out at *(a)* above. However underspends in these areas may be redirected to other priority areas later in the current financial year.

*(c)* The principal activities funded under B1 are the National Probation Service, and the administration costs of the units that comprise Criminal Policy Group.

### Blakenhurst Prison

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contract price was agreed by the Prison Service when the public sector took over HMP Blakenhurst at Redditch; and what additional sums have since been agreed. [22261]

**Beverley Hughes:** The year one price for the Service Level Agreement (SLA) at Blakenhurst prison is £10,143,844. The additional annual costs that have since been agreed amount to £58,000. There will also be a payment of £166,000 per year to cover Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment regulations (TUPE) costs for the first three years of the SLA.

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 84W, on asylum seekers, what categories of data to be stored on the microchip on the asylum seeker's identification card were added after 5 November. [15273]

**Angela Eagle:** The list we provided earlier has been subjected to change. Discussions are still continuing in order to conclude a final list. Once this has been agreed, I will place a copy in the Library.

**Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bed spaces the Landmark company is contracted to provide for asylum seekers. [18346]

**Angela Eagle:** I regret that I am unable to supply this information on the grounds that details of individual contracts between National Asylum Support Service and its suppliers are commercial in confidence.

**Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department concluded the last contract with the Landmark company in respect of asylum seekers; and which properties this was in respect of. [18347]

**Angela Eagle:** The National Asylum Support Service has a single contract with the Landmark company for five years effective from 3 April 2000. I am unable to disclose precise details of the properties involved as there is a need

to protect and preserve rights to privacy and security of the individuals living in accommodation provided by Landmark.

**Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the administrative costs of the policy of dispersing asylum seekers were. [12872]

**Angela Eagle:** In the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 the administrative costs of National Asylum Support Service (NASS) were £15.6 million[1]. In addition, grants totalling £14 million[1] were paid to voluntary sector organisations by NASS to recognise their role in the dispersal scheme. These figures include start-up costs for NASS.

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest £0.1 million.

### International Development Foundation

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the Charity Commission investigation into the International Development Foundation. [14822]

**Angela Eagle:** This is a matter for the Charity Commission who will write to my hon. Friend. A copy of the Commission's reply will be placed in the Library.

## DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

### Permanent Secretaries

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the merits of recruiting from the private sector to fill vacancies at permanent secretary level. [23607]

**Mr. Leslie:** Like any organisation, the civil service benefits from people coming in at all levels. Since the beginning of 1999 well over half of the vacancies at permanent secretary level have gone to open competition and a number of external appointments have been made.

It takes an outstanding individual to come in at the very top of any organisation without previous experience of that sector. There is, however, an increased use of open competition at other levels in the senior civil service, which should broaden the future field of permanent secretary candidates. Last year 202 SCS posts were advertised, and almost two-thirds were won by candidates from outside the civil service.

### Civil Service Code

**Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many complaints have been reported under paragraph 11 of the civil service code since 13 May 1999; how many of these related to special advisers; and how many have been reported to the civil service commissioners under paragraph 12 of the code. [23385]

**Mr. Leslie:** Information on the number of complaints made within Departments under paragraph 11 of the civil service code is not held centrally. However, information on appeals made under paragraph 12 of the civil service code are set out in the annual report of the civil service commissioners. A copy of the commissioners' latest annual report for the year 2000–01 is in the Library of the House.

### Devolved Administrations

**Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans the Government have to publish a revised edition of the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations. [24329]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I am publishing today as Cm 5240 a revised edition of the Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary agreements between the UK Government, Scottish Ministers, the Cabinet of the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Executive Committee. Copies of this document have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and will be made available on the Cabinet Office website shortly.

### Government Car Service

**Richard Burden:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list, by manufacturer and country of manufacture, the composition of the Government Car Service fleet for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97, *(d)* 1997–98, *(e)* 1998–99, *(f)* 1999–2000 and *(g)* 2000–01. [23094]

**Mr. Leslie:** The Government Car and Despatch Agency's fleet composition for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is as follows:

| *Manufacturer* | *Number*[1] | *Number*[2] | *Country of manufacture* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rover | 44 | 35 | United Kingdom |
| Jaguar | 12 | 15 | United Kingdom |
| Ford | 98 | 77 | Belgium |
| | 3 | 3 | Portugal |
| | 15 | 24 | United Kingdom |
| Vauxhall | 65 | 67 | Germany |
| | 6 | 7 | United Kingdom |
| Nissan | 5 | 8 | United Kingdom |
| Total | 248 | 236 | |

[1] Year end 2000
[2] Year end 2001

The Government Car and Despatch Agency was formed in April 1997. Information on fleet composition by country of manufacture is available only for years 1999–2000 and 2000–01. Information for earlier years is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Staff Numbers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people were employed in his Department in each of the last four years. [23785]

**Mr. Leslie:** The numbers of staff in all Departments are shown in Table C of Civil Service Statistics 2000, published on 31 August 2001. Copies are in the Libraries of the House.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Government Bills (Human Rights)

**Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will provide more specific information about the consideration given to human rights issues by Government Bills. [24725]

**Mr. Wills:** Yes. The Government have agreed changes to the relevant guidance so that the explanatory notes of all Government Bills first introduced after 1 January 2002 will draw attention to the main Convention issues raised by a Bill. I hope that this will further assist the House in its debates on these matters.

### Public Guardianship Office

**Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what additional key performance targets have been agreed for the Public Guardianship Office. [24364]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** Two additional key performance targets for the Public Guardianship Office have been agreed as follows:

1. to achieve 75 per cent. effective visits by March 2002; and
2. to achieve a unit cost per case of not more than £425.

### Legal Aid

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the size is of the eligibility package for legal aid for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; and when it will take effect. [22551]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** Changes to the financial conditions for public funding were implemented on 3 December 2001 and will apply to new cases from that date. The cost of this package is £2.5 million this year (2001–02) and £10 million for 2002–03. We estimate that an additional 5 million people will become eligible to obtain publicly funded advice and assistance.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Monument Oil

**Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has had with representatives of Monument Oil in the last 12 months. [20239]

**Mr. Wilson:** None. Monument Oil was taken over by Lasmo in 1999 and Lasmo have themselves since been taken over by Eni.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many and what proportion of letters received by her Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18596]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by ministerial agency chief executives, and Departments and agencies and performance in handling them is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 325W.

Figures broken down in percentages of replies within each of the specified timescales are unavailable, however my Department monitors its performance annually by sample for all correspondence (excluding ministerial) against the Whitehall standard "to answer all correspondence within 15 working days". The latest figure available is for 2000–01 when the department answered 95 per cent. of correspondence within this target. The volume of correspondence was estimated to be 81,726.

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many, and what proportion of letters received by the Department from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July were replied to in *(a)* under 15, *(b)* under 20, *(c)* under 30, *(d)* under 40 and *(e)* over 40 working days. [22007]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* 936 letters were received by this Department from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. The proportion of letters replied to in *(a)* under 15, *(b)* under 20, *(c)* under 30, *(d)* under 40 and *(e)* over 40 working days were as follows:

| | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| Under 15 | 65.96 |
| Under 20 | 71.61 |
| Under 30 | 84.04 |
| Under 40 | 89.41 |
| Over 40 | 100 |

### Manufacturing Advisory Service

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many local firms are involved in the Manufacturing Advisory Service in Portsmouth, South. [21795]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The Manufacturing Advisory Service will be formally launched in spring 2002.

In October this year, SEEDA (South East England Development Agency) awarded a three-year contract to the Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) (South) to establish a regional centre for manufacturing excellence (RCME). The RCME will be responsible for delivering the MAS in the south-east, forming a strong partnership with the six Business Links in the south-east region. A full-time MAS professional manufacturing consultant will be attached to each of the Business Links to provide a range of information, advice, diagnostic and manufacturing consultancy support to businesses in the south-east.

### Combined Heat and Power

**Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many combined heat and power schemes are under construction. [22331]

**Mr. Wilson:** Information on the number of schemes under construction is not readily available. However, in the "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 2001", chapter 6, details are given of schemes that had received consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and section 14 of the Energy Act 1976 but were not in commercial operation at the time of publication. Only schemes over 10 MWe need consent from the Secretary of State. The information will be updated in July 2002. It

is understood that a large portion of consented capacity is not likely to proceed at the present time, or may be built, but will be much smaller than the consented capacity.

### Law of the Sea

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she plans to consult the *(a)* Executive of the National Assembly for Wales, *(b)* Scottish Executive and *(c)* Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly prior to the Government's submission to the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea by 17 December; [21800]

(2) what plans she has for discussions with the *(a)* Executive of the National Assembly of Wales, *(b)* Scottish Executive, *(c)* Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly, *(d)* Government of Iceland, *(e)* Government of Norway and *(f)* Government of the Irish Republic following the decision of the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea on MOX; [21790]

(3) which parties she plans to consult prior to the UK Government's submission to the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea on 17 December. [21801]

**Mr. Wilson:** The International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea has prescribed the following provisional measure:

"Ireland and the UK shall co-operate and shall, for this purpose, enter into consultations forthwith in order to:

(a) Exchange further information with regard to possible consequences for the Irish Sea arising out of the commissioning of the MOX plant;

(b) Monitor risks or the effects of the operation of the MOX plant for the Irish Sea;

(c) Devise, as appropriate, measures to prevent pollution of the marine environment which might result from the operation of the MOX plant."

On 17 December, the Government submitted their initial report to ITLOS setting out the steps the UK has taken and which it proposes to take in order to comply with the provisional measure. A copy was sent to the Government of Ireland. I have placed a copy of that report in the Libraries of the House.

The provisional measure relates to co-operation and exchange of information between the Governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom. There is no intention at this stage to consult others on the question of compliance with it.

**Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the documentation Her Majesty's Government plans to exchange with the Government of the Republic of Ireland on Sellafield as a result of the ruling of the United Nations International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea of 3 December; and if she will place in the Library copies of all documents made available to Ireland following the ITLOS adjudication. [22842]

**Mr. Wilson:** The International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) has prescribed the following provisional measure:

"Ireland and the UK shall co-operate and shall, for this purpose, enter into consultations forthwith in order to:

(a) Exchange further information with regard to possible consequences for the Irish Sea arising out of the commissioning of the MOX plant;l

(b) Monitor risks or the effects of the operation of the MOX plant for the Irish Sea;

(c) Devise, as appropriate, measures to prevent pollution of the marine environment which might result from the operation of the MOX plant"

The Government are currently exploring with the Government of Ireland arrangements for ensuring compliance with the provisional measure including the form co-operation might take. On 17 December, the Government submitted their initial report to ITLOS setting out the steps the UK has taken and which it proposes to take in order to comply with the provisional measure. A copy was sent to the Government of Ireland. I have placed a copy of that report in the Libraries of the House.

### Business Grants (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies in the constituency of Buckingham have received funding from *(a)* Smart, *(b)* the Phoenix Fund, *(c)* the Enterprise Fund, *(d)* the Regional Venture Capital Scheme, *(e)* the Incubator Fund, *(f)* Carbon Trust, *(g)* the Regional Innovation Fund and *(h)* the Innovative Clusters Fund in the last 12 months; and what the total level of funding received from each scheme was. [22526]

**Nigel Griffiths:** *(a)* There is one current Smart project, which started in 1999 with a value of £308,000, and one new Smart award with a value of £45,000 was awarded in 2001.

(b) None. The Phoenix development fund seeks to promote innovative approaches to business support in deprived areas. It does not provide funding to individual businesses.

(c) The Enterprise Fund is the generic name for a number of programmes, including the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme and The UK High Technology Fund, designed to improve small businesses access to finance. Funding is not provided directly to businesses, but through intermediaries, as a result, companies in Buckingham benefiting directly from funding from the Enterprise Fund cannot be identified.

(d) The Regional Venture Capital Fund, as it is not yet operational in the South East region.

(e) None. This is a new initiative providing funding to establish incubator support. It does not provide funding to individual businesses.

(f) None. This is a new initiative, which will soon provide support to businesses. It does not provide funding to individual businesses.

(g) The constituency of Buckingham falls within the region covered by SEEDA which has been allocated RIF funding of £3.2 million in 2001–02.

(h) The ICF operated during 2000–01 during which time SEEDA was allocated £1.66 million of funding.

RIF and the now defunct ICF are not typical centrally administered DTI schemes. No funding goes directly from DTI to any companies. Both are funding streams provided to the Regional Development Agencies, which are non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs).

### Online Trading (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of small businesses in the constituency of Buckingham that are trading online. [22530]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The latest figures from the E-commerce International Benchmarking Studies—2001, which monitors business use of information communication technologies in the UK, shows that 540,000 small and medium enterprises are trading online in the UK.

The 'Study' does not break this figure down to constituency levels. However, it does confirm that we are making significant progress towards our aim of making the UK the best place in the world to trade online. For example, the target of having 1.5 million small businesses wired up to the digital marketplace by 2002 was achieved last year and continues to increase with 1.9 million now connected.

### Pulmonary Disease Claims

**Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many chronic obstructive pulmonary disease claims have been registered, broken down by coalfield area; how many live claimants there are; and how many *(a)* widows and *(b)* estates are claiming. [22233]

**Mr. Wilson** *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* In collating statistics, the Department does not normally distinguish between estate claims for widows and others. In the time given, these figures are not available. IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have registered claims in the following regions:

| *Region* | *Number of live claims* | *Number of estate claims* |
|---|---|---|
| Wales | 18,319 | 16,858 |
| Scotland | 7,582 | 5,478 |
| Nottinghamshire | 16,623 | 4,444 |
| Yorkshire | 31,447 | 13,117 |
| North East | 11,991 | 12,760 |
| North West | 5,371 | 3,803 |
| Midlands | 10,500 | 5,394 |
| South | 2,517 | 1,501 |
| Other | 756 | 307 |
| Total | 105,106 | 63,662 |

Regional statistics and headlines statistics are available on the Department's website on www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth.

**Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many miners claiming chronic obstructive pulmonary disease have been diagnosed by Health Call to be suffering with asthma, broken down by coalfield area; and how much money has been paid to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease claimants, broken down by coalfield area, showing how many *(a)* final and *(b)* expedited settlements have been made; and how many interim payments have been made. [22232]

**Mr. Wilson** *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* The court judgment did not accept that asthma can be caused by working in mining, but acknowledged that it may be made worse temporarily by coal dust or fumes. Under the Handling Agreement, the sum of £2,500 will be paid for temporary exacerbation of asthma plus interest. This sum is not subject to apportionment and is paid following full medical assessment. Interims and expedited offers are not applicable in this category. To date nine claimants have been diagnosed as having temporary exacerbation of asthma only (with no other accompanying compensatable disability), broken down as follows:

| *Region* | *Number of claimants* | *Damages paid (£)* |
|---|---|---|
| Nottinghamshire | 2 | 5,298 |
| Derbyshire | 2 | 5,343 |
| South Wales | 1 | 2,703 |
| Leicestershire | 1 | 2,594 |
| Leeds | 1 | 2,673 |
| West Yorkshire | 1 | 2,763 |
| Tyne and Wear | 1 | 2,627 |

### Renewables Obligation

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the timetable is for the renewables obligation. [22616]

**Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what she expects the start date for the renewables obligation to be. [22720]

**Mr. Wilson:** The Government intend to lay the necessary order before Parliament in February with a view to its coming into effect on 1 April 2002.

The Scottish Executive intends to lay the corresponding Scottish order before the Scottish Parliament with a view to its coming into effect to the same timetable.

**Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason a distinction is not made in the draft Renewables Obligation between conventional mixed waste incineration and energy from waste residue after separation, recycling and materials recovery. [23384]

**Mr. Wilson:** Such a distinction has not been made because the Government intend that the Renewables Obligation should encourage the development of more efficient or environmentally beneficial "energy from waste" technologies. These technologies include pyrolysis, gasification and anaerobic digestion.

### Export Licences

**Mr. Simon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is being done to ensure that manufacturers are *(a)* promptly and *(b)* accurately informed of what stage their applications for export licences have reached. [22811]

**Nigel Griffiths:** Any exporter who has submitted an application for an export licence can telephone the Export Control Organisation (ECO), who retrieve from their licensing database up to date information about the stage that application has reached.

For cases where ECO is awaiting a response from another Government Department, the ECO has agreed with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development, arrangements for direct communication between exporters and specified contacts in those Departments.

These arrangements apply if the ECO has not contacted the applicant for 15 or more working days following dispatch of their standard acknowledgement letter, or the receipt by them of any further information requested from the applicant in connection with the application. If the applicant telephones the licensing officer dealing with the application, the ECO will check their records to establish the current situation. If they are awaiting advice from one of their advisers and that advice request has been

outstanding for 10 or more days they will give the applicant a contact name and telephone number in the section of the relevant Department in order that the applicant may obtain accurate information on the progress of their application.

The ECO is planning to introduce a new IT system which will enable exporters to apply for Standard Individual Export Licences over the internet and will also provide an online facility for any exporter to find out what stage their application has reached.

**Mr. Simon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to aid manufacturers that are attempting to obtain export licences; and if she will make a statement. [22808]

**Nigel Griffiths:** A number of IT and other continuous improvement initiatives are in train to assist exporters seeking to obtain export licences. These include a project to enable exporters to apply for a licence over the internet.

**Mr. Simon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the difficulties faced by manufacturers with regard to their applications for export licences. [22814]

**Nigel Griffiths:** A joint Confederation of British Industry and Export Control Organisation working group works to address issues of concern, including difficulties faced by manufacturers with regard to their applications for export licences.

Among the difficulties I have identified are delays arising from the assessments of use of exports for internal repression, external aggression, diversion to other end-users and preventing the development of WMDs, among others.

**Mr. Simon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the effects of delays in the processing of applications for export licences. [22810]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The Government do recognise the effect that delays in the processing of an export licence application can have on individual companies, but the need to give applicants a quick decision cannot outweigh the Government's determination to manage the transfer of all goods and technology controlled for strategic reasons in a responsible manner by rigorously assessing all relevant export licence applications against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

**Mr. Simon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to speed up the procedure for the processing of applications for export licences. [22813]

**Nigel Griffiths:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1045W.

**Mr. Simon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the criteria that need to be met by British manufacturers, with special reference to the obtaining of export licences, in order to compete on level terms with their *(a)* European and *(b)* American counterparts; [22805]

(2) what assessment she has made of the effect on British manufacturers of difficulties in obtaining export licences in cases where they are in competition with their *(a)* EU and *(b)* American counterparts. [22804]

**Nigel Griffiths:** Many of the UK's controls on the export of military and dual use items are derived from international commitments that apply equally to competitors from the EU and the US as they do to British companies.

We have no evidence to suggest that British manufacturers face any more difficulties in obtaining export licences than their EU or American competitors. The provisions of the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports applies equally to all EU member states. In addition I would refer my hon. Friend to the Quadripartite Committee's analysis of the US system of export licensing published on 25 July 2000 (HC467), a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

**Mr. Simon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of actions manufacturers can take to speed up the process by which their applications for export licences are granted; and if she will make a statement. [22807]

**Nigel Griffiths:** In order to assist the Export Control Organisation to process an application for an individual export licence as quickly as possible, exporters are advised to submit at the outset a completed application form together with all relevant supporting documentation at the earliest opportunity before a contract has been signed. Copies of the application form and guidance notes are available on the ECO website www.dti.gov.uk/export.control.

**Mr. Simon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the process by which export licences are granted to manufacturers. [22806]

**Nigel Griffiths:** This is set out in a memorandum submitted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the Quadripartite Committee on the roles and responsibilities of the main Departments involved in the licensing process, published on 15 June 1999 (HC540), available from the Library of the House.

**Mr. Simon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the security threat posed by the granting of export licences to manufacturers selling their products to states that form part of the coalition against international terrorism. [22809]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The Government do not comment publicly on specific security threats. All relevant export licence applications are considered against the Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing requirements.

## Enron

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the implications of the problems faced by Enron for the UK electricity market, with particular reference to *(a)* volatility, *(b)* liquidity and *(c)* pricing; and if she will make a statement. [22591]

**Mr. Wilson:** It is important to recognise that Enron's current situation was not caused by any problems in the UK electricity market, but by the collapse of its US parent company. The wholesale electricity market coped well with the circumstances surrounding Enron's administration. The new electricity trading arrangements have provisions within them to deal with companies going into administration. It is difficult to identify the precise impact of any one event within the wholesale markets. There were however no significant increases in the level or volatility of prices over the past four weeks. Liquidity, particularly on the power exchanges, did however increase as market participants sought to offset any potential counterparty risk exposure.

## Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the public service agreement target on UK performance in transposition of EU single market measures. [23167]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The UK had transposed 97.2 per cent. of EU single market measures due by November 2001. Work is in hand across Government on this and we expect to exceed the PSA target in 2002.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target on the number of successful high growth business start ups. [23175]

**Nigel Griffiths:** For the purposes of this target high growth is defined as achieving annual sales of £1 million or more, or employing 10 or more people, by the fourth year of trading. Latest data from the Inter Departmental Business Register maintained by the Office for National Statistics show the figure for 1997–98 was 12,600 and for 1998–99 was 12,800.

Due to the long time lags inherent in this target, it is too soon to establish further progress.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target on productivity and profitability of small and medium sized enterprises assisted by Business Link partnerships. [23176]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The last Business Link Value for Money study in 1997 showed that after allowing for wider positive and negative effects, it is estimated that Business Links have generated at the national level more than 8,000 jobs, nearly £1 billion extra business turnover, more than £300 million extra profits, £145 million worth of extra net assets and nearly £400 million of extra exports in the last three years. The targets is to improve on this each year. Another VFM study is planned in 2002 to compare with the original study.

Year on year progress is being monitored by SBS using business data provided by Business Links. The monitoring system was only recently established so no year on year data are available yet. First comparative data are expected in February 2002.

Various quality measures are being introduced to monitor both customer satisfaction with Business Link Services and the Business Link operators themselves.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target on performance against a set of competitiveness indicators. [23177]

**Ms Hewitt:** The DTI published its most recent assessment of progress in "UK Competitiveness Indicators: Second Edition", a copy of which is available in the Libraries of the House. The DTI is currently working on an update of the "UK Competitiveness Indicators" to be published next year.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target on the productivity gap relative to other industrialised countries. [23178]

**Ms Hewitt:** The most recent ONS data shows that in 2000, UK productivity on both a "per worker" and "per hour worked" basis was lower than in France, Germany and the US. However, since 1997, the productivity gap on both a per worker and per hour basis has closed slightly with France and Germany. The gap with the US has remained broadly the same on a per hour basis, but has widened on the per worker measure. This is largely the result of the exceptional growth experienced by the US during the second half of the 1990s. The productivity data is available from the December 2001 ONS publication "Economic Trends", available from the Libraries of the House.

The Government's aim is to close the productivity gap through policies to encourage enterprise, innovation, investment, competition and the acquisition of skills. The policies have been designed to correct long-standing problems and so we should not expect to see results immediately. However, the slight narrowing of the productivity gap with our European competitors is encouraging.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target on the number of UK small and medium sized enterprises connected to the digital market place. [23174]

**Mr. Alexander:** The number of UK SMEs which are "connected" (i.e. have a website, or use external e-mail or Electronic Data Interchange) is now 1.9 million, up from 1.7 million in 2000, and 600,000 in 1999. This is well in excess of the Government target of having 1.5 million SMEs connected by 2002.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target on electronic trading. [23169]

**Mr. Alexander:** The recently published International Benchmarking Study showed that 540,000 UK businesses are trading online, up by 90,000 since 2000.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the target on the Radio Communications Agency financial efficiency, between 1998–99 and 2002–03. [23161]

**Mr. Alexander:** Under the DTI Public Service Agreement the Radiocommunications Agency has a target to achieve a gain in financial efficiency of 20 per cent. over the five-year period 1998–99 to 2002–03.

The Agency achieved annual gains of five per cent. in each of the year's 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01. It's latest Corporate Plan for 2001–02 to 2005–06 set targets of three per cent. for 2001–02 and two per cent. for 2002–03 which if met will ensure it delivers the overall target of efficiency gains of 20 per cent.

### Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under what circumstances operators are permitted under the NFFO transfer provisions to aggregate two or more existing NFFO contracts from different sites into one project. [23039]

**Mr. Wilson:** Decisions on whether modified NFFO contracts remain qualifying arrangements for Fossil Fuel Levy purposes are for Ofgem. My understanding is that aggregation of contracts is not permitted under current arrangements, and that the Locational Flexibility Order will not change this position.

The possibility of allowing aggregation was raised in the consultation on locational flexibility.

We will consider the complex legal and policy implications of aggregation with a view to bringing forward possible further legislation in the new year to allow some aggregation.

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many requests to amend NFFO contracts to enable implementation Ofgem has *(a)* received, *(b)* granted and *(c)* refused; and in cases where they have been refused, for what reason. [23041]

**Mr. Wilson:** This is a matter for Ofgem.

I have asked Mr. Callum McCarthy, the chief executive of Ofgem, to write to the hon. Member and to copy his reply to me, so that it may be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Ofgem, however, does not grant or refuse contract amendments as such amendments are a matter for the contracting parties. Ofgem has to assess whether any contract amendment would cause the project to cease to be a qualifying arrangement for receiving support from the fossil fuel levy. Each case is considered on its facts. If Ofgem decides that a project for which a contract amendment has been agreed has ceased to be a qualifying arrangement, that project will cease to receive support from the fossil fuel levy.

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidance she has provided to *(a)* the Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency and *(b)* to Ofgem defining the criteria for the transfer of NFFO contracts. [23037]

**Mr. Wilson:** The criteria for the transfer of NFFO contracts are set out in the Electricity from Non-Fossil Fuel Sources (Locational Flexibility) Order 2001.

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the roles are of *(a)* her Department, *(b)* the Non Fossil Purchasing Agency and *(c)* Ofgem in approving requests for NFFO contract amendments. [23038]

**Mr. Wilson:** The DTI has no role in approving requests for NFFO contract amendments.

The Non Fossil Purchasing Authority (NFPA) is counter-party to contracts and must agree any amendment. If the NFPA has any doubts as to whether the amended contract would remain a qualifying arrangement for support from the fossil fuel levy, it consults Ofgem.

Ofgem's role is to make payments from the fossil fuel levy in respect of qualifying arrangements and to set and collect the levy. Ofgem cannot make payment in respect of contracts which are no longer qualifying arrangements.

Ofgem is also required under NFFO contracts to approve terminations of contracts for economic reasons. Other terminations are matter for the NFPA and the contract-holder.

Separate but similar arrangements apply in Scotland where the SRO contracts are held by the supply successor companies and not by the NFPA.

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many NFFO contracts which would otherwise have failed she expects to be brought to fruition through the new arrangements for site transfer; and what steps she is taking to maximise take-up. [23040]

**Mr. Wilson:** The industry estimates that over a 100 projects across a wide range of technologies want to move.

The Government have played their part by making the NFFO Locational Flexibility Order, and it is now up to developers to take advantage of the new opportunities provided by that Order.

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the contracts under the Non Fossil Fuel Obligation which have been transferred from one site to another since March. [23036]

**Mr. Wilson:** There have been none. The Government are introducing an Order to facilitate such transfers.

### Telephone Lines

**Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if it is her objective that the minimum service standard for mainland telephone lines in the UK should be ISDN; and if she will make a statement. [23356]

**Mr. Alexander** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The Office of Telecommunications (Oftel) sets the minimum service standard for mainland telephone lines in the UK as part of the Universal Service Obligation on BT, taking into account the appropriate European legislation. I am therefore asking the Director General of Telecommunications to write to the hon. Member to address this point.

### Broadband Development

**Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the fund for broadband development has been allocated; and over what period it is expected to be fully allocated. [23266]

**Mr. Alexander** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* I set out allocations for the UK broadband fund on 9 October 2001. The Regional Development Agencies and devolved Administrations are in discussion with my officials to develop action plans. The fund will be allocated over the period 2002–04.

### Consignia

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with Consignia concerning its business prospects; and if she will make a statement. [23811]

**Mr. Alexander:** The Department has regular discussions with Consignia about a range of strategic issues facing the company. Last year's Postal Services Act gave the company greater commercial freedom so that it could improve its services and performance. We expect the management and the unions, which have been asking for more commercial freedom for years, to work together to use the freedom we have given them to deliver a better service to customers.

### Sudan

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice she gives to UK companies considering investment in Sudan. [23684]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The advice Trade Partners UK provides to UK companies considering trading or investing in Sudan is based on the nature of the inquiry and the specific area of business of the company concerned.

### Pakistan

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reasons the European Union has increased the quota allocation for imports from Pakistan's clothing and textile industry; and what assessment she has made of the impact on Pakistan's economy of the increased allocation. [23920]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The EC increased Pakistan's quotas for textiles and clothing as part of Commissioner Lamy's initiative to improve market access for these products on a reciprocal basis, taking into account the impact on Pakistan's economy of the events of 11 September and their aftermath. Given the importance of textiles and clothing to the Pakistani economy, the impact is likely to be of significant benefit.

### Post Office Card Accounts

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether it is her policy to cap the number of post office card accounts; and if she will make a statement. [23591]

**Malcolm Wicks:** I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for E-commerce and Competitiveness on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 119W.

## HEALTH

### Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme

**Kali Mountford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish the fifth report to Parliament on the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme. [24400]

**Ms Blears:** The fifth Report to Parliament on the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) was published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The PPRS: Fifth Report to Parliament covers the operation of the 1999 scheme, which was introduced in October 1999. It explains the Government's objectives for the scheme, how the scheme is managed and operated, including pricing policy, and gives detailed consolidated information on company annual financial returns. The report also sets out the contribution made to the economy by the United Kingdom based pharmaceutical industry.

### Health Authority Boundaries

**Ms Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce the outcome of the recent consultation on proposed boundaries for new health authorities in England. [24399]

**Mr. Hutton:** I can announce today that, following 22 simultaneous consultation exercises across the whole of England, we are proposing to establish 28 new health authorities from 1 April 2002, when the existing health authorities will be disestablished. Subject to progress with the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill these new health authorities are expected to become strategic health authorities by next October. The table indicates the new health authorities and their constituent existing health authorities.

| *New health authority* | *HAs involved* |
|---|---|
| Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire | Cambridgeshire |
| | Norfolk |
| | Suffolk |
| Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire | Bedfordshire |
| | Hertfordshire |
| Essex | North Essex |
| | South Essex |
| North West London | Brent and Harrow |
| | Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounlsow |
| | Hillingdon |
| | Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster |
| North Central London | Barnet, Enfield and Haringey |
| | Camden and Islington |
| North East London | Barking and Havering |
| | East London and the City |
| | Redbridge and Waltham Forest |
| South East London | Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich |
| | Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham |
| South West London | Croydon |
| | Kingston and Richmond |
| | Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth |
| Northumberland, Tyne and Wear | Gateshead and South Tyneside |
| | Newcastle and North Tyneside |
| | Northumberland |
| | Sunderland |
| County Durham and Tees Valley | County Durham and Darlington |
| | Tees |
| North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire | Easting Riding and Hull |
| | North Yorkshire |
| | South Humber |
| West Yorkshire | Bradford |
| | Calderdale and Kirklees |
| | Leeds |
| | Wakefield |
| Cumbria and Lancashire | North Cumbria |
| | East Lancashire |
| | Morecambe Bay |
| | North West Lancashire |
| | South Lancashire |
| Greater Manchester | Bury and Rochdale |
| | Manchester |
| | Salford and Trafford |
| | Stockport |
| | West Pennine |
| | Wigan and Bolton |

| *New health authority* | *HAs involved* |
|---|---|
| Cheshire and Merseyside | Liverpool |
| | North Cheshire |
| | Sefton |
| | South Cheshire |
| | St. Helen's and Knowsley |
| | Wirral |
| Thames Valley | Berkshire |
| | Buckinghamshire |
| | Oxfordshire |
| Hampshire and Isle of Wight | North and Mid-Hampshire |
| | Isle of Wight and Portsmouth and South East Hampshire |
| | Southampton and South West Hampshire |
| Kent and Medway | East Kent |
| | West Kent |
| Surrey and Sussex | East Surrey |
| | East Sussex, Brighton and Hove |
| | West Surrey |
| | West Sussex |
| Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire | Avon |
| | Gloucestershire |
| | Wiltshire |
| South West Peninsula | Cornwall and Isles of Scilly |
| | North and East Devon |
| | South and West Devon |
| Somerset and Dorset | Dorset |
| | Somerset |
| South Yorkshire | Barnsley |
| | Doncaster |
| | Rotherham |
| | Sheffield |
| Trent | Lincolnshire |
| | North Derbyshire |
| | North Nottinghamshire |
| | Nottingham |
| | South Derbyshire |
| Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland | Leicestershire |
| | Northamptonshire |
| Shropshire and Staffordshire | North Staffordshire |
| | Shropshire |
| | South Staffordshire |
| Birmingham and the Black Country | Birmingham |
| | Dudley |
| | Sandwell |
| | Solihull |
| | Walsall |
| | Wolverhampton |
| Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire | Coventry |
| | Herefordshire |
| | Warwickshire |
| | Worcestershire |

## Mental Health Act

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will bring forward the draft Bill for reform of the Mental Health Act 1983. [22957]

**Jacqui Smith:** We published the White Paper "Reforming the Mental Health Act" in December 2000. The White Paper made clear our intention to reform mental health legislation and bring it into line with the contemporary patterns of care and treatment including the changes and new investment set out in the NHS Plan, and to improve the provisions for high risk offenders, including those who are dangerous and severely personality disordered.

This is a high priority for the Government. New legislation will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

## Hospital Patients (Children)

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what educational provision exists for over 16-year-old children in hospital; and if he will make a statement. [22488]

**Margaret Hodge:** I have been asked to reply.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has a duty to secure the provision of proper facilities for the education and training of 16 to 19-year-olds including those who may have missed out on education due to prolonged illness.

The Connexions Service also provides integrated information, advice, guidance and personal development opportunities for all young people aged 13 to 19 in England, including giving more in depth support to those who are at greatest risk of not making a successful transition to adulthood.

In addition, the DfES published in November this year, new statutory guidance "Access to Education for children and young people with Medical needs" which sets out minimum national standards for the education of children who are unable to attend school because of medical needs. The guidance advises that all agencies should try to enable a pupil to continue any course being taken on entry to hospital or while ill or injured at home. Local education authorities (LEAs) also have the power to provide suitable education otherwise than at school for young people over compulsory school age but under the age of 19. A local education authority (LEA) should normally arrange continuing education for young people over compulsory school age but under 18 where he or she is a "year behind" if they need to study for a further year to complete an examination course.

From April 2002, local LSCs will allocate resources to LEAs for provision delivered in school sixth forms and LEA maintained 16–19 institutions. I expect this to ensure a genuinely coherent approach to post-16 provision.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Correspondence

**Brian Cotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to letters dated 2 August and 10 September from the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare on foot and mouth disease. [15668]

**Mr. Morley:** My noble Friend Lord Whitty replied to the letter from the hon. Member on 12 December. We have no record of his letter of 2 August.

### Landfill Sites

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she issued guidelines on the proximity of landfill sites to housing; and if they are retroactive; [22659]

(2) if she has powers to require the closure or containment of a landfill site which is closer to housing than the guidelines require; what discussions she has had with the European Commission about changes to those guidelines; and if the proposed EU Directive would be retroactive. [22660]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 requires a local planning authority to consult the Environment Agency before granting planning permission for development within 250 metres of land which is or has, at any time in the 30 years before the relevant planning application, been used for the deposit of refuse or waste. Guidance to the Agency in Waste Management Paper 27 on Landfill Gas published in 1991 contains guidelines on the proximity of new housing developments to landfill sites. These guidelines do not arise from European legislation and we have had no discussions with the European Commission about changes to the guidance.

In addition, under section 42 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Environment Agency must take the steps needed to ensure that:

1. the activities authorised by a waste management licence do not cause environmental pollution, harm to human health or serious detriment to local amenities; and
2. the conditions of a licence are complied with.

Following implementation of the Landfill Directive, the Environment Agency will be required to exercise its functions under the Directive in order to prevent, or reduce as far as possible, negative effects from the landfilling of waste on the environment and any resulting risk to human health during the whole life cycle of the site. The Directive also requires local planning authorities to take into consideration the distance from the site boundary when considering the location of a new landfill site. This requirement has applied to all new landfill sites from 16 July 2001 but is not applied retrospectively to existing landfill sites.

The Environment Agency can suspend, vary or revoke a waste management licence or, in future, the permit issued under the terms of the Landfill Directive, where it appears the continuation of activities would cause pollution of the environment or harm to human health or where the conditions of the permit or licence are breached.

### Livestock Markets

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the legal basis for the current closure of livestock markets; and when that legal basis has to be reviewed. [19739]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The Foot-and-Mouth Disease Declaratory (Controlled Area) (England and Wales) (No.3) Order 2001, as amended, was made under section 17 of the Animal Health Act 1981 and declares the whole of England and Wales to be an infected area to which the provisions of Part IV of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease Order 1983 as amended apply (a controlled area). Part IV imposes certain restrictions on the area, including the provisions of article 35 which prohibit the use of premises for a fair, market, show or other gathering of animals.

When the chief veterinary officer is of the opinion that England and Wales is no longer infected with foot and mouth disease, consideration will be given to revoking the Declaratory Order. Once this order is revoked, the restrictions in article 35 on the holding of livestock markets will no longer apply. There are other powers available to Ministers under the Animal Health Act 1981 to regulate markets even in the absence of an FMD controlled area. However, the Government are minded to permit the resumption of cattle and some sheep markets in the new year, provided no further cases of FMD come to light. The Government are in close consultation with representatives of auctioneers and farmers abut the biosecurity rules to apply when markets resume.

### White Goods

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's plans to improve energy efficiency standards in white goods. [22598]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Department will continue to seek to improve the energy efficiency of domestic appliances, including white goods, through a combination of policy measures including product information (energy labels), minimum standards and the promotion of best practice.

These policies will continue to be taken forward by the Market Transformation Programme (MTP), jointly sponsored by the Department and the Department of Trade and Industry, which aims to encourage products that do less harm to the environment, using less energy, water and other resources. The MTP will continue to have a strong focus on improving the delivered energy performance of domestic and non-domestic products, especially energy consuming appliances, equipment and components. This will include all major domestic energy consuming appliances (heating, cold, cooking and wet appliances, consumer electronics and lighting) as well as traded goods in the commercial sector.

The Department will also continue to work closely with stakeholders and other member states to conclude a review of Council Directive 92/75/EEC on the indication by labelling and standard product information of the consumption of energy and other resources by household appliances; to reach agreement on a Framework Directive for Minimum Energy Efficiency Requirements for End-Use Equipment; to develop voluntary measures where appropriate; and to support the work of the Energy Saving Trust in promoting more efficient products.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress the Government have made to date in improving the energy efficiency standards of white goods. [22599]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Government have made some good progress in improving the energy efficiency of household appliances, including white goods, in recent years. This has been achieved through a combination of policy measures including product information (energy labels), minimum standards, industry agreements and the promotion of best practice. The Market Transformation Programme (MTP), jointly sponsored by my Department and the DTI, works closely with business and other stakeholders to produce the analysis supporting these measures and suggesting future strategies for action at UK and EU level.

As an example of progress in the energy efficiency of white goods, the combination of energy labelling since 1995 and minimum standards from 1999 has helped to bring about the situation where new efficient fridge-freezers now use only half the electricity of existing older appliances.

While in general the unit energy consumption of white goods has been decreasing for a number of years, overall energy savings have tended to be offset by increasing numbers of appliances in use as the number of households and demand for new services such as digital electronics, in the UK have increased.

## Household Appliances

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research has been commissioned by the Government into the effects of not leaving electrical appliances on standby in terms of energy saved. [22597]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Government's Market Transformation Programme, jointly sponsored by the Department and the DTI, has been working over the last three years to reach consensus on the potential to reduce the energy consumption of a range of products and appliances. The programme addresses 27 key product types so far, representing about 75 per cent. of UK electricity consumption. From that on-going research and consultative process, the current indications are that the energy used by domestic electrical appliances left in standby mode accounts for about 7 TWh, which is equivalent to about 6 per cent. of total electricity consumption in the domestic sector.

## Farming Subsidies

**Mr. Keith Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers are waiting for subsidy payments from the Rural Payments Agency *(a)* in Norfolk and *(b)* in England. [22612]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The information requested is not available.

**Mr. Keith Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what percentage of subsidy payments were paid within three weeks in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; [22613]

(2) for what reasons there have been delays in subsidy payments to farmers by the Rural Payments Agency. [22614]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Most IACS (integrated administration and control system) schemes are subject to regulatory payment windows determining the earliest and latest dates for payment to be made. Progress in processing claims for individual schemes varies from year to year and is influenced in particular by the workloads faced by the offices handling the claims and by the extent of any regulatory changes. This year claim processing on all schemes has been affected by the diversion of staff to foot and mouth disease duties and by industrial action. In addition livestock claims have had to be cross-checked with FMD slaughter records and bovine scheme claim processing has been delayed because new computer software had to be developed to reflect regulatory changes.

The percentage of IACS subsidy claims sent for payment within the first three weeks of the opening of the payment window in 2000 and 2001 was as shown in the table.

| | *2000* | *2001* |
|---|---|---|
| Arable Area Payments | 83 | 51 |
| Slaughter Premium | 18 | 0 |
| Beef Special Premium (advance) | 74 | 0 |
| Beef Suckler Cow (advance) | 0 | 0 |
| Sheep Annual Premium | | |
| 1st advance | 97.2 | 86.2 |
| 2nd advance | 99.4 | 97.8 |

## Uncultivated Land

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many responses she has had to the consultation on the proposed

regulations concerning environmental impact assessments on uncultivated land; what research she has commissioned on how other EU member states implement these regulations; and if she will make a statement. [22460]

**Alun Michael:** The Government gave a commitment in the Rural White Paper in November 2000 to consult on the implementation of the uncultivated land provisions of the EIA Directive. Two public consultation exercises have been carried out this year; the first in May on the options for implementation elicited 42 responses; the second in September, with detailed proposals, received 32 responses.

It has not been necessary to formally commission a report on how other EU member states have implemented the regulations, as the Commission has shown a willingness to take any member state to the European Court of Justice should they fail to implement the Directive properly or correctly. Information is also available through agricultural attachés.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-natural Areas) (England) Regulations 2001 (S.I. No. 3966), come into force on 1 February 2002. They will require any project to bring uncultivated land and semi-natural areas into intensive agricultural use to be assessed for the likelihood of significant environmental effects. Only where there is a likelihood of significant effects will an environmental statement be required. In case where a project raises environmental concerns, officials will be as helpful as possible to farmers and will seek to agree a way forward which takes account of business needs as well as environmental factors.

Guidelines are to be introduced which explain further the types of land that can be regarded as uncultivated, and an indicative list of the types of projects on that land which will be subject to the regulations. These guidelines will also explain how the scheme is to be administered. The Government are looking for a collaborative approach with farmers, land owners and environmentalists so that the regime can protect the most environmentally significant land without bearing disproportionately heavily on the farming industry.

### Organic Farming

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial support there is for farmers who grow organic crops; and if she will make a statement on organic farming. [22864]

**Mr. Morley:** Support for organic farmers in England is provided in the main through the Organic Farming Scheme, which offers payments to farmer over a period of five years totalling from £50 to £450 per hectare according to land type. Supplementary payments totalling £600 per beneficiary are made towards the cost of training. The budget for this year's payments is £18 million, rising to £20 million in the next financial year.

Direct payments to organic farmers in other regions of the UK are a matter for the devolved Administrations. Organic farmers are also entitled to other payments under the common agricultural policy in the same way as their conventional counterparts.

In addition, the Department's Research and Development programme includes a large component dealing with research on organic farming. And there is a programme of free, on-farm advice to prospective organic farmers.

We wish organic farming to succeed and to this end have already committed £140 million under the England Rural Development Programme which should triple the organic farming area by 2006. To build on this, we intend to product a strategy for the future direction of organic farming when we have the report of the Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, taking account of any recommendations made by the Commission for this sector. The strategy will assess potential growth both for UK production and for the organic market, and will need to take account of the large variation between different products.

### Council Borrowing

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the total borrowing figure for Solihull district council. [23803]

**Dr. Whitehead:** I have been asked to reply.

The total debt (long and short-term) for Solihull, as at March 2001, was about £85 million.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the average annual contribution to council tax per council tax payer in England and Wales that is attributable to repayments and interest on borrowing. [23805]

**Dr. Whitehead:** I have been asked to reply.

It is not possible to quantify separately the amounts attributable to English local authority debt repayments and interest on borrowing that are financed by council taxes.

Welsh figures are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average total borrowing is for *(a)* all and *(b)* district councils in England and Wales. [23804]

**Dr. Whitehead:** I have been asked to reply.

The average total debt (long and short-term) for English local authorities, as at March 2001, was about £132 million. This figure covers London boroughs, Metropolitan districts, Unitary authorities, Shire counties and Shire districts.

The average total debt for Metropolitan districts is about £368 million and for Shire districts is about £14 million.

It should be noted that authorities with high levels of debt are generally those which have undertaken capital investment and that long-term borrowing to finance capital expenditure is regulated by Government through the issue of credit approvals.

### Water Recreation

**Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to publish the findings of the research contract about access to water for sport and recreation. [24403]

**Alun Michael:** We will be publishing the research report on Friday 21 December. The research provides information about availability of water space, the effectiveness of current arrangements in meeting the demand for different types of water-based sport and recreation and the scale and nature of potential demand. We shall be looking carefully at the findings to decide what action may be needed. A copy of the report will be placed in the House Libraries.

### Rural White Paper

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the Rural White Paper, what examples of good practice in rural policing the Government recommend should be followed. [20035]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The operational deployment of officers is a matter for individual chief officers of police, but we do know that police forces are tackling rural crime in innovative ways. The additional £30 million per year for rural police forces is to assist them in this, to enable them to increase both the visibility of the police in rural communities and the public's access to them.

In addition, we set out our proposals for increasing the police presence in the community, including through development of the extended police in the White Paper "Policing a new century", published on 5 December. We believe these proposals will be of particular importance to rural communities.

Examples of existing good practice include: mobile police stations, established within specific communities, such as a local village, shopping centre or housing estate; establishment of a permanent local 'blue light' police presence—whether by reopening small police stations on a part-time basis, or by sharing accommodation with other emergency services, or community centres, libraries, village halls or schools; the use of rural community beat officers to patrol clusters of villages or neighbourhoods to build strong relationships with the local community; dedicated parish or neighbourhood special constables; and intelligence-led patrols; focusing on local crime hot-spots, to provide a visible presence to deter criminals and troublemakers.

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS

### Specialist Schools

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list specialist schools by constituency and specialism at the most recent date. [23103]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* Details of the 685 specialist schools operational as of September 2001 is listed by parliamentary constituency and by specialism and is contained in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools applied for specialist school status in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [23242]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The number of schools that applied for specialist school status in the previous three years is as follows.

*(a)* 1999 : 213

*(b)* 2000 : 335

*(c)* 2001 : 410.

### Student Support

**Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support will be available to students in England and Wales in the academic year 2002–03. [23910]

**Margaret Hodge:** The level of support available to students in 2002–03 will be 2.4 per cent. higher than for 2001–02, in line with forecast price increases. I am today placing a Memorandum in the Library giving details of the new loan, grant and fee rates for 2002–03. These rates will be incorporated in the Education (Student Support) Regulations, which cover support for eligible students under the current arrangements, and in the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations and Education (Student Loans) Amendment Regulations, which cover the small number of students who are still eligible for support under the previous arrangements. These regulations will all be laid before Parliament in due course.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish information by family income bands showing the average contributions of parents to the student support and tuition fee costs of one student *(a)* before 1997 and *(b)* in 2000. [22794]

**Margaret Hodge** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The following table shows for 1996–97 and 2000–01 the assessed parental contributions for dependant students normally resident in England and Wales at illustrative levels of income. The maximum assessed contribution will depend on the level of support available to the student. This will depend on whether the student is living in the parental home or, if living away from home, if they live in London or elsewhere. In addition it will depend on whether they are entitled to any of the additional allowances. For illustrative purposes the table shows the assessed contributions for a single student eligible for the basic rate of support for students living away from home outside London.

In 2001–02 there were a number of changes to the calculation of assessed contribution including a significant rise in the lower income threshold. The table therefore includes the assessed contributions for this year also.

| Residual income | 1996–97 Assessed contribution to grant[2] | 2000–01 Assessed contribution Total | To fee | To loan | 2001–02 Assessed contribution Total | To fee | To loan |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| £16,050[3] | 45 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £17,000 | 118 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £17,805[4] | 180 | 45 | 45 | 0 | — | — | — |
| £18,000 | 195 | 60 | 60 | 0 | — | — | — |
| £19,000 | 271 | 136 | 136 | 0 | — | — | — |
| £20,000[5] | 348 | 213 | 213 | 0 | 45 | 45 | 0 |
| £21,000 | 440 | 290 | 290 | 0 | 150 | 150 | 0 |
| £22,000 | 549 | 367 | 367 | 0 | 255 | 255 | 0 |
| £23,000 | 658 | 451 | 451 | 0 | 360 | 360 | 0 |
| £24,000 | 766 | 560 | 560 | 0 | 466 | 466 | 0 |
| £25,000 | 875 | 669 | 669 | 0 | 571 | 571 | 0 |
| £26,000 | 984 | 777 | 777 | 0 | 676 | 676 | 0 |
| £27,000 | 1,092 | 886 | 886 | 0 | 781 | 781 | 0 |
| £28,000 | 1,201 | 995 | 995 | 0 | 887 | 887 | 0 |
| £29,000 | 1,310 | 1,103 | 1,103 | 0 | 992 | 992 | 0 |
| £30,000 | 1,418 | 1,212 | 1,050 | 162 | 1,097 | 1,075 | 22 |
| £31,000 | 1,548 | 1,321 | 1,050 | 271 | 1,202 | 1,075 | 127 |
| £32,000 | 1,681 | 1,429 | 1,050 | 379 | 1,308 | 1,075 | 233 |
| £32,218[6] | 1,710 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £33,000 | — | 1,538 | 1,050 | 488 | 1,413 | 1,075 | 338 |
| £34,000 | — | 1,660 | 1,050 | 610 | 1,518 | 1,075 | 443 |
| £35,000 | — | 1,793 | 1,050 | 743 | 1,623 | 1,075 | 548 |
| £36,000 | — | 1,927 | 1,050 | 877 | 1,729 | 1,075 | 654 |
| £36,398[7] | — | 1,980 | 1,050 | 930 | — | — | — |
| £37,000 | — | — | — | — | 1,834 | 1,075 | 759 |
| £38,000 | — | — | — | — | 1,939 | 1,075 | 864 |
| £38,856[8] | — | — | — | — | 2,030 | 1,075 | 955 |

[1] Assessed contributions are based on parents' 'residual income'. This is based on gross income, for income tax purposes less a number of allowances.
[2] The assessed contribution shown is the initial assessment. This assessment will be reduced if the parents have other dependent children.
[3] In 1996–97 for residual incomes below £16,050 no contribution was assessed.
[4] In 2000–01 for residual incomes below £17,705 no contribution was assessed.
[5] In 2001–02 for residual incomes below £20,000 no contribution is assessed.
[6,7,8] Above this point additional contributions would be required if a student was eligible for a higher rate of support, was eligible for additional allowances or the parent had more than one child in higher education.

## Teachers' Earnings (Inner London)

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information her Department has on the movement in earnings for teachers in inner London in each of the last three years, broken down into *(a)* earnings for (i) female and (ii) male teachers and *(b)* teachers in (A) primary and (B) secondary schools; and how these movements compare with (1) London as a whole and (2) England as a whole. [12994]

**Mr. Timms:** Average salaries of full-time regular teachers in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 (the last year for which data are available) were as follows[1,2]:

| | 1997–98 | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Inner London* | | | |
| *Nursery and primary* | | | |
| Male | 26,270 | 27,530 | 28,740 |
| Female | 24,680 | 25,760 | 26,830 |
| Total | 24,940 | 26,050 | 27,140 |
| *Secondary* | | | |
| Male | 27,320 | 28,550 | 29,730 |
| Female | 26,170 | 27,330 | 28,460 |
| Total | 26,670 | 27,860 | 29,010 |
| *London* | | | |
| *Nursery and primary* | | | |
| Male | 26,140 | 27,240 | 28,410 |
| Female | 23,940 | 24,950 | 25,890 |
| Total | 24,270 | 25,300 | 26,270 |
| *Secondary* | | | |
| Male | 26,590 | 27,740 | 28,890 |
| Female | 25,160 | 26,150 | 27,210 |
| Total | 25,800 | 26,850 | 27,950 |
| *England* | | | |
| *Nursery and primary* | | | |
| Male | 25,140 | 26,070 | 27,290 |
| Female | 22,200 | 23,070 | 24,000 |
| Total | 22,690 | 23,560 | 24,530 |
| *Secondary* | | | |
| Male | 25,200 | 26,160 | 27,170 |
| Female | 23,200 | 24,090 | 24,960 |
| Total | 24,140 | 25,060 | 25,990 |

[1] Provisional data.
[2] All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

## Further Education Funding Council

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the total cost of administration of the former Further Education Funding Council in each of the last three financial years. [13337]

**Margaret Hodge** *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* Total FEFC cost of administration (taken from the FEFC published accounts) was £23.3 million in 1998–99 and £25.5 million in 1999–2000. Final FEFC accounts for 2000–01 are not yet available.

Also, we estimate that in total TECs spent in the order of £240-£250 million on administration of the activities that have now passed to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

As well as the activities previously carried out by the FEFC and TECs, the LSC has also taken on additional activities such as greater involvement and intervention at local level to raise Basic Skills, and managing a 9 per cent. real terms increase in the overall programme budget allocated to post-16 education and training compared to plans for 2000–01. It takes on further responsibilities in 2002–03 such as the funding of school VI forms and local decisions about the allocation of funds on key youth and adult learning programmes.

In the light of these responsibilities, and the different VAT regime to which the LSC is subject compared to TECs, the Secretary of State has agreed a revised LSC administration budget of £213 million in 2001–02 and £218 million in 2002–03.

This is significantly lower than the £270-£280 million estimated in total to have been spent by its predecessors, and delivers the commitment given to Parliament during the passage of the Learning and Skills Act that there would be administrative savings of at least £50 million compared to previous arrangements.

## Learning and Skills Councils

**Mr. Damian Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many *(a)* teachers and *(b)* head teachers there are on each learning and skills council; [14573]

(2) what proportion of those who sit on learning and skills councils are *(a)* teachers and *(b)* head teachers. [14574]

**Margaret Hodge** *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* All 47 local Learning and Skills Councils include representatives with relevant experience from the school sector. In total, there are three teachers (0.4 per cent.) and 17 head teachers (2.4 per cent.—this figure includes one headteacher who has just retired from the profession but is still on the council) represented on local Learning and Skills Councils (LSC) and one head teacher represented on the LSC's Young Peoples Advisory Committee. In total 2.8 per cent. of members are teachers or head teachers. However 20 per cent. of all LSC members have an interest in and particular experience of school education either as school governors (14 per cent.), LEA officials (four per cent.) or members (one per cent.). Also eight local Executive Directors (1 per cent.) have either previous LEA or headteacher experience.

Almost all LLSCs have other local authority representatives (often at council leader or chair of education level).

There are also 45 FE heads and three FE lecturers who are local council members.

In April 2002, the LSC assumes responsibility for school sixth form funding, and in recognition of this we will encourage the LSC to appoint further representatives from the school sector as and when council vacancies arise.

A breakdown showing the number of teachers, head teachers, FE heads, FE lecturers, school governors and LEA/LA reps on each LSC is outlined in the table:

| *Local LSC* | *Teacher* | *Headteacher* | *FE college heads* | *FE college lecturers* | *School Governors* | *LEA Reps* | *Other LA Reps* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *North West* | | | | | | | |
| Cheshire/Warrington | — | — | 1 | — | 3 | 1 Elected | 1 Official |
| Cumbria | — | — | 1 | — | 2 | 2 Officials | 1 Elected |
| Lancashire | — | — | 1 | — | 2 | 1 Elected | 1 Official |
| Greater Manchester | — | — | 1 | — | 3 | — | 1 Elected |
| Greater Merseyside | — | 1 | 1 | — | 2 | 1 Elected | 1 Official<br>1 Elected |
| *West Midlands* | | | | | | | |
| Birmingham and Solihull | — | — | 1 | — | 2 | 1 Official | 1 Elected |
| Black Country | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 Elected |
| Coventry/Warwickshire | — | 1 | 1 | — | 5 | — | 1 Official<br>1 Elected |
| Hereford/Worcester | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | — | 1 Official<br>1 Elected |
| Shropshire | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | 1 Official<br>2 Elected |
| Staffordshire | — | — | 1 | — | 3 | 1 Elected | 1 Official<br>1 Official |
| *South West* | | | | | | | |
| Devon and Cornwall | — | — | 1 | — | 2 | — | 1 Elected |
| Dorset | — | — | 2 | — | — | 1 Official | 1 Official<br>1 Elected |
| Gloucestershire | 1 | — | 2 | — | 2 | — | 1 Official |
| Somerset | — | — | 1 | — | 2 | — | 1 Elected |
| West of England | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | 2 Officials<br>1 Elected |
| Wiltshire/Swindon | — | — | 2 | — | 3 | 1 Elected | 2 Elected<br>1 Official |

| Local LSC | Teacher | Headteacher | FE college heads | FE college lecturers | School Governors | LEA Reps | Other LA Reps |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *North East* | | | | | | | |
| County Durham | — | 1 | — | — | 2 | — | 1 Elected<br>1 Official |
| Northumberland | — | — | 1 | — | 3 | 1 Official | — |
| Tees Valley | — | — | 1 | 1 | 3 | — | 2 Elected |
| Tyne and Wear | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 2 Elected |
| *Yorkshire and Humber* | | | | | | | |
| North Yorkshire | — | 1 | 1 | — | 3 | 1 Official | 2 Elected |
| West Yorkshire | — | — | 1 | — | 2 | 1 Official | 1 Elected |
| South Yorkshire | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 1 Official | 2 Elected<br>1 Official |
| Humberside | — | — | 1 | — | 2 | 1 Official | 1 Elected<br>1 Official |
| *East Midlands* | | | | | | | |
| Derbyshire | — | — | 1 | — | 4 | 1 Elected<br>1 Official | 1 Elected |
| Leicestershire | — | — | 1 | — | 3 | 2 Officials | 1 Elected |
| Lincoln/Rutland | — | — | 1 | — | 6 | 2 Officials | 1 Elected |
| Northamptonshire | 1 | — | 1 | — | 2 | 1 Official | 2 Elected |
| Nottinghamshire | — | — | — | — | 3 | 1 Elected | 1 Elected |
| *East of England* | | | | | | | |
| Bedfordshire | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | — | 2 Elected |
| Cambridgeshire | — | 1 | 1 | — | 4 | 1 Official | 2 Elected<br>1 Official |
| Essex | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 Official | 2 Elected<br>1 Official |
| Hertfordshire | — | 2 | 1 | — | — | 1 Official | 1 Elected<br>1 Official |
| Norfolk | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 Official | 1 Elected |
| Suffolk | 1 | 1 | — | — | 4 | — | 4 Elected |
| *London* | | | | | | | |
| Central London | — | 1 | 1 | — | 3 | — | 1 Elected<br>1 Official |
| East London | — | — | 1 | — | 4 | 1 Elected | 1 Elected |
| North London | — | 1 | 1 | — | 2 | — | 1 Elected<br>1 Official |
| South London | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 Official | 1 Elected |
| West London | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | 1 Official |
| *South East* | | | | | | | |
| Berkshire | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 1 Official | 1 Official |
| Hampshire/IOW | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 1 Official | 1 Official |
| Milton Keynes/Oxfordshire/Buckinghamshire | — | — | 1 | — | 2 | 2 Officials | 3 Elected |
| Kent/Medway | — | — | 2 | — | 1 | 1 Official | 2 Elected<br>1 Official |
| Sussex | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 Officials | 1 Elected<br>1 Official |
| Surrey | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 Official | 1 Elected<br>1 Official |
| *National* | | 1 | | | | | |

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much VAT it is estimated that the Learning and Skills Council will pay in the current financial year. [23926]

**Margaret Hodge:** This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have, therefore, asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to the hon. Member with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the projected staff numbers were for the Learning and Skills Council in its first year of operations, and how many staff are in post. [23927]

**Margaret Hodge:** The set up figure for the Learning and Skills Council is 4,757 posts. At the end of November, it employed 4,575 people. This figure equates to 4,444 full time equivalents and gives a profile of 93.4 per cent. of posts filled.

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total projected spend this financial year is on the LSC *(a)* administration and *(b)* staff budget and what percentage of its total budget will be spent on administration. [23928]

**Margaret Hodge:** The total projected spend by LSC on administrative costs in 2001–02 is £213 million.

The total projected spend by LSC on staff costs in 2001–02, included in the above figure, is £138 million.

The percentage of the LSC's total budget to be spent on administration is 3.9 per cent.

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what date her Department received the LSC request for an increase in its administration budget. [23929]

**Margaret Hodge:** Officials from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) have been in contact with officials from the Department for Education and Skills for many months, to discuss the LSC's running costs.

The original administration budget for the LSC was set a couple of years ago, based on the then best estimates of the costs of the previous arrangements. The LSC became operational in April 2001 and inherited the majority of its costs from its predecessors (in particular Training and Enterprise Councils, and the Further Education Funding Council). It was always going to be the case that the actual running costs of the LSC would not be clear until it was up and running.

We now have more up-to-date and accurate estimates of the administration costs of the previous arrangements, which are significantly higher than the earlier estimates. We announced a £25 million increase in the LSC's administration budget on 10 December, which delivers the commitment given to Parliament of at least £50 million savings compared to the previous arrangements.

## Fair Trade

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the value of fairly traded *(a)* tea and *(b)* coffee used in her Department in each of the last five years. [17549]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** It is not possible even at disproportionate cost to identify the value of fairly traded tea and coffee as separate records are not kept.

## Threshold Pay

***Chris Grayling:*** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers are receiving threshold pay; and how many are expected to be eligible in 2002–03. [19353]

**Mr. Timms:** About 195,000 teachers in England were assessed as meeting the threshold standards in the first (2000) round, which entitles them to be paid on the upper pay scale while they are employed as a classroom teacher in the maintained sector. Applications for the second round of the threshold (November 2001) have not yet been assessed.

We estimate that about 250,000 teachers in England were eligible to apply for threshold assessment in 2000 and that about 20,000 teachers will become newly eligible to apply for threshold assessment in September 2002.

## Sixth Forms

**Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the heads of secondary schools with sixth forms who sit on each Learning and Skills Council. [21437]

**Margaret Hodge:** The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will be taking over responsibility for funding school sixth forms from 2002–03. However, 14 heads of secondary schools with sixth forms currently sit on the LSC. The precise breakdown is as follows:

| *Local LSC* | *Member* | *School with sixth form* |
|---|---|---|
| *North West* | | |
| Greater Merseyside | David Atkin | Headteacher: Rainhill High School |
| *West Midlands* | | |
| Hereford/Worcester | Valerie Thomasson | Headteacher: The Minster College |
| *South West* | | |
| West of England | Andrea Arlidge | Headteacher: St. Katherine's School |
| *North East* | | |
| County Durham | Unica O'Reilly | Headteacher: Wolsingham School and Community College |
| *Yorkshire and the Humber* | | |
| North Yorkshire | Rachel Totton | Headteacher: Whitby Community College |
| *East of England* | | |
| Bedfordshire | John Mitchell | Headteacher: The Cedars Upper School and Community College |
| Cambridgeshire | Christopher Walford | Headteacher: John Mansfield School |
| Essex | Susan Anderson | Headteacher: Hedingham School |
| Hertfordshire | Jane Creasey | Headteacher: Sir John Lawes School |
| | Gail Tolley | Headteacher: Stanborough School |
| Norfolk | Robert Young | Headteacher: Hamond's High School |
| Suffolk | Neil Watts | Headteacher: Northgate High School |
| *London* | | |
| South London | Pauline Cox | Headteacher: The Tiffin Girls School |
| *National* | | |
| Young People's Committee | Ian Gartshore | Headteacher: Downham Market School |
| Total | 14 | |

Further sixth form expertise is brought by:

Two former head teachers (from schools with sixth forms) on LLSCs (1 as an Executive Director);

One deputy head teacher, one assistant head teacher and one teacher (from schools with sixth forms) on LLSCs.

In the Secretary of State's Grant Letter to the LSC, she has encouraged the Council to widen representation from the schools sector.

In addition, further knowledge and experience of schools is brought by:

Three headteachers of schools without sixth forms, on local councils;

36 representatives from local education authorities who bring knowledge and understanding of school sixth forms;

101 members who are school governors.

This is reflected in the following table:

| *Local LSC* | *LEA reps with knowledge and understanding of school sixth forms* | *School governors* |
|---|---|---|
| *North West* | | |
| Cheshire/Warrington | 1 Elected | 3 |
| Cumbria | 2 Officials | 2 |
| Lancashire | 1 Elected | 2 |
| Greater Manchester | | 3 |
| Greater Merseyside | 1 Elected | 2 |
| *West Midlands* | | |
| Birmingham and Solihull | 1 Official | 2 |
| Black Country | | 1 |
| Coventry/Warwickshire | | 5 |
| Hereford/Worcester | | 1 |
| Shropshire | | 1 |
| Staffordshire | 1 Elected | 3 |
| *South West* | | |
| Devon and Cornwall | | 2 |
| Dorset | 1 Official | |
| Gloucestershire | | 2 |
| Somerset | | 2 |
| West of England | | |
| Wiltshire/Swindon | 1 Elected | 3 |
| *North East* | | |
| County Durham | | 2 |
| Northumberland | 1 Official | 3 |
| Tees Valley | | 3 |
| Tyne and Wear | | 1 |
| *Yorkshire and the Humber* | | |
| North Yorkshire | 1 Official | 3 |
| West Yorkshire | 1 Official | 2 |
| South Yorkshire | 1 Official | 1 |
| Humberside | 1 Official | 2 |
| *East Midlands* | | |
| Derbyshire | 1 Elected/1 Official | 4 |
| Leicestershire | 2 Officials | 3 |
| Lincoln/Rutland | 2 Officials | 6 |
| Northamptonshire | 1 Official | 2 |
| Nottinghamshire | 1 Elected | 3 |
| *East of England* | | |
| Bedfordshire | | 4 |
| Cambridgeshire | 1 Official | 4 |
| Essex | 1 Official | 1 |
| Hertfordshire | 1 Official | |
| Norfolk | 1 Official | |
| Suffolk | | 4 |
| *London* | | |
| Central London[1] | | 3 |
| East London | 1 Elected | 4 |
| North London[1] | | 2 |
| South London | 1 Official | 1 |
| West London | | 2 |
| *South East* | | |
| Berkshire | 1 Official | 1 |
| Hampshire/IOW | 1 Official | 1 |
| Milton Keynes/Oxfordshire/ Buckinghamshire | 2 Officials | 2 |
| Kent/Medway | 1 Official | 1 |
| Sussex | 2 Officials | 1 |
| Surrey[1] | 1 Official | 1 |

[1] Headteachers without sixth forms

## Education SSA

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to reform the education standard spending assessment. [21560]

**Mr. Timms:** As part of the review of local government funding we have set up two working groups, with local government and schools partners, to develop proposals for a new LEA and school funding system. We will be in a position to make proposals for the new system by the summer of 2002 and intend to introduce the new system in 2003–04.

## Teenagers (Health Education)

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to ensure that health support and advice is made available through schools to young people in their teenage years. [21814]

**Margaret Hodge:** We are the first Government to introduce a non-statutory framework for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) that provides the opportunities for pupils to receive the health support and advice they need to live confident, healthy and independent lives. Through PSHE, schools deliver a range of programmes that include, for example, drug, alcohol, tobacco and sex and relationship education. Schools receive Standards Fund money directly to support these programmes.

## Pre-school Education

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Ofsted-inspected pre-school nurseries and playgroups have closed in each of the past three years. [21953]

**Margaret Hodge:** The information is not available in the form requested. The Department collects information on day nurseries and playgroups and pre-schools defined in terms of the full day or sessional care that they provide. It does not collect information on pre-schools separately from playgroups. The available information is shown in the table.

*Number of day nurseries and playgroups and pre-schools in England[1] (position at 31 March each year)*

| | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* | *2001* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Playgroups and pre-schools | 15,700 | 15,000 | 14,300 | 14,000 |
| Day nurseries | 6,700 | 7,000 | 7,500 | 7,800 |

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

Local authorities provided the data. Ofsted did not assume responsibility for registration and inspection of children's day care facilities until September 2001.

Figures for 2001 for England and Government Office regions were published in Statistical Bulletin 08/01 "Children's Day Care Facilities as at 31 March 2001", which is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/ and from the Library.

### Small Businesses (Communications)

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what structures exist to facilitate communication between her Department and small businesses. [22152]

**John Healey:** My Department is committed to working actively with everyone who shares our aim of building a competitive economy and inclusive society. Small businesses have an important contribution to make to achieve that aim and my Department has regular communications with them both directly, for example with the ICT Industry Club where half of the 150 members are small businesses, and through organisations such as the Learning and Skills Councils, the Small Business Service, Regional Development Agencies and many other national and local organisations. We also run an online forum for small businesses that offers direct access to my Department for all small businesses; the forum is at www.business.dfes.gov.uk.

The new employer-led Sector Skills Councils licensed from 2002 will lead discussion with Government about skills and productivity in their industry or business sectors, including the needs of small business. The purpose of this discussion will be to develop effective policies and provision that better meets the needs of employers to drive up competitiveness and business effectiveness.

### Faith Schools

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what advice she has received from Ofsted on the performance of faith schools. [22321]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* Her Majesty's Chief Inspector has not provided my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State with any formal advice on the performance of faith schools. I have received from HMCI a draft paper that examines inspection and attainment data on Church of England and Roman Catholic schools for the period 1996–2000. Ofsted regards this paper as work in progress, not yet ready for publication.

### Schools (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils have been excluded from schools in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [22649]

**Mr. Timms:** The number of pupils permanently excluded from maintained primary and secondary schools and special schools within the constituency of Buckingham is shown in the following table.

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 14 |
| 1998–99 | 8 |
| 1999–2000 | 6 |

### Tuition Fees

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many letters she has received in 2001 on tuition fees from residents of the Buckingham constituency. [22650]

**Margaret Hodge:** My Department does not routinely record correspondence data on a constituency basis. To provide this information would involve disproportionate costs.

### Special Educational Needs

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children have been statemented as having special educational needs in the constituency of Buckingham. [22651]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The number of children having been statemented as having special educational needs and reported to be attending primary, secondary and special schools within the constituency of Buckingham as at January 2001 was 315.

### Class sizes

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the average size of classes in primary schools in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the North East and *(c)* South Tyneside at the most recent date for which figures are available. [22666]

**John Healey:** The available information is shown in the table:

*Average class size in maintained primary schools: all classes*

| *January 2001* | *Average class size* |
|---|---|
| South Tyneside | 25.7 |
| North East | 25.9 |
| England | 26.8 |
| Wales | 24.8 |
| Scotland | 24.4 |
| Northern Ireland | 23.9 |

### Standards Fund

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the amounts *(a)* allocated to and *(b)* spent from the Standards Fund in each of the last three years. [22683]

**Mr. Timms:** The amounts allocated and spent from the Standards Fund in the last three years are as follows.

£

| | Amount allocated | Amount spent |
|---|---|---|
| 1998–99 | 618,349,380 | 586,812,481 |
| 1999–2000 | 1,256,632,332 | 1,167,833,535 |
| 2000–01 | 2,524,925,580 | 2,215,126,768 |

The figures include recurrent and capital Standards Fund grants. The Standards Fund includes Government grant and local authority contributions, which have both been included in the calculations. The amounts for 2000–01 will not reflect the full level of expenditure as not all local authorities have yet submitted outturn expenditure details, once they have done so the allocated figure and the expenditure figure will move closer together. In addition, £144 million of Devolved Formula Capital funding for schools was allocated to schools late in the financial year, which meant most schools decided to carry expenditure over into 2002–03. We have reallocated the capital budget underspend in 2001–02 to accelerate spend on improving the condition of school buildings.

## Universities

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list, for each university, *(a)* the number of undergraduate students admitted and *(b)* the number of units of student accommodation provided, and what is figure (b) as a percentage of figure (a). [22784]

**Margaret Hodge:** The available information on the number of undergraduate entrants is given in the table. Data on the units of student accommodation in each HE institution are not held centrally.

*Full-time and part-time undergraduate entrants to UK HEIs*

| As at 31 December 2000 | Entrants |
|---|---|
| The Open University | 48,072 |
| Cranfield University | 215 |
| Institute of Advanced Nursing Education | 280 |
| Bishop Grosseteste College | 257 |
| Bretton Hall College of HE | 925 |
| Buckinghamshire College of HE | 3,895 |
| Central School of Speech and Drama | 151 |
| Chester College of HE | 2,265 |
| Canterbury Christ Church College of HE | 3,902 |
| The College of Ripon and York St. John | 1,685 |
| College of St. Mark and St. John | 666 |
| Dartington College of Arts | 145 |
| Edge Hill College of HE | 2,969 |
| Falmouth College of Arts | 514 |
| Harper Adams Agricultural College | 618 |
| Homerton College | 1,127 |
| Kent Institute of Art and Design | 808 |
| King Alfred's College, Winchester | 1,381 |
| Liverpool Hope | 2,236 |
| The London Institute | 3,732 |
| University of Luton | 3,639 |
| Nene College | 4,288 |
| Newman College | 599 |
| Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication | 305 |
| Roehampton Institute of HE | 2,280 |
| Rose Bruford College | 251 |
| Royal Academy of Music | 82 |
| Royal College of Music | 116 |
| Royal Northern College of Music | 125 |
| Southampton Institute | 4,608 |
| St. Martin's College | 2,368 |
| St. Mary's College | 989 |

*Full-time and part-time undergraduate entrants to UK HEIs*

| As at 31 December 2000 | Entrants |
|---|---|
| Trinity and All Saints College | 692 |
| Trinity College of Music | 132 |
| Surrey Institute of Art and Design | 1,193 |
| Worcester College of HE | 2,047 |
| Anglia Polytechnic University | 8,384 |
| Bath College of HE | 1,427 |
| Bolton Institute of HE | 2,180 |
| Bournemouth University | 4,361 |
| The University of Brighton | 6,553 |
| The University of Central England in Birmingham | 7,004 |
| The University of Central Lancashire | 9,450 |
| Cheltenham and Gloucester College of HE | 3,251 |
| London Guildhall University | 5,115 |
| Coventry University | 6,274 |
| University of Derby | 3,930 |
| The University of East London | 3,578 |
| The University of Greenwich | 5,769 |
| University of Hertfordshire | 6,577 |
| The University of Huddersfield | 5,864 |
| The University of Lincolnshire and Humberside | 4,196 |
| Kingston University | 5,151 |
| Leeds Metropolitan University | 9,845 |
| Liverpool John Moores University | 6,765 |
| The Manchester Metropolitan University | 9,474 |
| Middlesex University | 7,955 |
| De Montfort University | 6,827 |
| The University of Northumbria at Newcastle | 7,251 |
| The University of North London | 5,024 |
| Nottingham Trent University | 7,088 |
| Oxford Brookes University | 4,437 |
| The University of Plymouth | 7,633 |
| The University of Portsmouth | 5,541 |
| Sheffield Hallam University | 6,321 |
| South Bank University | 6,060 |
| Staffordshire University | 6,980 |
| The University of Sunderland | 4,045 |
| The University of Teesside | 6,008 |
| Thames Valley University | 6,231 |
| The University of the West of England, Bristol | 7,962 |
| Chichester Institute of HE | 1,334 |
| The University of Westminster | 7,317 |
| Wimbledon School of Art | 193 |
| The University of Wolverhampton | 7,789 |
| University of Wales College, Newport | 3,603 |
| The North-East Wales Institute of Higher Education | 2,227 |
| University of Wales Institute, Cardiff | 3,278 |
| University of Glamorgan | 6,561 |
| Swansea Institute of Higher Education | 1,830 |
| Trinity College, Carmarthen | 993 |
| University of Abertay, Dundee | 1,283 |
| Edinburgh College of Art | 398 |
| Glasgow School of Art | 471 |
| Northern College of Education | 536 |
| Queen Margaret College | 1,353 |
| Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama | 155 |
| The Robert Gordon University | 3,061 |
| The University of Paisley | 3,025 |
| Glasgow Caledonian University | 5,239 |
| Napier University | 3,995 |
| Aston University | 1,667 |
| The University of Bath | 2,134 |
| The University of Birmingham | 6,317 |
| The University of Bradford | 2,791 |
| The University of Bristol | 4,671 |
| Brunel University | 3,551 |
| The University of Cambridge | 5,925 |
| City University | 3,862 |
| The University of Durham | 3,744 |
| The University of East Anglia | 3,917 |
| The University of Essex | 2,315 |
| The University of Exeter | 3,365 |
| The University of Hull | 6,260 |
| The University of Keele | 2,456 |

*Full-time and part-time undergraduate entrants to UK HEIs*

| *As at 31 December 2000* | *Entrants* |
|---|---|
| The University of Kent at Canterbury | 4,025 |
| The University of Lancaster | 3,712 |
| University of Leeds | 7,908 |
| University of Leicester | 2,680 |
| The University of Liverpool | 5,703 |
| Birkbeck College | 5,173 |
| Goldsmiths' College | 2,383 |
| Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine | 2,164 |
| Institute of Education, University of London | 17 |
| Kings College London | 4,663 |
| London School of Economics and Political Science | 1,383 |
| Queen Mary and Westfield College | 2,588 |
| Royal Holloway and Bedford New College | 1,468 |
| The Royal Veterinary College | 176 |
| St. George's Hospital Medical School | 917 |
| The School of Oriental and African Studies | 818 |
| The School of Pharmacy, University of London | 172 |
| University College London | 3,928 |
| London University—(Central Institute and activities) | 88 |
| Loughborough University of Technology | 3,191 |
| The Victoria University of Manchester | 6,330 |
| The University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne | 4,395 |
| The University of Nottingham | 6,635 |
| The University of Oxford | 5,460 |
| The University of Reading | 3,976 |
| The University of Salford | 6,944 |
| The University of Sheffield | 6,635 |
| The University of Southampton | 6,239 |
| The University of surrey | 2,796 |
| The University of Sussex | 4,202 |
| The University of Warwick | 6,558 |
| The University of York | 2,643 |
| The University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology | 1,496 |
| The University of Edinburgh | 5,102 |
| The University of Glasgow | 7,601 |
| The University of Strathclyde | 3,800 |
| The University of Aberdeen | 3,056 |
| Heriot-Watt University | 1,666 |
| The University of Dundee | 3,246 |
| The University of St. Andrews | 1,595 |
| The University of Stirling | 2,067 |
| Scottish Agricultural College | 435 |
| The University of Wales, Lampeter | 894 |
| The University of Wales, Aberystwyth | 2,767 |
| University Wales, Bangor | 2,610 |
| University of Wales, Cardiff | 6,446 |
| University of Wales, Swansea | 3,737 |
| University of Wales College of Medicine | 846 |
| Welsh College of Music and Drama | 231 |
| The Queen's University of Belfast | 7,251 |
| University of Ulster | 6,500 |
| Institute of Cancer Research | 114 |
| Writtle College | 586 |
| Norwich School of Art and Design | 276 |
| Northern School of Contemporary Dance | 50 |
| Cumbria College of Art and Design | 341 |
| Stranmillis University College | 358 |
| St. Mary's University College | 295 |
| Total | 597,020 |

## Education Funding Statistics

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she has collated on the proportion of total expenditure on *(a)* education, *(b)* higher education and *(c)* higher education student support met by (i) private funding, (ii) public funding in (A) each EU country, (B) the USA, (C) Australia and (D) New Zealand. [22793]

**Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* My Department does not collate any data regarding spending on education in other countries. Information regarding the proportion of total expenditure on education and higher education met by both private and public funding in other countries is available in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publication, "Education at a Glance", 2001 Edition (Chapter B3—Charts B3.1, B3.2, Table B3.1). A copy of this publication is to be found in the House of Commons Library (POLIS Accession Number: 944669349). No figures are published in the UK on public and private shares of expenditure on student support in these countries.

## Education Funding (Worcestershire)

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the sources of funding for schools and local education authorities paid by her Department to schools and local education authorities; which of these sources of funding are available in Worcestershire; and if she will make a statement. [22909]

**Mr. Timms:** Sources of funding provided by the Department in 2001–02 are as listed:

Standards Fund

School Standards Grant

Teachers' Pay Reform Grants (Threshold, Threshold Supply, Deputies' Assimilation, Leadership Group, Performance Pay Progression)

Education Budget Support Grant

Nursery Education Grant

Childcare Grant

Education Action Zone Grant

Transitional Grant (former GM Schools)

Education Maintenance Allowance

Schools Capital Grants (Basic Need—ACG, VA Schools Grant, Schools Access Initiative, New Deal for Schools).

All of the sources of funding are available in Worcestershire, with the exception of support for Education Action Zones. There are no Education Action Zones in Worcestershire.

## Individual Learning Accounts

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason the individual learning account system was not accessible by learning providers between 4.15 pm and 6.30 pm on Friday 23 November. [23107]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* On Friday 23 November the ILA website experienced heavy traffic, with 22,481 successful hits. As a result access may have been difficult at any time. From 5.00 pm on 23 November work was carried out to enable the website to be closed at 6.30 pm. During this process access to the system was restricted.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) to ask the Secretary of State for Education, which learning providers attended the individual learning account focus group meeting at the Department for Education and Skills on 25 July; and what recommendations were made; [23113]

(2) what action was taken by her Department following the advice received by those attending her Department's individual learning account focus group on 25 July on the exploitation of the system. [23112]

**John Healey:** As part of the workshop on 25 July the specific details of the new learning provider agreement were discussed and providers were asked to comment on what additional guidance they felt would help them comply with the principles of the agreement. We also advised providers of our intent to introduce a learner leaflet to help individuals make a more informed choice about the learning they undertook.

An initial draft of new learning provider guidance incorporating, where possible, suggestions made by providers at these workshops was produced on 5 October. The final draft of this document was put on hold due to the early closure of the ILA programme. The learner leaflet was completed and from the end of August was issued to all individuals who opened an ILA.

The individuals who attended the workshop on 25 July were: Libby Woodhatch—Seafish Training Association; Tim Addison—Future Open College; Neil Eades—Best Training; Tessa Mitchell—Manor Community College; Richard Marshall—Imperial College; and Fiona Nouri—Royal College of Art.

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether her Department has written contracts with training organisations providing services to ILA holders. [23438]

**John Healey:** The Department does not have written contracts with training organisations providing training to ILA account holders.

**Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many arrests have been made in connection with fraud of the Government's individual learning accounts scheme. [23548]

**John Healey:** 39 arrests have been made and one person has been charged in relation to allegations of fraud in connection with the operation of the individual learning account programme.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 814W, on individual learning accounts, if she will enable the individual learning account holders to use their accounts as soon as the system has been proofed against fraud and theft. [23583]

**John Healey:** Account holders will be able to pursue any legitimate learning booked before the programme closed on 23 November. However, we have now withdrawn the current ILA programme, and there are therefore no plans to reinstate access to the individual learning account system for account holders.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 814W, on individual learning accounts, if she will make it her policy to give such individual learning account holders priority in the new system after it is established. [23585]

**John Healey:** We are developing plans for supporting adult learners which build on the successful elements of the ILA programme. It is too early to say who or what learning will be eligible for support under those plans.

### Delegated Budgets

**David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what percentage of Leicestershire LEA's education budget was delegated to schools in the financial years *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01; and what percentage of the LEA education budget Leicestershire schools will receive in 2001–02; [23314]

(2) what average percentage of the LEA education budget was delegated to schools in England and Wales in the financial years *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01; and what the projected figure is for 2001–02; [23313]

(3) what progress has been made in delegating LEAs' education budgets to schools in England and Wales for the year 2001–02. [23312]

**Mr. Timms:** The Government have set authorities in England a target in delegating percentages of the local schools budget (LSB) to schools. In 2000–01 and 2001–02, the Government's target for delegating the LSB to schools was 80 per cent. and 85 per cent. respectively; the average delegation actually achieved by LEAs was 84.2 per cent. and 86.5 per cent. Although there was no national target set in 1999–2000, the average delegation rate actually achieved by LEAs in England was 82.4 per cent. Next year, 2002–03, the national delegation target is 87 per cent. We expect authorities to reach this target, prior to the proposed introduction of the new local authority funding system in 2003–04 when we will be moving towards the publication of separate schools and LEA budgets.

From 1999–2000 to 2001–02, Leicestershire LEA achieved delegation percentages of 83.4 per cent., 84.2 per cent. and 85 per cent. respectively.

School funding in Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

### Education Action Zones

**Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings she has had with Ofsted to discuss the performance of schools within education action zones. [23546]

**Mr. Timms:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State holds meetings with HM Chief Inspector every four to six weeks. The performance of schools in education action zones is just one of a wide range of issues that they discuss during the course of these meetings.

**Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings she has had with Ofsted to discuss her decision to abolish education action zones. [23547]

**Mr. Timms:** All education action zones will complete their agreed full statutory term. Under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, EAZs had a maximum statutory term of five years.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State holds meetings with HM Chief Inspector every four to six weeks to discuss a wide range of matters including education action zones.

**Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent meetings she has had with the National Union of Teachers to discuss the performance of schools within education action zones. [23676]

**Mr. Timms:** My right hon. Friend and I have had no recent meetings with the National Union of Teachers to discuss the performance of schools within education action zones.

### Keystage 2 (Leaked Results)

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the joint inquiry by her Department and the Office for National Statistics into the leak of keystage 2 results during the week of 11 September will be *(a)* completed and *(b)* made public. [23930]

**Mr. Timms:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 782W.

### Teachers' Pay

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what directions she is giving *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* schools on how to finance the higher pay scale for teachers due in 2002. [24016]

**Mr. Timms:** In England we are consulting on a new special grant to help schools fund the cost of performance points, including points on the upper pay scale. The grant—worth £250 million over the next two financial years—will be allocated to local education authorities using a formula that takes account of the number of teachers on the upper pay scale. Local authorities will be expected to allocate the money to schools in the same way. Schools will be free to decide how much to invest in performance points, taking account of all the resources available to them including special grant.

Funding for teachers' pay in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

### Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

**Jim Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to announce the quinquennial review of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. [24366]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** In accordance with the Government's policy of conducting quinquennial reviews of all non-departmental public bodies, my Department is today beginning a review of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Following Cabinet Office guidelines, the terms of reference for the first stage of the review will be:

to review the role and functions of QCA as outlined in its remit letter, the efficiency and effectiveness with which they have been carried out and how these functions contribute to the delivery of wider DfES and Government objectives;

to consider the likely need for these functions in the future and whether there is a need for any reduction or expansion in the functions undertaken by QCA;

to consider what QCA's customers and other interested parties think about its role, performance and responsiveness to their needs;

to consider whether continued NDPB status is the best way of delivering these functions or whether some, or all, of the functions could be delivered more efficiently and effectively within an alternative organisational framework, including by another private, public or voluntary body or otherwise within Government; and

to consider the powers, remit, objectives and status of QCA and the membership and role of the Board.

We should welcome comments on those matters to be covered by the review from all those with an interest in the work of QCA. Comments, which may be made public unless respondents specifically request otherwise, should be sent by 28 February 2002 to:

Ellie Reynolds
Department for Education and Skills
E3c
Moorfoot
Sheffield S1 4PQ
or. by e-mail to: ellie.reynolds@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

We have asked that this first stage of the review should be completed by spring 2002.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Wednesday 19 December 2001*

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Gibraltar

**Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what form consultations with the Government of Gibraltar will take prior to the next meeting with Spain under the terms of the Brussels Process. [21684]

**Peter Hain:** Ministers and officials will continue actively to maintain and pursue contacts with the Chief Minister and Government of Gibraltar.

**Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what future discussion he has planned with the Governor of Gibraltar. [23913]

**Peter Hain:** Normal contacts between Ministers and officials and the Governor of Gibraltar will continue.

**Jim Sheridan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision will be taken on the model adopted by Gibraltar for the 2004 European elections; and what discussions he has had with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar on the participation of Gibraltar in the 2004 European elections. [24028]

**Peter Hain:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer (UIN 21531) I gave to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 632W.

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Spanish Government and *(b)* EU partners regarding participation of Gibraltar in the 2004 European elections. [24029]

**Peter Hain:** Following the European Court of Human Rights' judgment in Matthews *v.* UK, the extension of the European parliamentary franchise to Gibraltar was discussed with our EU partners in the relevant Council working group.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 312W.

**John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he proposes to introduce legislation to allow Gibraltar to participate in the 2004 European elections; and when the next round of discussions under the Brussels process will take place. [24030]

**Peter Hain:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 800W; and to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 311W.

### Zimbabwe

**Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with Southern African Governments about the situation in Zimbabwe. [22721]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Ministers and officials at all levels are in regular contact with representatives of Southern African Governments. My noble Friend Baroness Amos has recently spoken to representatives of the South African, Malawian, Mozambican and Zimbabwean Governments, among others. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke to the Botswana Foreign Minister on 3 December and plans to meet him again during the meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on 20 December.

### Oman

**Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit Oman. [23231]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Secretary of State has no plans to visit Oman at present.

### EU Accession

**Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's position for the date of entry to the European Union of the applicant countries. [23230]

**Peter Hain:** The Laeken European Council (14–15 December) stated its determination to complete accession negotiations by the end of 2002 with those candidates that are ready, so they can participate in the 2004 European Parliament elections as members. The Government welcome these conclusions, which echo the objective set by the Prime Minister in Warsaw last year.

### General Affairs Council

**Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council held in Brussels on 10 to 11 December; what the Government's position was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [23886]

**Peter Hain:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) in Brussels on 10 December.

The GAC adopted the 16 "A" Points listed in document number 15005/01. It also noted the resolutions, decisions and opinions adopted by the European Parliament in its part-session of 12–15 November 2001 in its part-session in Strasbourg listed in document number 13612/01. Copies of both documents have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The Conclusions of the Council were adopted by consensus. The only formal vote took place on the Generalised System of Preferences (see following).

*Work in other Council Formations*

The Presidency drew attention to the Secretariat's stocktaking report of the main issues being discussed by other sectoral meetings of the Council of Ministers, with particular reference to the European Arrest Warrant, Galileo and the Community Patent.

*Preparations for Laeken (including Council Reform)*

The Presidency issued a draft agenda for the first day of the Laeken summit. The following items featured:

post-11 September—an updated road-map and report of EU action

Afghanistan

the Middle East Peace Process

the Western Balkans

ESDP

Justice and Home Affairs

EU enlargement

Economic/social issues (taking forward the Lisbon process to Barcelona, Community Patent, introduction of the euro).

modalities for a Convention on the Future of the EU

EU agency locations.

*Enlargement*

Conclusions were agreed by Council underlining the EU's commitment to meeting the Gothenburg timetable, noting that enlargement was affordable within the current financial perspective, welcoming the recent signs of progress in the UN Cyprus process and confirming that the provisions of a Cyprus settlement could be accommodated within the terms of its accession to the EU. The UK welcomed in particular the emphasis on meeting the timetable set at the Gothenburg European Council.

*EU follow-up to 11 September*

The Council, as co-ordinator of the EU's Action Plan against terrorism, examined the updated roadmap outlining the current state of play. It was encouraged by substantial development made, particularly in priority areas. It also welcomed the Presidency's prospective report to the Laeken European Council on the implementation of the Action Plan.

The Council reached political agreement on EU measures to freeze terrorist assets in pursuit of UN Security Council Resolution 1373. The Council also agreed to consider further the implications of the 11 September attacks for EU non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control policy.

The Council welcomed progress made on 7 December on the European arrest warrant, a common definition of terrorist offences and minimum sentencing thresholds and a decision to make Eurojust fully operational. It reiterated the Union's commitment to winning the fight against terrorism and welcomed the support of candidate countries as noted at the meeting of the European Conference on 20 October. The UK underlined the need for continuing work to ensure rapid implementation of the commitments made by the Union.

*General System of Preferential Tariffs 2002–04*

The Council adopted by a qualified majority the new GSP Regulation, which provides for enhanced EC trade preferences to developing countries. All member states except Portugal voted for the regulation.

*Governance White Paper*

The Council noted with interest the measures proposed in the Commission's White Paper on European governance. It undertook to hold a detailed discussion at a subsequent meeting, giving the Commission its reaction in due course and aimed to co-ordinate a plan of action during the first half of 2002. The UK is keen to see a debate on the measures proposed in the White Paper.

*ESDP*

The Presidency's draft report, summarising progress over the last six months on the European Security and Defence Policy, was discussed by Ministers and will be forwarded to the European Council at Laeken. The UK supported the draft report and in particular the emphasis on capabilities.

*Middle East Peace Process*

The Council reiterated its commitment to the Middle East peace process. It concluded that only determined and concerted action by the European Union, the United Nations, the United States and the Russian Federation would help break the cycle of violence and restore the negotiations.

The Council noted that this required: the reaffirmation and full recognition of Israel's irrevocable right to live in peace and security within internationally recognised borders; the establishment of a viable and democratic Palestinian State; and an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories.

The Council stated that, as a first step, the following pledges had to be given: by the Palestinian authority to dismantle Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorist networks plus a public appeal for an end to the armed intifada; from Israel, a pledge to withdraw its military forces, end extrajudicial executions, lift all restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people, and impose a freeze on settlements.

The Council asked Javier Solana, High Representative for CFSP, to go to the region and report back to Laeken European Council. The UK supported this proposal.

*Afghanistan*

The Council confirmed the appointment of Klaus Klaiber, a senior German diplomat, as EU Special Representative for Afghanistan. The Council adopted Conclusions underlining the importance of effective donor co-ordination in the reconstruction effort. The UK emphasised the importance of early, visible results.

*Western Balkans*

The Council noted that the planned Macedonia donors' conference would not be held before next year, after the adoption of the local self-government law required by the August 2001 Framework Agreement. It confirmed the appointment of Erhard Busek as EU Special Representative for the Stability Pact.

*AOB: Gender Mainstreaming in the EuroMed/Barcelona Process*

The Presidency reported on its programme for developing gender mainstreaming in the Barcelona Process, highlighting its EuroMed conference on the role of women in economic development.

### Egypt

**Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visas have been issued for settlement for spouses from Egypt in the last five years. [23777]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The total number of settlement visas issued in Cairo between 1996 and 2000 is as follows:

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1996 | 104 |
| 1997 | 164 |
| 1998 | 185 |
| 1999 | 194 |
| 2000 | 152 |

*Note:*
Figures do not distinguish between spouse and other settlement visas. This information could be obtained only by mutual search of Post's records, at disproportionate cost.

The Home Office has provided the following information on the number of settlement applications received from Egyptian nationals at all ports, which resulted in the applications being accepted.

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1996 | 190 |
| 1997 | 190 |
| 1998 | 210 |
| 1999 | 210 |
| 2000 | 210 |

*Note:*
Figures for both spouses and unmarried partners, rounded to the nearest five.

### Yemen

**Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Yemen. [23779]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Secretary of State has no plans to visit Yemen at present.

### Afghanistan

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about British diplomatic representation in Kabul. [24543]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Following discussions with the incoming Interim Administration, we expect to renew diplomatic relations with Afghanistan on 22 December and to re-designate the Office of the British Representative in Kabul as an embassy, headed by a Chargé d'Affaires. We last had permanent diplomatic representation in Kabul in 1989. We did not have normal government-to-government dealings with the Taliban regime.

### Data Protection

**Mrs. Fitzsimons:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the certificates he has signed under section 28 of the Data Protection Act 1998, covering personal data processed by *(a)* the SIS and *(b)* GCHQ. [24960]

**Mr. Straw:** On 8 December I revoked Data Protection Act exemption certificates dated 30 July 2000 and issued new ones. I have placed copies of the new certificates, and a statement outlining the reasoning behind their issue, in the Library of the House.

### Regional Funding

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had regarding the implications of European Union enlargement on regional structural fund programmes in Wales. [23981]

**Alan Johnson:** I have been asked to reply.

There have so far been no specific discussions on the implications of EU enlargement for the Structural Funds programmes in Wales. However, as the Minister in the DTI responsible for the Structural Funds, I represented the UK at an informal meeting of EU regional policy Ministers held in Namur on 13 July under the Belgian Presidency of the EU, at which the Structural Funds was the main item on the agenda. More recently, I also touched on the subject with Michel Barnier, European Commissioner responsible for Regional Affairs, during his visit to the UK in early November. On both these occasions I put forward the current UK position that there should be a thorough review of the purpose and added value of the Structural Funds, and of the balance between the role of the EU and that of member states in providing assistance to lagging regions, before we enter into a debate about the implications for different member states, nations and regions of possible future Structural Funds regimes.

### Small Businesses

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 June 2000, *Official Report*, column 230W, on small businesses, how many of the improvements listed have been instigated; and what is his assessment of *(a)* the costs and *(b)* benefits to business therefrom. [19627]

**Nigel Griffiths:** I have been asked to reply.

Heads of Government will review progress on reform undertaken as a result of the Lisbon and Stockholm European Councils at their Council in Barcelona in March 2002.

## SOLICITOR-GENERAL

### Trial Delays (Counsel)

**Andrew Mackinlay:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the circumstances in which major trials have been delayed recently owing to commitment of Counsel to other cases for which they have agreed to be instructed which are listed at the same time. [24153]

**The Solicitor-General:** It is important that major trials are conducted expeditiously in the interests of justice. Decisions as to the timing of trials are for the judges to determine, bearing in mind the representations that they receive. I am aware of the case to which this question refers, the name of which I am omitting since the matter

is sub judice; however, I hope that the following information will be of assistance. The trial was originally fixed to commence on 2 October 2001. Application was made on behalf of one defendant for that date to be vacated due to serious illness rendering him unfit to stand trial. The matter was investigated by the Crown Prosecution Service and an independent medical report confirmed the position.

The case was therefore listed again before the trial judge to fix a new date. At this hearing it was clear that the first defendant would not be fit for trial for a period of six months. All parties, prosecution and the four defendants, were agreed that it was in the interests of justice that all should be tried together. However, when Counsel for the Crown sought a listing on the first available date in April 2002, six months ahead, Counsel for another defendant opposed this, on the grounds that neither he nor his junior, who had represented their client from the first appearance before the Crown court, would be available until the end of October 2002, and it would be unjust to deprive him of both counsel in those circumstances.

The Counsel for the prosecution opposed a delay of this length. In the event, the trial judge, having accepted that a delay until April was unavoidable because of the first defendant's illness and having weighed all the competing interests, ruled, with, she said, great reluctance, that the trial should be fixed for 4 November 2002.

One defendant involved in these proceedings is already serving a sentence of imprisonment having been convicted following an earlier linked trial.

### Sellafield

**Llew Smith:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the legal implications for the United Kingdom of the adjudication of the United Nations International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea, Ireland *v.* United Kingdom, on the Sellafield MOX plant, given on 3 December in Hamburg. [22825]

**Peter Hain:** I have been asked to reply.

By its order of 3 December 2002, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea "pending a decision by the Annexe VII arbitral tribunal" prescribed a provisional measure that Ireland and the United Kingdom "shall co-operate and shall for this purpose enter into consultations forthwith in order to:

*(a)* exchange further information with regard to possible consequences for the Irish Sea arising out of the commissioning of the MOX plant;

*(b)* monitor risks or the effects of the operation of the MOX plant for the Irish Sea;

*(c)* devise, as appropriate, measures to prevent pollution of the marine environment which might result from the operation of the MOX plant."

This provisional measure is legally binding and the United Kingdom will comply fully with it.

### Staff

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Solicitor-General how many people were employed in her Department in each of the last four years. [23791]

**The Solicitor-General:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Cabinet Office.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will make a statement on the contribution made by the New Audiences Fund to the efforts to widen access to the arts; [22540]

(2) if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target to increase access to the performing arts by attracting new audiences. [22542]

**Dr. Howells:** Attendance figures at organisations funded by the Arts Council of England increased by nearly 2 million between 1999–2000 and 2000–01. The contribution of the New Audiences Programme to this improvement is set out in the 2001 DCMS annual report.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement to devolve decision-making to the regions; [22561]

(2) if the New Opportunities Fund has established a network of regionally based staff in pursuit of the PSA target to devolve decision-making to the regions and strengthen regional bodies. [22582]

**Dr. Howells:** The Regional Cultural Consortiums have all produced regional cultural strategies. The Heritage Lottery Fund in England is now devolved to nine separate regional decision-making committees and by April 2002 the fund will open offices in each English region. The New Opportunities Fund now has a regional team and one representative in each region.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target to work with the British film industry to implement a new joint funded strategy for the development of the industry; [22543]

(2) if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target to develop film culture and a sustainable domestic film industry; [22564]

(3) if she will make a statement on progress towards the target for improving strategic mechanisms for influencing anti-fraud standards in sponsored bodies; [22523]

(4) if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for performance-related funding agreements of non-departmental public bodies. [22560]

**Dr. Howells:** The current position is set out in the Department's 2001 Annual Report (CM5114).

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what standard performance targets have been incorporated in the funding agreements of her Department's sponsored museums and galleries. [22559]

**Dr. Howells:** The following core performance targets appear in the current funding agreements

Number of total visitors

Number of adult visitors

Number of child visitors

Number of over-60s visitors

Number of website visits

Number of UK and overseas loan venues

Percentage of collection stored in correct environmental conditions

Percentage of collection internet-accessible

Number of learners in on-site educational programmes

Grant-in-aid per visitor

Average days lost sick per employee excluding long-term sickness.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target of extending social inclusiveness by increasing the involvement of identified priority groups in each of the sectors for which her Department has responsibility. [22552]

**Dr. Howells:** In January this year, DCMS published a sectoral social inclusion strategy for libraries, museums, galleries and archives. Counterpart documents on the historic and built environment and on the arts will follow. In its follow-up report to the work of the Policy Action Team 10 on Arts and Sport, published in February 2201, the Department also presented an action plan for disabled people and an outline action plan for people from ethnic minorities.

DCMS is working with the Arts Council of England to develop the £40 million Creative Partnerships programme, bringing together arts and media professionals with children in 16 deprived areas. All pilots will be up and running by April 2002. DCMS is also working alongside Department for Education and Skills, the New Opportunities Fund, Sport England and the Arts Council of England on the Space for Sport and Arts programme. This will fund new or renovated sports and arts facilities in around 300 primary schools in 65 deprived local education authority areas.

The Millennium Commission made decisions on their fifth funding round in June 2001, for projects that reflect the aims and aspirations of ethnic minority communities in the UK. The Commission awarded 10 grants with a total value of £23.6 million. Grants were awarded during 2000 for projects that reflected the aims and aspirations of black communities in the UK.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the Public Service Agreement target to transfer her Department's responsibility for underwater archaeology to English Heritage. [22563]

**Dr. Howells:** The Government are supporting a Private Member's Bill introduced into another place in July 2001 by Baroness Anelay of St. Johns, which includes provisions that were originally in the Culture and Recreation Bill to transfer underwater archaeology to English Heritage. The Bill has completed its passage through the other place and will shortly be introduced into the Commons.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment she has made of the margin of failure to achieve the target for reduced sickness absence in the Royal Parks Agency in 2001; [22571]

(2) what steps she is taking to assist the Royal Parks Agency in meeting its 2003 target for reduced sickness absence. [22570]

**Dr. Howells:** The Chief Executive of the Royal Parks Agency (RPA) is responsible for meeting the targets set for reduced sick absence. He has put in place a strategy to deliver improved performance in this area. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State monitors the performance of the parks through a funding agreement. Should the RPA fail to meet any of its targets the Chief Executive is required to report this to the Secretary of State.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target of increasing visitor numbers in major national museums. [22525]

**Dr. Howells:** Visitors to DCMS sponsored museums and galleries increased by 22 per cent. in 2000–01. Child visitors have increased by up to 20 per cent. since 1 April 1999 and visits from people over 60 increased by 40 per cent. in 2000–01. Free access for all to permanent collections held by DCMS sponsored museums was introduced on 1 December 2001.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target of promoting quality tourism development. [22547]

**Dr. Howells:** Using the performance measure of the level of expenditure in the United Kingdom by domestic and overseas tourists, the target for 2000, £29.1 billion, was exceeded with an outturn of £38.9 billion.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the target for answering external correspondence. [22579]

**Dr. Howells:** In the period April-October 2001 (latest figures) 88 per cent. of all external correspondence was answered within 18 working days.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of improved performance as a result of redeveloped funding agreements with non-departmental public bodies. [22565]

**Dr. Howells:** It is too early to make a full assessment because the new funding agreements came into effect in April of this year. Regular six-monthly reports on the funding agreement targets will be monitored by the Department and will feed into the assessment of progress towards the value-for-money target in the DCMS 2001–04 Public Service Agreement.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the target for the effective use of her Department's estate. [22575]

**Dr. Howells:** The progress statement in the Department's 2001 Annual Report is still current. With regard to the property at 7 St. James's Square, this has been disposed of by assigning the lease.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of invoices to her Department in 2000–01 were undisputed. [22580]

**Dr. Howells:** In 2000–01, 99.4 per cent. of invoices were undisputed.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the target for the review of her Department's services and activities. [22574]

**Dr. Howells:** The Department is on schedule to meet its current Service Delivery Agreement target to review 50 per cent. (by expenditure) of its services and activities by December 2004. We completed a review of facilities management, accounting for 8 per cent. of spend, in 1999–2000; the function was contracted out. We are about to carry out a review of the core functions of policy-making and sponsorship of non-departmental public bodies. This review will account for a further 40 per cent. and will be completed during 2002–03. Information technology support (5 per cent.) will be reviewed in 2003–04, when contracts are up for renewal.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for long-term savings in the support for heritage, sport and tourism. [22557]

**Dr. Howells:** The Department is currently conducting the second stage of a Quinquennial Review of Sport England and the first stage of a review of English Heritage. These reviews will examine, among other issues, the scope for improvements in efficient, effective and responsive service delivery. Following the reconstitution of the English Tourist Board as the English Tourism Council (ETC), resources have been freed up to allow an increase in support to the English Regional Tourist Boards of over a third.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target of ensuring that public service broadcasters sustain the quality and range of their output. [22544]

**Dr. Howells:** On 13 September 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave the BBC approval to launch three new digital television channels—BBC4 and two children's channels—and five new digital radio channels. The approval was subject to conditions, including commitments to high quality, interactivity and the use of home-grown talent and productions. The new channels should educate and inform as well as entertain, and they should attract a wider range of viewers to all digital services. On 4 December 2001, my right hon. Friend received an application from the BBC to launch BBC3, a channel targeted at younger people, which will be considered in accordance with the published criteria for BBC new services.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for the number of new educational sessions undertaken by arts organisations. [22555]

**Dr. Howells:** Estimates based on returns received by the Arts Council of England indicate that the PSA target has been exceeded.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the target for the disposal of surplus properties at St. Pancras has been achieved. [22568]

**Dr. Howells:** The land to the north of the British Library at St. Pancras has been temporarily transferred to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, for purposes connected with the channel tunnel rail link. Once the land is returned to DCMS, disposal will be considered in the light of available opportunities.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the target for the reduction of running costs as a proportion of the departmental expenditure limit. [22578]

**Dr. Howells:** On the basis of my Department's current expenditure limits for the financial years 2001–02 to 2003–04, the average annual reduction in running costs is forecast to be approximately 4 per cent.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on performance against the target for the Millennium celebrations. [22524]

**Dr. Howells:** The Department remains committed to co-ordinating the Government's interest in the Millennium following an array of successful celebrations during the year 2000. After the closure of the Millennium Experience on 31 December 2000 which was operated by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), the Department has continued to worked closely with the Millennium Commission which is distributing over £2 billion of Lottery funds. The commission has invested carefully and the projects it has funded will leave a lasting legacy for generations to come.

The commission's projects have created an estimated 13,300 permanent jobs and many capital projects have also acted as a catalyst for the regeneration of key areas throughout the country. Projects have levered in significant additional funding from a wide variety of sources, and the capital projects programme has constituted 1.35 per cent. of the total UK construction industry by value since 1994.

A study into the economic impact of the Millennium Experience at Greenwich which was jointly commissioned by NMEC, English Partnerships and the London borough of Greenwich, has established that the Dome eventually generated contracts worth more than £500 million for UK companies; generated £385 million in direct spending by visitors on transport, accommodation, catering etc.; provided work for over 7,700 people in construction and over 5,000 in management and operation between 1997 and 2000; and led to the regeneration of nearly 300 acres of formerly derelict, contaminated land.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target to raise standards of care of museum collections and public access to them. [22553]

**Dr. Howells:** Since 1999, the Designated Museums Challenge Scheme has provided support for each museum with designated collections. £15 million has been awarded to help improve the care of and access to those collections, in recognition of their outstanding importance. The number of museums in the scheme was increased to 62 in 1999.

### Works of Art

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much has been spent by the Government since 1 May 1997 on acquiring works of art; and how much has been realised from the sale of works of art. [23073]

**Dr. Howells:** Since 1 May 1997 the Government Art Collection has spent £688,000 on purchases of works of art. No works of art have been sold from the Government Art Collection. The Foreign Office and Commonwealth Office has spent approximately £506,501 and the Department for Education and Skills approximately £26,451.

We have been notified of no other purchases or sales by other Government Departments.

### Public Libraries

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many public libraries there were in the Buckingham constituency in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [23749]

**Dr. Howells:** There are eight public libraries in the Buckingham constituency: Buckingham; Haddenham; Ivinghoe; Long Crendon; Steeple Claydon; Stewkley; Wing; and Winslow. This is the same number as in 1997. The Buckingham mobile library (full-time) and the Aylesbury Urban and Aylesbury Rural mobiles (part-time), also serve the constituency.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the percentage of adults in the Buckingham constituency that are library members. [23748]

**Dr. Howells:** Such statistics are not maintained on a constituency basis, and Buckinghamshire do not currently differentiate between adult and child members. However, Buckinghamshire county council's statistics show that 75 per cent. of the population of the county are library members. This is in excess of the national average.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the libraries based in the Buckingham constituency which have received funding from the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge indicating *(a)* the nature of the project, *(b)* the date of the award and *(c)* the amount of funding provided in each case. [23747]

**Dr. Howells:** No libraries in the Buckinghamshire constituency have been successful in their applications for match funding from the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund since the programme began in 1998.

### Arts Bodies

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the evidence presented in the Arts Council of England's two consultation periods; and if she will make a statement. [23570]

**Dr. Howells:** Following the first consultation my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wanted to see proposals which created a dynamic new organisation; brought the regions into the heart of the funding system; delegated real decision making to regional level; set challenging targets for administrative savings; was simpler and more consistent for those applying for funding.

We are confident that the new proposals will deliver this.

The Secretary of State has just received a progress report following the second consultation exercise and will respond to the Arts Council in due course.

### PFI/PPP Contracts

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* PFI and *(b)* PPP contracts her Department maintains; if she will list those contracts, giving their (i) length and (ii) value, and the businesses involved in fulfilling them; what assessment she has made of those contracts; and if she will make a statement. [23575]

**Dr. Howells:** The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has not itself entered into any PFI or PPP contracts. The Royal Parks Agency, which is an executive agency, has entered into one PFI contract, Pembroke Lodge, Richmond, relating to the restoration of building and operation of catering facilities, which is to last for 30 years. Its value is £1 million, and The Hearsum Family Ltd. is fulfilling the contract. The Agency has employed consultants to advise on whether construction works are compliant with the contract.

### Gambling Report

**Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many responses the Government have received to recommendations *(a)* 60, *(b)* 61, *(c)* 62, *(d)* 63 and *(e)* 64 of the Gambling report, indicating how many (i) supported, (ii) opposed and (iii) were in neutral in respect of each recommendation. [23781]

**Mr. Caborn:** By the end of the consultation period we had received 20 responses supporting and 10 opposing recommendation 60, nine responses supporting and seven opposing recommendation 61; 11 responses supporting and 11 opposing recommendation 62; eight responses supporting and 10 opposing recommendation 63; and nine responses supporting and 13 opposing recommendation 64. A very much larger number of responses did not specifically refer to this group of recommendations. Since these we have received a number of further letters from hon. Members enclosing correspondence from constituents operating or employed in businesses involving gaming machines which children may currently play, criticising the recommendations.

**Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what estimate she has made of the impact on the Government's policies to regenerate seaside resorts of the implementation of recommendations 60–64 of the Gambling Review report; [23780]

(2) what estimate the Government have made of the impact on jobs of the implementation of recommendations 60–64 of the Gambling Review report. [23782]

**Mr. Caborn:** We have not yet completed out consideration of the report.

### Betting Levy Board

**Mr. John Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the use by the Betting Levy Board of its general funds to finance a pension shortfall. [23767]

**Mr. Caborn:** The Horserace Betting Levy Board is responsible for its pension commitments and may properly use Levy income for these purposes.

### Millennium Dome

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received about making the Millennium Dome a listed building; what the earliest possible date for listing the Dome would be; and if she will make a statement. [24130]

**Dr. Howells:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received no representations this year about making the Dome a listed building. The general rule when looking at buildings for listing is that those less than 10 years old are not eligible for consideration. There is no reason for us to adopt a different policy for the Millennium Dome.

### Public Entertainment Licences

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received regarding the issuing of public entertainment licences; and if she will make a statement. [24133]

**Dr. Howells:** Representations from hon. Members, industry, performers and licensing law practitioners concerning public entertainment licensing law have tended to fall into five main categories. These are concerns about inconsistent approaches adopted by different licensing authorities; the scope for local licensing authorities to impose disproportionate and burdensome requirements on smaller venues; the duplication of the requirements with the fire safety and health and safety regulations; some evidence of excessive fee charging; and the limitations on the exemption from public entertainment licensing for public houses in the Licensing Act 1964. Changes to public entertainment licensing laws require primary legislation, and our reform of the alcohol and public entertainment licensing laws will address these anxieties. We shall present the necessary legislation as soon as Parliamentary time permits.

### "Time for Reform"

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to implement the proposals outlined in 'Time for Reform'; what estimate she has made of the time scale for implementation; and if she will make a statement. [24132]

**Dr. Howells:** We remain fully committed to the proposals set out in the White Paper "Time for Reform" and intend to introduce legislation to implement them. The timetable for implementation inevitably depends on when it will be possible to introduce the necessary legislation in Parliament and this will be done as soon as parliamentary time permits.

### Capital Assets

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 889W, on capital assets, if she will place in the Library information on the accounting treatment of the public private partnership projects relating to *(a)* British Library corporate bibliographic services, *(b)* British Library provision of catering services and *(c)* the Royal Parks Embassy Pembroke Lodge; and if she will make a statement. [24258]

**Dr. Howells:** The contract for the British Library corporate bibliographic services project has been terminated. I refer the hon. Member to the Minister for Sport's letter of 18 November 2001 to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), a copy of which has been placed in the Library. The British Library provision of catering services project is treated as the purchase of services and is accounted for off balance sheet. The Royal Parks Agency Pembroke Lodge project is accounted for on balance sheet in accordance with the Accounting Standards Board's Statement of Standard Accounting Practice—Accounting for Leases and Hire Purchase Contracts.

### Regional Arts Boards

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what date she received the responses to consultations about the Arts Council of England's proposals to merge the regional arts boards to create a single organisation for arts funding; and if she will place a copy of the responses in the Library. [24080]

**Dr. Howells:** The Arts Council of England has submitted a progress report on its proposed reorganisation on 29 November 2001. This includes a summary of responses to the consultation and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will respond to this in due course.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what date she received the business plan supporting the Arts Council of England's proposals to merge the regional arts boards to create a single organisation for arts funding; and if she will place a copy of the plan in the Library. [24081]

**Dr. Howells:** On 29 November my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State received a progress report on which she will respond shortly.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the

Chairman of the Arts Council of England's handling of the proposals to merge the regional arts boards to create a single organisation for arts funding. [24077]

**Dr. Howells:** The Government have every confidence in the ability of the Chairman of the Arts Council to deliver a streamlined system for funding the arts in this country. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a progress report to which she will respond shortly.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will assess the Arts Council of England's proposals to create a single organisation for arts funding against the criteria for new organisations established by her Department. [24082]

**Dr. Howells:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a progress report from the Arts Council of England, which she will assess against her original criteria. These are to create a dynamic new organisation which brings regions to the heart of the funding system, delegates decision making, sets challenging targets for administrative savings and is simpler and more consistent for those applying for funding.

### Go Digital

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the Go Digital research programme. [24079]

**Dr. Howells:** The Go Digital pilot project, being led by the Independent Television Commission, and comprising Government and industry partners, has been established to trial the conversion of 300 homes to digital television. Its aim is to address technical and social issues related to switchover. We expect the conversion of 30 homes comprising the first phase of the trial to take place early in 2002.

### Arts Funding

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the funding of arts in England. [24076]

**Dr. Howells:** Arts funding in England is now higher than it has ever been. Funding will rise to £338 million by 2003–04 which represents an increase of over £100 million over four years.

### Arts Subsidies

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the total spending by her Department in the next 12 months in subsidising *(a)* live drama, *(b)* art galleries, *(c)* ballet, *(d)* opera and *(e)* literature. [24394]

**Dr. Howells:** The Department for Culture, Media and Sport allocates funds to the Arts Council of England, which in turn allocates funds to the regional arts boards as appropriate, and to those arts organisations that it deems most deserving and which meet the criteria set for the various funding programmes. The Department allocated a total of £252.2 million to the Arts Council for 2001–02 and £297 million to the Arts Council for 2002–03.

## TREASURY

### Pension Credit

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many recipients will pay an effective marginal tax rate of 40 per cent. as a result of the pension credit. [14444]

**Mr. McCartney:** I have been asked to reply.

Most pensioners do not pay tax. Very few of those receiving pension credit will be liable. Pension credit is not taxable.

### Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many formal notices his Department has received in the last year from the Parliamentary Ombudsman expressing an intention to carry out an investigation; and in respect of each notice how long it took to respond. [18761]

**Ruth Kelly** *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* Information on the outcome of statutory investigations which were concluded during 2000–01 are set out in the Parliamentary Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2000–01, copies of which are available in the Library of the House, or on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk/pca/document/par01/index.htm.

Since 1 April 2001, the Treasury has received three new statutory statements of complaint from the Parliamentary Ombudsman. So far, the Treasury has responded to all three of these cases, and the average time taken to respond overall is 24 days.

### National Health Service

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy not to allow *(a)* social insurance, *(b)* a ring-fenced hypothecated tax and *(c)* additional health user charges as solutions for the future funding mechanism for the national health service; and if he will make a statement. [23659]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Government have made their commitment to increasing resources over the next three years for the NHS, funded from general taxation and linked to reform. Decisions on taxation and spending will be taken in future Budgets and in the spending review next year.

### Financial Services Authority

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent the FSA complied with the service level agreement concluded on 18 December 1998 in *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000. [13256]

**Ruth Kelly:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 489–90W.

### Equitable Life

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the reserves of using them for compensation payments for Equitable Life policy-holders. [14387]

**Ruth Kelly:** Equitable Life's reserves are a matter for the board of Equitable life and its members.

### Treasury Website

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the latest overhaul of the HM Treasury website cost; and what the breakdown of spending on the website has been in each year since 1997. [18307]

**Ruth Kelly:** HM Treasury's new website was launched in November this year and replaces the site originally launched in 1994, which was struggling to cope with the levels of traffic it attracted on Budget day.

The new site is designed to cope with the growing demands being placed upon the Treasury's website, to offer a better service to the public, and to ensure that the Treasury is prepared for future technological developments.

On PBR day the new site was accessed by 20,000 visitors who between them downloaded 183,250 separate documents. This represents a 50 per cent. growth in the number of recorded visitors to the site compared with Budget 2001. There were no reports of anyone being unable to access the site.

This new, more robust site employs completely new computer hardware and software so that it can handle both the tens of thousands of visitors that it receives on Budget day and the increasing number of Treasury documents being made available on the site. The latest version of the site includes new services, such as a comprehensive search facility. It is also designed to cope with emergent technologies, such as mobile internet devices and digital television.

The total cost of launching the new site was £240,595. This included the costs of purchasing new computer hardware and software, software development and integration, and web page design.

This is the first capital expenditure by the Treasury on the www.hm-treasury.gov.uk site since it was launched in 1994.

This investment is intended to ensure that the Treasury is ready to meet its current and future information obligations.

### Pension Funds

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what HM Treasury's estimate is of the asset mix of UK pension funds in *(a)* 2005 and *(b)* 2010; [23764]

(2) if he will make a statement on his assessment of the implications of current trends in respect of the equity/bond asset mix of UK pension funds for *(a)* overall equity risk and *(b)* access to equity finance for small companies. [23760]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Treasury has made no forecast of the asset mix of UK pension funds. However, it keeps developments in financial markets under constant review.

### War Risk Insurance

**John Barrett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost was of the Government's decision to underwrite the third party war risk insurance for UK airline and service providers. [22963]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The total cost of the scheme is unquantifiable at this time, as it depends on potential claims—if any—made under the scheme to the Treasury as reinsurer. Full details of the scheme and the liabilities entered into were submitted to Parliament in a Treasury Minute of 28 November 2001.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the question of 15 October from the hon. Member for Hertsmere, on the subject of fraud and the WFTC. [23151]

**Dawn Primarolo:** I have done so today, at columns 323-24W.

### Benefit Fraud

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to *(a)* encourage and *(b)* enable the public to provide information about fraudulent or improper claims for working families tax credit or other tax credits. [23308]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Inland Revenue treats all information received from members of the public about suspected fraud, including tax credit fraud, very seriously. Members of the public are able to inform the Inland Revenue about potential fraudulent or improper claims to tax credits in a number of ways. They can write to or telephone the Tax Credit Office or a local office or telephone a helpline, including the Benefits Anti-fraud Hotline. The Tax Credit Office also has a Childcare Tax Credit Hotline for child care providers to give information of suspected improper claims for child care costs.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employers have been *(a)* investigated and *(b)* prosecuted in respect of fraudulent claims for (i) working families tax credit and (ii) other tax credits in each year since the relevant credit commenced. [23309]

**Dawn Primarolo:** *(a)* In 2000–01, routine checks were carried out on the payroll records of approximately 6,800 employers who made payments of tax credits to their employees. The checks established that the vast majority of employers were operating tax credit payments correctly.

In addition, 199 employer cases were taken up by local offices for action in 2000–01 where the Tax Credit Office suspected error or breakdown of the payment system. Of those cases

13 resulted in recovery of tax credits and payment of penalties;

161 were settled in other ways, for instance by giving educational assistance and explanations to the employer, that enabled the employee to receive the tax credits due to them;

25 cases are still working, and the outcome is not yet known.

*(b)* There have been no prosecutions of employers in respect of tax credits.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* investigations, *(b)* penalties and *(c)* prosecutions in respect of (i) working families tax credit and (ii) disabled person's tax credit involved the child care tax credit in each year since the credit commenced. [23306]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The following table lists the number of investigations, penalties and prosecutions involving child care for working families and disabled person's tax credits, broken down into financial years since the schemes began in October 1999.

| *Period* | *Child care investigations* | *Penalties* | *Prosecutions* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Working families tax credit* | | | |
| 1 October 1999 to 31 March 2000 | 55 | 2 | 0 |
| 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 | 263 | 0 | 0 |
| 1 April 2001 to 30 November 2001 | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| *Disabled person's tax credit* | | | |
| 1 October 1999 to 31 March 2000 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 | 14 | 0 | 0 |
| 1 April 2001 to 30 November 2001 | 5 | 0 | 0 |

## Tax Credit Claims

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance is given to resource officers concerning tax credit claims where the claimant is allegedly in receipt of payment at a rate beneath the minimum wage. [23310]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Inland Revenue computer system prompts staff looking at working families tax credit applications to check whether the National Minimum Wage is being paid for each employment. The Employment Relations Act 1999 makes provision for information about apparent non-compliant employers to be passed to the National Minimum Wage Unit for further investigation.

## Working Families Tax Credit

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his Department spent to counter fraud in the working families tax credit in nominal terms and expressed as a percentage of the total working families tax credit expenditure in the last three years. [1151]

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the extent of fraud in working families tax credit; how many prosecutions have been undertaken in respect of such fraud; and what plans he has to tackle fraud in WFTC. [7471]

**Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the level of WFTC fraud; and if he will make a statement; [18884]

(2) how many investigations have been conducted into WFTC fraud; and how many successful prosecutions there have been since the commencement of the scheme. [18885]

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* investigations of fraudulent claims, *(b)* penalties for fraudulent claims, *(c)* prosecutions of fraudulent claims and *(d)* successful prosecutions for fraudulent claims there have been in respect of the working families tax credit, since its introduction, broken down into (i) monthly and (ii) quarterly periods. [2272]

**Dawn Primarolo** *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* The Inland Revenue is currently undertaking an exercise to benchmark the level of fraud within the working families tax credit. The full results of this will be known early next year. The findings of this exercise will then be used by the Inland Revenue to ensure that WFTC compliance work is adjusted if necessary.

The Revenue's approach to compliance is based on the progressive use of civil penalties, and prosecution in cases of criminal fraud.

The tables show the number of WFTC applications investigated by the Inland Revenue for the period from October 1999 (when the scheme began) to September 2001. Of the applications investigated for this period, 8,852 were closed in the Department's favour by recovering overpaid tax credits. At present, there are 7,560 WFTC investigations under way.

| *Month ending* | *WFTC investigations opened in period* | *Total WFTC investigations opened for quarter ending* |
|---|---|---|
| *1999* | | |
| October | 0 | — |
| November | 608 | — |
| December | 730 | 1,338 |
| *2000* | | |
| January | 1,518 | — |
| February | 3,009 | — |
| March | 5,189 | 9,716 |
| April | 2,620 | — |
| May | 2,930 | — |
| June | 2,987 | 8,537 |
| July | 3,012 | — |
| August | 3,797 | — |
| September | 2,368 | 9,177 |
| October | 1,553 | — |
| November | 2,135 | — |
| December | 1,692 | 5,380 |
| *2001* | | |
| January | 2,446 | — |
| February | 2,483 | — |
| March | 2,393 | 7,322 |
| April | 1,257 | — |
| May | 1,317 | — |
| June | 1,486 | 4,060 |
| July | 2,749 | — |
| August | 1,349 | — |
| September | 1,615 | 5,713 |

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Approximate number of penalties imposed for false WFTC applications[1] | 478 |
| Number of successful prosecutions for false WFTC applications[1] | 13 |
| Number of prosecutions for false WFTC applications[1] | 22 |
| Number of prosecutions pending as at 22 November 2001 | 9 |

[1] October 1999 to September 2001

While tax credit applications are received and processed centrally, compliance work associated with them is also undertaken in network offices throughout the UK and consequently it is not possible to answer specific questions about the proportion of the Inland Revenue's compliance costs that relate to Tax Credits.

## Tax Fraud

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome is of the Inland Revenue benchmarking exercise to establish the level of fraud in

tax credit claims; if he will place a copy of reports received from the Inland Revenue *(a)* relating to this exercise and *(b)* otherwise concerned with fraud in tax credit, in the Library; by what criteria the seriousness of fraud cases is assessed with a view to prosecution; and if he will make a statement. [23228]

**Dawn Primarolo:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 154W. The Inland Revenue assess cases for prosecution according to their published prosecution policy, a copy of which I am sending to the hon. Gentleman.

### Rebated Fuels

**Barbara Follett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for consultation on the proposal to introduce an approval scheme for distributors of rebated fuels. [25096]

**Mr. Boateng:** Customs and Excise today published a formal consultation document on this proposal, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

### National Statistics Code of Practice

**Barbara Follett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the National Statistics Code of Practice will be released for public consultation. [25097]

**Ruth Kelly:** The National Statistics Code of Practice, which represents a significant step in the implementation of the proposals contained in the White Paper "Building Trust in Statistics" (Cm 3882), is being published today. Copies are available in the Libraries of both Houses and electronic copies are accessible via the National Statistics website www.statistics.gov.uk. The code sets out the professional standards applicable to National Statistics, the range of official statistics that together provide an accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive and meaningful description of the UK economy and society.

The public consultation will end on 28 March 2002. Responses should be sent by post to James Denman, Room D4/12, ONS, 1 Drummond Gate, London, SW1V 2QQ, or via e-mail to codeofpractice@statistics.gov.uk. Hard copies of the consultation documents are available from either of these addresses.

### Debt Management

**Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the UK Debt Management Office's debt management accounts. [25098]

**Ruth Kelly:** The first published Debt Management Account covering the period 15 November 1999 to 31 March 2001 is being laid before the House and published today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

### Aggregates Levy

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of the introduction of the aggregates levy in Scotland; and what the cost will be to Scottish local authorities per year in each of the five years after April 2002. [23954]

**Mr. Boateng:** No estimates have been made.

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what aid the Government will provide to businesses in Scotland which will be affected by the aggregates levy. [23955]

**Mr. Boateng:** The aggregates levy receipts will be returned to business through a 0.1 percentage point reduction in employers' national insurance contributions, and the £35 million Sustainability Fund. The Government will not provide specific aid to businesses affected by the levy because their objective is to provide an incentive to make more efficient use of virgin aggregate and to use more recycled or alternative materials.

### Tax Credit Fraud

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff are employed by the Inland Revenue in investigating fraudulent claims for tax credits. [22941]

**Dawn Primarolo:** As at 31 December 2001, there were a total of 542 Inland Revenue staff involved in investigating possible false applications for tax credits. This figure comprises 27 Investigators and 226 support staff employed centrally at the Tax Credit Office. There are a further 247 Inland Revenue Network staff who also deal with tax credit investigations, and a specialist team of 42 staff dealing with the most serious cases including those resulting in prosecution.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the value is of *(a)* overpayments and *(b)* penalties recovered by the Inland Revenue as a result of fraud investigations in respect of each tax credit in each year since their introduction. [22929]

**Dawn Primarolo:** I will write to the hon. Member about this matter and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

### Air Passenger Duty

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has been raised by air passenger duty in each year since 1997. [24027]

**Mr. Boateng:** Receipts of air passenger duty for the financial years 1997–98 to 1999–2000 are published in Table A1 of the tables and statistics accompanying the HM Customs and Excise Annual Report for 2000, available on the Customs and Excise website www.hmce.gov.uk/general/about/index.htm—scroll down to 'Annual Report 2000', click on 'Tables and Statistics'.

Details for the year 2000–01 can be found in the National Statistics Publication "Financial Statistics" Table 2.1D.

### Stamp Duty

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the VAT which will be forgone in this financial year as a result of the new stamp duty exemptions for properties where the price does not exceed £150,000. [23761]

**Mr. Boateng:** The stamp duty exemption will have no direct impact on VAT receipts. Any VAT due on the sale of a property is charged before stamp duty is calculated.

### Departmental Staff

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were employed in his Department in each of the last four years. [23783]

**Ruth Kelly:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 256W.

### National Insurance

**Adam Price:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the national insurance fund is in surplus. [23978]

**Dawn Primarolo:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to table 2 of the report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the Social Security Benefits Up-rating (No. 2) Order 2000 and the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Funds Payments) Order 2001 (Cm 4933), a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

### Stakeholder Pensions

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the first stage of the changes to NIRS2 needed to support the introduction of stakeholder pensions was completed by the October deadline. [24236]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The first stage of changes to NIRS2 needed to support the introduction of stakeholder pensions was delivered on time and to the required standard.

### Tax Credits

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason it was decided to base entitlement to the child tax credit and the working tax credit on current year income. [24232]

**Dawn Primarolo:** No such decision has been taken. It has been decided that tax credits will be based on the income of a tax year. The Tax Credits Bill allows for a variety of approaches to responding to changes in income as between one year and the next.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of total compliance costs for employers the reduction listed in paragraph 2.20 of the Inland Revenue Regulatory Impact Assessment for the new tax credits is; and if he will make a statement. [24129]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The estimated recurrent compliance costs to business of the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit were set out in paragraph 44 of the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Tax Credits Act 1999 and accompanying regulations (December 1999).

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library *(a)* a summary and *(b)* a complete set of the responses to the Inland Revenue consultation paper, "New Tax Credits". [24241]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Treasury issued a summary of the responses to the Inland Revenue's consultation paper, "New Tax Credits: supporting families, making work pay and tackling poverty" (July 2001). This summary was attached to a Treasury press notice of 29 November 2001 (no. 132/01). A copy has been placed in the House of Commons Library. A complete set of responses, except for those we have been asked to keep confidential, has also been placed in the Library.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the minimum age of working tax credit recipients will be. [24233]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Workers with a disability or with children will be eligible for the working tax credit from the age of 16. The minimum age for those without children or a disability is to be set at 25, since those aged 25 or over are more likely to face severe financial barriers to work or suffer persistent poverty.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether entitlement to the child tax credit and the working tax credit will be based on net income. [24231]

**Dawn Primarolo:** No. The Government have decided, in the light of representations received in response to consultation, that entitlement to the working tax credit and the child tax credit will be based on gross income.

### Public Expenditure

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the reasons for the difference between the initial voted annually managed expenditure and provisional outturn for financial year 2000–01, as listed in the Treasury document, "Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn", for the accounting and other adjustments category; and if he will make a statement. [24109]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Treasury document "Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn" presented early estimates of annually managed expenditure accounting adjustments in 2000–01, based on the difference between published national accounts estimates of total spending and Treasury estimates for the identified individual components of spending. Updated estimates, which remain provisional, of the outturn for 2000–01 were published in the 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318), Table B13. The pre-Budget report also includes, in Table B15, a detailed breakdown of accounting and other adjustments.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for (1) what reason the final departmental expenditure limit and provisional outturn rows relating to the Capital Modernisation Fund in Table 1 of the Treasury document, Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn are blank; and if he will make a statement; [24106]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 769–70W, for what reason the Capital Modernisation Fund capital budget line for financial year 2000–01, Table B16 of the Treasury document, 'pre-Budget report 2001' is blank; and if he will make a statement. [24126]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The line for the CMF 2000–01 is left blank in the public expenditure outturn white paper and the pre-Budget report because the fund for that

year was fully allocated to Departments. Allocations for 2001–01 from the CMF have been drawn down into the capital Expenditure Limits for individual departments and will be included in the outturn figures for those departments.

### Customs and Excise

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people arriving in the Channel ports in each of the last four years were found to have *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* tobacco in excess of EC-defined minimum guide levels; what proportion were unable to satisfy Customs that those goods were for their own use; and if he will make a statement; [23257]

(2) how many people were stopped by HM Customs at the Channel ports in each of the past four years. [23256]

**Mr. Boateng** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* While Customs do maintain and publish records on the number of people they have searched and on the numbers of seizures they have made, there are no records either of the total numbers of people spoken to by Customs officers or of the qualities of goods they were carrying.

Customs use the indicative levels set out in EC legislation as a guide to help distinguish between goods being imported for individuals' own use and goods which may be being imported for a commercial purpose. Customs then consider a range of other factors in order to determine whether goods are actually being brought into the UK for a commercial purpose.

It is estimated that—in the majority of cases—those individuals with goods in excess of the indicative levels who were stopped and asked questions by Customs when entering the Channel ports in 2000–01 were able to demonstrate that the goods they are carrying were for their own use and were allowed to travel on freely.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has set a specific target for the rate of checks to be carried out by HM Customs and Excise on spirits consignments entering this country under duty suspension, pursuant to paragraph 4.23 of 'Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud'. [23273]

**Mr. Boateng** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* No specific targets have been set.

### Excise Warehouses

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to strengthen the controls on bonded warehouses within the United Kingdom; [23275]

(2) when he will complete the review of excise warehouse approvals. [23274]

**Mr. Boateng** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* Customs have already begun to strengthen the controls on excise warehouses by increasing the number of visits made to excise warehouses and by extending the range of checks performed during those visits. Customs are also tightening up procedures for the approval of warehouse premises and for the authorisation and registration both of warehouse-keepers and of the owners of excise goods held in warehouses. A review of current warehouse approvals will be completed by 31 March 2002.

### Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, 'Winning the Generation Game', *(a)* what progress his Department has made and *(b)* what future plans his Department has for acting on them; and if he will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24204]

**Ruth Kelly:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office.

### Euro

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the preliminary technical work to be undertaken before the assessment of the five economic tests for Euro entry will be completed. [24825]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Government have said that they will complete an assessment of the Five Tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. The assessment has not yet started, but the necessary preliminary analysis—technical work that is necessary to allow us to undertake the assessment within two years as promised—is under way.

### Asbestos Victims

**Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what measures he will introduce to stop companies and insurers avoiding their asbestos liabilities; [24878]

(2) if he will ensure that Treasury officials assist the lawyers acting for UK claimants to co-ordinate their claims against Turner and Newall with lawyers working for creditors against Federal Mogul; [24877]

(3) what money Turner and Newall put aside for future asbestos claims; and *(a)* whether this constitutes a trust and *(b)* how it is affected by the administration order; [24879]

(4) when he expects the stop that has been placed on compensation cheques by Turner and Newall to be lifted; [24880]

(5) what action he will take to ensure that the interests of UK asbestos victims are protected during *(a)* the administration of Turner and Newall and *(b)* the Chapter II reorganisation of Federal Mogul pending in the USA bankruptcy court in Wilmington, Delaware; [24876]

(6) what was the basis of the financial package Turner and Newall agreed with a consortium of European re-insurers to cap their asbestos liabilities in November 1996; [24883]

(7) if he will set up a public inquiry *(a)* to examine the sale of Turner and Newall to Federal Mogul and *(b)* to ascertain whether the company has been managed in accordance with good business practice; [24881]

(8) what the trading position of Turner and Newall is; and on what date it formally stopped trading in the U.K. [24875]

**Ruth Kelly:** Since 1 October, Turner and Newall have been operating under an Administration Order, and as a consequence all legal actions against the company have been stayed. They are continuing to trade. We understand

the driver for the administration is to crystallise asbestos claims in the US and UK in a consistent and fair manner so the company can arrange for their payments. The administrators are exploring ways of trying to resolve this problem, and if necessary will seek direction from the courts to do that. We do not yet know when the stay on legal actions will be lifted. The insurance and compensation arrangements surrounding asbestos-related claims against Turner and Newall are very complex, and not yet completely clear. Officials are in contact with the administrators and are looking into this as a matter of urgency. Therefore I am not able to make further comments about Turner and Newall's insurance arrangements or payment of compensation claims.

Once the situation is clear the Government will be in a position to assess whether and what action is required.

### User Fees

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the 2001 IMF Article IV consultation, Concluding Statement, regarding user fees; and if he will make a statement. [23759]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Government have made their commitment to increasing resources for the NHS over the next three years funded from general taxation and linked to reform. Decisions on taxation and spending will be taken in future Budgets and the Spending Review next year.

### Government Underspend

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his forecast is for total Government underspend in this financial year; and what the figures are for *(a)* health and *(b)* education. [20472]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** We make no forecast. Provisional outturn data on Supply spending for the Department of Health, Department for Education and Skills and other departments for the first six months of this financial year was shown in Table 1.6 of the Winter Summary Supplementary Request for Supply (HC391) presented on 4 December.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when and on how many occasions the Chairman and individual members of the Commission have received complaints concerning the conduct of the Commissioner for Standards. [23666]

**Mr. Kirkwood** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* No complaints have been received by the Commission and no individual Commissioner has raised a complaint with the Commission.

**David Winnick:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if the Commission will consult the Committee on Standards in Public Life on where responsibility should lie for the appointment of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; and if he will make a statement. [23321]

**Mr. Kirkwood** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended in its first report (Cm 2850), page 43, that the House of Commons itself should take responsibility for appointing a Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. Accordingly, at the conclusion of the selection process now under way, the House of Commons Commission proposes to make a recommendation to the House. Any change in the method of appointment would be a matter for decision by the House.

### Select Committee on Standards and Privileges

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what the annual cost was of meeting the staffing needs of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges in each year since its establishment; and what his estimate is of the *(a)* funding requirements and *(b)* staffing needs of the Select Committee in the next three years. [23665]

**Mr. Kirkwood** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The staff of the Committee consisted of the following:

| *Date* | |
|---|---|
| *As Clerk of the Committee:* | |
| November 1995 to October 1997 | 1 principal clerk |
| November 1997 to present | 1 deputy principal clerk |
| *As Second Clerk:* | |
| November 1995 to October 1999 | 1 senior clerk |
| November 1999 to October 2000 | 1 assistant clerk |
| November 2000 to present | 1 senior clerk |
| *and, as secretary:* | |
| November 1995 to present | 1 secretary grade 3 |

all of whom had other duties in the Department of the Clerk of the House. It is not possible to specify precisely how much time each of these staff devoted to the work of the Committee, and so it is not possible to calculate a total attributable cost.

The Committee on Standards and Privileges will continue to be funded and staffed on the same basis as other Select Committees, commensurate with the work load.

### Commission

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many times the Commission has met in the past two years; how this body is serviced; how many staff at what grades are attached to the Commission; what the job title is of each post; by what method the staff are recruited; what the breakdown is of employees by *(a)* gender and *(b)* ethnicity; and what plans he has to make the work of the Commission more transparent. [23664]

**Mr. Kirkwood** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* In the two years to 31 December 2001 the Commission will have met 19 times.

The Commission is advised and assisted by the Finance and Services Committee and the five Domestic Committees, by the Board of Management, and by other Committees, Chairmen, individual Members and Officers of the House, according to the business under consideration. It draws upon outside advice when appropriate.

The Secretary to the Commission is a Principal Clerk, who also serves as Clerk of the Finance and Services Committee and as a Clerk at the Table. On Commission business he is supported by one Grade 2 Secretary (this post is job shared) and one Grade 3 Secretary, who also help support the Finance and Services Committee and the Domestic Committees. All four staff are permanent members of the House of Commons Services; all were recruited by open competition. Three are female and one is male. Ethnic origin information is provided by staff in confidence; it is the House's practice not to disclose the ethnic mix of small groups of staff, in order to maintain that confidence.

The Commission reports on its work in its Annual Report, which also includes sections on the Board of Management, and on the performance and plans of individual Departments. It now includes the Annual Report of the Audit Committee. The latest Report, for 2000–01 (HC 155 of Session 2001–02), is available from the Vote Office and on the internet. The Commission is seeking further to improve content and presentation in the Annual Report for 2001–02. In addition, it has approved intranet webpages covering the Audit Committee, the Board of Management and the Office of the Clerk, as well as the Commission itself. These will be available shortly.

### Standards Commissioner

**Peter Bottomley:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if the Commission will establish an inquiry into reports of briefing against the Standards Commissioner. [22723]

**Mr. Kirkwood** *[pursuant to his reply, 17 December 2001, c. 2W]:* The Parliamentary Commissioner has now replied to Mr. Speaker's letter of 6 December. Following discussion at the meeting of the Commission on 18 December Mr. Speaker has passed the Parliamentary Commissioner's letter to the Standards and Privileges Committee for consideration.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Human Rights Commission

**Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission will submit their second Annual Report as required by paragraph 5(1) of Schedule 7 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. [24959]

**Mr. Browne:** I have today laid before Parliament the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's second Annual Report.

### New Deal (Young People)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21324]

**Dr. John Reid:** The NIO (and its agencies) currently employs one person under the new deal for young people. New dealers are recruited to the NIO on a subsidised basis and take up existing vacancies. Therefore extra costs are limited to the subsidy and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

## DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

### Ministerial Visits (North-East)

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many times since November 2000 Ministers from the Cabinet Office have visited *(a)* the Teesside area and *(b)* Middlesbrough South and Cleveland, East constituency to meet locally based businesses. [19076]

**Mr. Leslie:** There have been five visits to the Teesside area by Cabinet Office Ministers since November 2000, involving meetings with locally based businesses.

### Cross-Government Communications

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if new electronic tools for cross-Government communication, presentation, policy analysis and development were delivered by April. [21462]

**Mr. Leslie:** Yes. The Government's programme of work to ensure that the UK is a world leader in the knowledge economy were published on 4 December 2001 in the Second UK Online Report. This includes details of the UK strategy for transforming Government, empowering people to make the best of new technology, and putting in place the infrastructure for e-Government (please see Chapter 5 of the report, available at: hhtp://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/progress/anrep2001/default.htm).

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on progress since April 2000 in meeting the public service agreement target for promoting the needs of women in society; [21258]

(2) in pursuit of the PSA target on women's interests, by what means his Department has involved the Treasury in realising the potential of women in addressing the productivity gap. [21259]

**Mrs. Roche:** There is no public service agreement target for promoting the needs of women in society nor is there a public service agreement on women's interests. However, the Government are committed to bringing about practical improvements to women's lives that benefit society as a whole. The Women and Equality Unit, a cross-cutting unit within the Cabinet Office, supports the Ministers for Women in delivering these changes.

For example, next year I will be running a series of seminars to encourage more women to take up public appointments.

### Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, 'Winning the Generation Game', *(a)* what progress his Department has made and *(b)* what future plans his Department has for acting on them; and if he will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24205]

**Mrs. Roche:** The Civil Service is committed to the active employment of older people. Figures for April 2000, for example, show that the Civil Service as a whole has more staff in the 55–75 age group (47,680) than it does in the 16–24 age group (31,770). In the light of the recommendations in the "Winning the Generation Game" report, Departments and agencies have been considering what further action they can take to improve their record by offering more options for employees over 50 to work in different ways and at different levels towards the end of their working lives.

The Cabinet Office is in the process of collecting data from Departments on their current position in considering each of the recommendations of the "Winning the Generation Game" report in order to have a full picture in the new year.

I will write to the hon. Member once all Departments have provided the information.

### Departmental Expenditure Limits

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the reasons for the difference between the final voted departmental expenditure limit and provisional outturn for financial year 2000–01, as listed in the Treasury document, Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn, for Vote XVII, Cabinet Office, subcategory 3 Cabinet Office: civil superannuation; and if he will make a statement. [24113]

**Mr. Leslie:** Full details of outturn against 2000–01 voted provision will be published in the appropriation accounts to be presented to the House of Commons by 31 January. The resource accounts on an accruals basis will also be presented to the House of Commons by 31 January.

## DEFENCE

### Drug Misuse

**Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken on trends in the percentage of service personnel testing positive for controlled substances. [23693]

**Mr. Ingram:** Since routine, random compulsory drug testing became regular practice across the three services in 1998, the percentage of armed forces personnel proving positive has only risen from 0.45 per cent. to 0.54 per cent. (in 2000) of the total number tested. The services reflect the society from which they are recruited and employ mainly young people who are at an age when they are most vulnerable to drug misuse. In addition to rigorous single service drug education programmes, the compulsory drug testing programme is a specific deterrent against the misuse of drugs by service personnel. Despite the comparatively low number of personnel who return positive results, the services continue to examine their drugs policies to remain vigilant against the problem.

Recent improvements in drug testing methods have given the Ministry of Defence a more reliable detection capability for the Class A drug, Ecstasy. While this and an increase in the number of service personnel being tested generally, year on year, is reflected in the overall number of positive findings, our enhanced drug testing capability is viewed as a positive measure against members of the armed forces misusing drugs.

**Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many convictions there were for drug-related offences among armed forces personnel in each year since 1995; [23694]

(2) which units have been subjected to compulsory drug testing since January 2000; and how many personnel tested positive in each unit, broken down by substance. [23692]

**Mr. Ingram:** I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Special Educational Needs

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of children of armed forces personnel have special educational needs. [23206]

**Mr. Ingram:** There is no remit on service personnel to inform the Ministry of Defence when their children have special educational needs. Therefore, this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Submarines

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which submarines will receive the final stage of the Swiftsure and Trafalgar Update; and for what reasons the remaining fleet submarines are not receiving this upgrade. [23618]

**Mr. Ingram:** The submarines which will receive the final stage of the update are HMS Torbay, HMS Trenchant, HMS Talent and HMS Triumph.

The remaining Swiftsure and Trafalgar Class submarines have insufficient remaining planned service life for the procurement and fitting of the final phase of the update to be cost effective.

### Sea Eagle Missile

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Sea Eagle anti-ship missile will be withdrawn from service; and what anti-surface capability the aircraft carriers will have after the withdrawal of the Sea Eagle missile. [24025]

**Mr. Ingram:** The decision to withdraw the Sea Eagle anti-ship missile from service in April 1999 was taken as a consequence of the Strategic Defence Review. The review

concluded that since the end of the cold war the threat of open ocean warfare had reduced and that the requirement for air launched anti-surface ship capability had diminished. While our carriers no longer possess an organic anti-surface ship capability, they would normally operate as part of a Maritime Task Group whose component escorting vessels would typically be armed with a potent mixture of anti-surface weapons including the long range, ship launched Harpoon missile and the helicopter launched Sea Skua missile.

### Leisure Time (Submarine Crews)

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the set number of hours given over to downtime for sleep and rest in every 24 hours are for submarine naval officers; and if he will make a statement. [23288]

**Mr. Ingram:** Warfare officers in submarines operate in a six hours on, six hours off watch-keeping routine when at sea in a nuclear powered attack submarine. Their 12 hours off watch in each 24-hour period are used for sleep, meals, rest and recreation as well as dealing with routine administrative work.

### Submarine Officers

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training is expected to have been completed by submarine officers before being left as duty officers of a nuclear powered cruise missile-equipped submarine; and if he will make a statement. [23286]

**Mr. Ingram:** All Royal Navy warfare officers undergo a lengthy period of training, progressing from general naval training to specific disciplines, such as navigation, to the level of detail necessary to conduct safely a warfare officer's first appointment. Beyond this, submariners sub-specialise and receive an appropriate level of training tailored to meet the particular demands of watch-keeping in submarines.

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment is made of the competency and physical fitness of officers before they are placed in charge of a nuclear powered submarine; and if he will make a statement. [23291]

**Mr. Ingram:** Any officer appointed to a submarine is required to be assessed as medically fit for his duty. A comprehensive training and assessment regime is in place to ensure that such officers possess the professional ability and competence required by their duties. This includes a Basic Sea Qualification, which all officers must undertake in the submarine in which they are serving; this is a stringent test to ensure that they have knowledge of the systems onboard required to operate the boat effectively and safely.

### HMS Triumph

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he intends to hold an inquiry into the events which led to the court martialling of Lieutenant Ashley Philpott and Lieutenant Ian Tabberer; and if he will make a statement. [23302]

**Mr. Ingram:** A full board of inquiry was held into the circumstances surrounding the grounding of HMS Triumph immediately after the incident occurred in November 2000. It is not intended to hold another inquiry.

### Spanish Airspace

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of UK military aircraft avoiding Spanish airspace over the last year. [23814]

**Mr. Ingram** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* This information is not held and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Gibraltar

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many joint military operations with *(a)* other EU partners and *(b)* non-EU states have taken place in Gibraltar in each of the last three years. [23815]

**Mr. Ingram** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* None.

### HMS Gannet

**Sandra Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost is of the HMS Gannet site, including rates and utilities. [23935]

**Mr. Ingram** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The total cost of the HMS Gannet site, including rents, rates, utilities and property management, is in the order of £1.736 million per year, inclusive of VAT.

**Sandra Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if serving personnel based at HMS Gannet are renting private accommodation to armed forces personnel based at HMS Gannet *(a)* as part of the Hambros scheme and *(b)* by other methods. [23936]

**Mr. Ingram** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* Three Naval personnel, currently serving at HMS Gannet, are renting accommodation which they own to other armed forces personnel also based at HMS Gannet. The property involved is rented by Hambros Countrywide Mobility Service, who are the agents for Substitute Single Service Accommodation on behalf of the Ministry of Defence.

We do not hold records on personnel based at HMS Gannet who are renting out private accommodation by means other than through the Hambros scheme, as that would be a private transaction.

**Sandra Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel who are in the Hambros scheme were previously accommodated at HMS Gannet. [23937]

**Mr. Ingram** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* There are 78 Naval personnel and 21 RAF personnel currently living in Substitute Single Service Accommodation (the Hambros scheme), who were previously accommodated at HMS Gannet.

**Sandra Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the cost of the leases of HMS Gannet site are *(a)* detailed and *(b)* publicly available in the asset register of Defence Estates. [23938]

**Mr. Ingram** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* HMS Gannet is occupied and held by Commander in Chief Fleet and therefore Defence Estates do not show the property in their annual accounts, but do show it within their property records, as per all other departmental properties.

Because the property is held at market rent there is no value in the land to the Department, however the Ministry of Defence buildings on site are shown on page 298 of the National Asset Register holdings of Commander in Chief Fleet under the heading "Royal Naval Air Station Prestwick".

While the actual cost of the leases of the property are detailed within departmental records, the precise details are commercial in confidence and I am therefore withholding details under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

### Recruitment (Medical Rejections)

**Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the number of applicants to the *(a)* Army, *(b)* RAF, *(c)* Royal Navy and *(d)* Royal Marines turned down on medical grounds in each quarter of the last seven years. [21818]

**Mr. Ingram:** Information on the number of applicants rejected on medical grounds is not held centrally in the format or for the time period requested. Details which are available are as follows:

*Medical rejections*

| *Service/financial year* | *Officers* | *Other ranks* |
|---|---|---|
| *Royal Navy* | | |
| 1996–97 | 32 | 544 |
| 1997–98 | 16 | 764 |
| 1998–99 | 32 | 813 |
| 1999–2000 | 39 | 821 |
| 2000–01 | 43 | 923 |
| 2001–02[1] | 35 | 626 |
| *Royal Marines* | | |
| 1996–97 | 3 | 52 |
| 1997–98 | 1 | 93 |
| 1998–99 | 3 | 103 |
| 1999–2000 | 18 | 215 |
| 2000–01 | 21 | 247 |
| 2001–02[1] | 7 | 187 |
| *Army* | | |
| 1995–96 | 30 | [2]— |
| 1996–97 | 38 | [2]— |
| 1997–98 | 41 | 1,880 |
| 1998–99 | 42 | 2,304 |
| 1999–2000 | 60 | 1,660 |
| 2000–01 | 33 | 1,132 |
| 2001–02[1] | 43 | [2]— |
| *Royal Air Force* | | |
| 1996–97 | [3]184 | 56 |
| 1997–98 | [3]183 | 88 |
| 1998–99 | [3]215 | 105 |
| 1999–2000 | [3]215 | 126 |
| 2000–01 | [3]255 | 193 |
| 2001–02[1] | [3]107 | 184 |

[1] The figures for 2001–02 are as at 7 December 2001

[2] Army Other Rank figures unavailable for these years

[3] These figures are for RAF Officers and Airmen Aircrew combined

### Royal Scots Regiment

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* current strength of the Royal Scots regiment. [23766]

**Mr. Ingram:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 455–56W, to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch).

### Afghanistan

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what his latest estimate is of *(a)* the deployment of United Kingdom military personnel in the Afghan theatre of war and *(b)* the total value of ordnance dropped in the conflict; [23639]

(2) what the total number of United Kingdom military personnel serving in Afghanistan is; and under whose command they operate. [23644]

**Mr. Ingram** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* There are approximately 3,800 involved in support of Operation Veritas, the UK element of Operating Enduring Freedom. This figure excludes the number of UK personnel operating within Afghanistan, and I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

British troops operating in Afghanistan are under the overall command of the UK Chief of Joint Operations, and are available for specific tasks to the US Commander-in-Chief, Central Command.

We have not estimated the value of ordnance dropped in the operation.

### Army HQ

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the final cost was of moving the army's northern headquarters from York to Edinburgh; what estimates he has made of the economic consequences for York of this move; and what estimates he has made of the economic benefit to the area around Craigiehall. [24021]

**Mr. Ingram:** A final assessment of the cost of moving the Army's northern headquarters from York to Edinburgh will be made shortly, now that the organisation is fully established in its new location. It is already clear, however, that the increase in the number of people working both at Craigiehall and in York continues to benefit both locations.

### Military Training Grounds

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are being taken to ensure that Kenyan civilians are not killed, disabled and injured by unexploded munitions on military training grounds used by the British Army in the central part of Kenya. [23130]

**Mr. Ingram:** The British Army takes every precaution to minimise danger to the Kenyan people and follows the same infantry training regulations in Kenya for live firing as it does in the UK. These are laid down in Infantry Training Volume 4, Pamphlet Number 21, and Artillery Training Volume 3, Pamphlet 19. Details of ammunition used are recorded and units are required to submit a

certificate to state that the range has been cleared of ammunition fired during that exercise. In addition, we have a continuing programme of activity, which we carry out in conjunction with the Kenyan authorities. This includes the provision of training for Kenyan range staff; the construction of a range control centre; the employment and training of range wardens; and the erection of substantial warning signs on specific areas of the training area. Beyond that, we are also engaged in a continuing information campaign and provide assistance to the Kenyan authorities with range clearance. Our mutual aim is to ensure that the ranges are as safe as they can be.

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what (1) the procedure is for clearing live ammunition from military training grounds in the UK; [23133]

(2) what regulations are in place to govern the clearance of live ammunition from military training grounds; [23131]

(3) what records the British Army keeps during training exercises with live ammunition, of the number of rounds of ammunition fired and the number of unexploded ammunition; and if these records are published. [23134]

**Mr. Ingram:** The regulations and procedures for the clearance of live ammunition from military training grounds are laid down in Infantry Training Volume 4, Pamphlet Number 21, and Artillery Training Volume 3, Pamphlet 19. These regulations and procedures are adhered to wherever British forces are required to train with live ammunition, whether in the UK or overseas.

Each unit training on a range or training area is required to clear military debris from the range after live firing or training with pyrotechnics, with details of the ammunition used recorded on a relevant form. In addition, units are required to submit a certificate to state that the range has been cleared.

Any live ammunition that has not been used during training is returned to the ammunition store for use at another time. We aim to recover any ammunition not accounted for during the clearance operation at the end of the training. If there have been misfires—where a round does not fire correctly—or blinds—where a round is fired but does not explode correctly—a qualified individual would destroy the misfire or blind on site.

Joint Service Publication 403—Defence Land Ranges Safety-Volume 1, Chapter 6 requires that records are kept of all live ammunition firing, the amount of live ammunition fired and the number of misfires or blinds. These records are not made public.

### Territorial Army

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Territorial Army have served with regular army forces overseas in each of the last five years; and in which countries. [23667]

**Dr. Moonie:** The numbers of Territorial Army personnel that have served with regular army forces overseas in each of the last five years are shown in the table.

| | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* | *[1]2001* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bosnia | 640 | 609 | 489 | 129 | 210 |
| Kosovo | 0 | 0 | 290 | 291 | 289 |
| Sierra Leone | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 51 |
| Macedonia | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Total | 640 | 609 | 779 | 420 | 559 |

[1] To date

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions he has had, and with whom, concerning the location of the headquarters of the Territorial Army in Scotland; and if he will make a statement; [23201]

(2) if he has had discussions with *(a)* the Scottish Executive and *(b)* Scottish local authorities on the siting of TA Brigade headquarters in Scotland; and if he will make a statement; [23203]

(3) which local authorities in Scotland have been consulted regarding the location of TA brigade headquarters in Scotland; [23204]

(4) what discussions he has had regarding the amalgamation of 51 and 52 Brigade of the Territorial Army in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [23202]

**Mr. Ingram:** The roles and responsibilities of the regional brigade structure in Scotland have been studied extensively by the Ministry of Defence as part of a wider examination of our force structure. This work has now concluded and I am pleased to announce that 52 (Lowland) Brigade will re-role to become a light infantry brigade, retaining command of the light role battalions in Redford Barracks and Dreghorn Barracks, Edinburgh and assuming command of those based at Preston and Chester. It will also retain responsibility for public duties. The Brigade will be known as 52 Infantry Brigade and the HQ will continue to be based at Edinburgh Castle. In parallel, 51 (Highland) Brigade will become the Scottish Regional Brigade assuming the infrastructure responsibilities of both 51 and 52 Brigades. The Brigade will be known as 51 (Scottish) Brigade and will be based at Forthside in Stirling.

These changes support the Strategy for the Army, are wholly consistent with the conclusions of the Strategic Defence Review and will enhance our military capability.

There have been no discussion about these plans outside my Department but I have written to the First Minister for the Scottish Parliament to advise him of these changes.

### HMS Invincible

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Invincible's refit will be complete; and when HMS Invincible will be withdrawn from service. [23614]

**Mr. Ingram:** HMS Invincible will complete her current refit and return to operational status in the summer of 2003. On current plans she will be withdrawn from service towards the end of this decade.

### Sub-harpoon Anti-ship Missiles

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the sub-harpoon anti-ship missiles will be withdrawn from service; and what effect this will have on submarine capabilities. [24026]

**Mr. Ingram:** On current plans the sub-harpoon anti-ship missiles will be withdrawn from service in 2008. Subsequent to this date it is assessed that the anti-surface ship capability required of the nuclear submarine flotilla will be delivered by the Spearfish heavyweight torpedo.

### Departmental Expenditure Limits

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the reasons for the difference between the final voted departmental expenditure limit and provisional outturn for financial year 2000–01, as listed in the Treasury document, Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn, for Vote VI, Defence, subcategory 2 Defence: Armed Forces retired pay, pensions etc; and if he will make a statement. [24115]

**Mr. Ingram:** Outturn was lower than estimated in financial year 2000–01 mainly because receipts from the Accruing Superannuation Liability Charge were slightly higher than anticipated, and because the overall increase in pensions was lower than forecast. For further information I refer the hon. Member to the Armed Forces Pension Scheme Resource Accounts for 2000–01, published on 21 November 2001. A copy is available in the Library of the House.

### Army Pensions

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the pre-1973 army pensioners and army widows identified as entitled to tax free pensions under the pre-1973 attributable tax exercise of 1999 were entitled due to aggravated unfitness. [24181]

**Dr. Moonie:** The figures available to us on service pensions do not differentiate between those awarded for injuries or conditions that were attributable to, and those that were aggravated by, service. Figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Moved Bases

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list any major moves of *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* Airforce bases since 1997. [24020]

**Mr. Ingram:** I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Palestinian Authority

7. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with other European Governments regarding the provision of emergency aid for the Palestinian Authority. [21888]

**Clare Short:** Without peace, the prospects for economic growth and improved quality of life are negligible. But the potential for the region is considerable. Following the Oslo Accords in 1993, the area enjoyed a period of relative peace and economic growth. This benefited Palestinians and Israelis. Events took a downward turn in September 2000. Since then, there has been a continuing cycle of violence. Various attempts to re-engage the peace process have made little progress. Following the events of 11 September, there has been increased pressure from the international community for a resumption of productive dialogue, accompanied by renewed calls for the creation of a viable Palestinian state.

This is the context for UK development assistance to Palestinians and Palestinian refugees. Our assistance is part of an international effort, with the international financial institutions, the US, and the European Community playing leading roles.

We have provided over £43 million in development assistance and a further £61 million to UNRWA since the establishment of the PA in 1994. We also contribute substantially through our share of the EC and World bank spending. Between 1995 and 1999, the EC's MEDA programme provided euro 3.4 billion (about £2 billion), of which the UK share was 16 per cent. (about £320 million). The World bank has provided some $380 million to the West Bank and Gaza Strip; the UK share is about 5 per cent.

In response to the current crisis, I have increased our contribution to UNRWA by a further £7 million, to a total of £25 million for calendar year 2001. I have also increased our support to the Palestinian Authority by £6 million, to a total of £14 million for 2001–02 financial year.

### World Trade Round

8. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on how she intends to help developing countries to make gains from trade following the launch of a new trade round at the ministerial meeting in Doha. [21889]

**Hilary Benn:** Following the outcome of last month's meeting in Doha, the new trade round could potentially provide significant benefits for developing countries. The challenge now will be to deliver on that potential in the negotiations.

As part of this process, we are continuing to support capacity building in developing countries. Last month, my right hon. Friend announced further help to strengthen involvement in trade policy making and negotiating, and assist countries seeking accession to the WTO.

### Afghanistan

9. **Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is providing to the people of Afghanistan to help them throughout the winter. [21890]

**Clare Short:** We have so far provided almost £40 million to United Nations agencies, the Red Cross movement and NGOs, including support for provision and stockpiling of assistance for the winter. The UN is aiming to maximise delivery through both road and air routes and is prioritising deliveries to areas where access may become more difficult over the winter, including the central Highlands, the Panjshir valley and the north-east of the country.

11. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the amount of aid reaching the people of Afghanistan. [21892]

**Clare Short:** United Nations agencies, particularly the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF, the Red Cross movement and NGOs continue to make good progress in transporting essential relief supplies into Afghanistan. Over the past month, WFP has delivered over 68,000 tonnes of food, exceeding its monthly target. International staff of humanitarian agencies have now returned to some areas of the country and are working with national staff to reach those in need of assistance. However, progress is heavily dependent on improved security. Despite the best efforts of humanitarian agencies, some areas of Afghanistan are still proving difficult to access because of continuing insecurity.

12. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the situation in the central highlands of Afghanistan with regard to the distribution of humanitarian aid. [21893]

**Clare Short:** United Nations agencies, particularly the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF, the Red Cross movement and NGOs continue to make good progress in transporting essential relief supplies into the central Highlands. UN international staff have now returned to the area.

WFP has achieved its target delivery of 33,000 tonnes of food aid to the central Highlands; the food will be distributed by partner NGOs to support up to a million people over the winter.

Other agencies, including UNICEF, the International Organisation for Migration and Oxfam, have continued to deliver health, shelter and education supplies.

14. **Mr. Neil Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to support recovery and reconstruction in Afghanistan. [21896]

**Clare Short:** I have just announced an additional £20 million to support the UN-led recovery effort. We are fully committed to supporting Ambassador Brahimi and the United Nations system in their central role to help the people of Afghanistan and their new Interim Authority to begin this huge task. A copy of our updated "Emergency Plan to Initiate Recovery" has been placed in the Library of the House.

21. **Mr. Bailey:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to relieve the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. [21903]

22. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. [21904]

24. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the international aid situation in Afghanistan; and if she will make a statement. [21906]

26. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. [21908]

**Clare Short:** The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains serious. The United Nations estimates at least 5 million people are in need of assistance, and over 1 million have been displaced from their homes.

UN agencies, particularly the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF and the Red Cross movement continue to make good progress in transporting essential relief supplies into Afghanistan. Over the past month, WFP has delivered over 68,000 tonnes of food, exceeding its monthly target. International staff of humanitarian agencies have now returned to some areas of the country and are working with national staff to reach those in need of assistance. However, progress is heavily dependent on improved security. Despite the best efforts of humanitarian agencies, some areas of Afghanistan are still proving difficult to access because of continuing insecurity.

My Department has so far allocated £60 million to United Nations agencies, the Red Cross movement and NGOs for their response to the Afghan crisis.

### EU Aid

13. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the distribution of the EU aid package to overseas countries. [21894]

**Clare Short:** European Community aid is distributed on a regional basis to all developing countries and countries in transition. Provisional figures for 2000 show that the percentage of EC development assistance spent in low-income countries continues to fall and is now below 50 per cent. This is unsatisfactory but difficult to change because many members states and large parts of the Commission support the distribution of aid for political rather than developmental purposes.

In November 2000, the Council and Commission adopted a new development policy which makes poverty reduction the central objective for all EC programmes in developing countries. In line with our published strategy on working with the European Community we continue to work to improve the impact of EC aid on the Millennium Development Goals including through the allocation of a much higher percentage of EC aid to poor countries.

### Sierra Leone

15. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she is giving to the amputee victims of terrorism in Sierra Leone. [21897]

**Clare Short:** There are around 1,000 amputee victims of the conflict in Sierra Leone. DFID has provided £110,000 to the Mercy Ships project, which helps both conflict amputees and polio victims—the latter greatly exceed the former. Through our contributions to the EC's humanitarian programme we also support the work of Handicap International, the main provider of prosthetic limbs and rehabilitation support at the amputee centre in Murray Town, Freetown.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the work of her Department in Sierra Leone. [21895]

**Clare Short:** In Sierra Leone, we are engaged primarily in promoting security and good governance. We are providing £30 million per annum to provide long-term support to the police, strengthening the Ministry of Defence to ensure the armed forces are more democratically accountable, and helping reintegrate

ex-combatants wishing to return to civilian life. We are supporting the Anti-Corruption Commission, helping to reform the judiciary, training the media, assisting the Government to prepare for elections next year, and providing budgetary support to help meet the running costs of government. We also provide substantial support to meet the ongoing humanitarian needs of those displaced by the conflict.

### Somalia

16. **Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department has given to Somalia in the last 12 months. [21898]

**Clare Short:** This calendar year we have pledged almost £3 million to Somalia, mainly directed towards emergency and humanitarian activities:

*International Committee of the Red Cross*

2001 Appeal for Somalia—£1,000,000

*United Nations*

2001 Consolidated appeal for Somalia—£410,850

*World Vision*

Primary health care in Middle Juba—£328,785

Primary health care in Bay Region—£266,163

*International Organisation for Migration*

Workshop to encourage Somali women's participation in the peace process—£88,969

*Norwegian People's Aid*

Water rehabilitation, Sool region—£200,173

*Medecins sans Frontieres*

Health assistance, Bakool Region—£207,000

Health assistance, Middle Shabelle—£377,689

*Africa Educational Trust*

Developing community school partnerships in Somaliland—£123,863.

The pursuit of a lasting peace agreement in Somalia remains the highest priority. To this end we, with the international community, continue to support the efforts of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

### Palestinian Territories

17. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the work of her Department in the Palestinian territories. [21899]

**Clare Short:** I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 915–16W.

### Latin America

18. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has for further work in Latin America following the economic crisis in Argentina. [21900]

**Clare Short:** We are working to implement our existing strategy for Latin America, which is focused on reducing poverty in the region through the promotion of pro-poor growth, reducing inequality and improving governance. In addition to our programmes in Guatemala and El Salvador we provide support to improve the effectiveness of national development programmes in middle-income countries with major inequality and poverty problems such as Brazil and Peru. In Nicaragua, Honduras and Bolivia, which are highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) we are working with the Government, civil society and other donors to help with the implementation of their poverty reduction strategies.

Details of our strategy for Latin America will be published in various country strategy papers in the new year.

### UNICEF

19. **Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she next plans to meet the Executive Director of UNICEF to discuss its work. [21901]

**Clare Short:** I met the Executive Director of UNICEF in February in New York and briefly in Paris in October in the margins of a Unesco conference. I have no plans to meet her in the near future but I would hope to see her next time I am in New York, she is in London or we are both attending the same international conference.

### HIV/AIDS

20. **Joan Ryan:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's work on HIV/AIDS. [21902]

**Clare Short:** HIV/AIDS is the single most important development challenge in Africa. We know what needs to be done to tackle the disease, and countries such as Uganda, Thailand and Cambodia have shown that political commitment and leadership can help to contain the spread of the disease. My Department supports comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention, control and mitigation programmes. We continue to give greatest priority to prevention, but we also place emphasis on reducing the personal, social and economic impact of illness and death caused by the disease.

We seek to support the development, strengthening and implementation of national strategies to combat HIV/AIDS and to provide assistance in the framework of such strategies. We have recently approved several new major programmes to support national HIV/AIDs responses in, for example, Russia, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Nigeria, China and India totalling around £300 million, and a £20 million programme is being designed to support Mozambique. A major new multi-sectoral HIV programme for South Africa is also planned for this year.

My Department is supporting the development of HIV/AIDS vaccines through the support of the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative. Work is under way to support the development of microbicides to prevent HIV. We are also working on a range of initiatives which aim to increase the long-term affordability and availability of treatment for HIV/AIDS and related infections.

Our strategy for our HIV/AIDS works is outlined in our HIV/AIDS strategy paper published in summer 2001 and available in the Library of the House.

29. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to help poor countries which have been hard hit by HIV and AIDS. [21911]

**Clare Short:** HIV/AIDS is the single most important development challenge in Africa. The epidemic is undermining economic growth and fundamentally threatens social and economic development in many countries. It also poses a threat to health in many other countries around the world. My Department supports comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention, control and mitigation programmes. We continue to give greatest priority to prevention, but we also place emphasis on reducing the personal, social and economic impact of illness and death caused by the disease.

We seek to support the development, strengthening and implementation of national strategies to combat HIV/AIDS and to provide assistance in the framework of such strategies. We have recently approved several new major programmes to support national HIV/AIDS responses in, for example, Russia, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Nigeria, China and India totalling around £300 million, and a £20 million programme is being designed to support Mozambique. A major new multi-sectoral HIV programme for South Africa is also planned for this year. We have committed £25 million to support the International Partnership Against AIDS in Africa.

In addition, the Government are exploring the potential of a number of options for increasing the long-term affordability and availability of treatment for HIV/AIDS and related infections, while maintaining a focus on the development of sustainable health systems which is needed to deliver them.

Our strategy for our HIV/AIDS work is outlined in our HIV/AIDS strategy paper published in summer 2001 and available in the Library of the House.

### Development Targets

23. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the World bank about progress towards the 2015 development targets. [21905]

**Clare Short:** I have regular discussions with the World bank about this issue. The most recent occasion was at the meeting of the World bank/International Monetary Fund Development Committee in Ottawa, 17–18 November. I am pleased to report that there is an increasingly strong commitment within the World bank and its member countries for concerted action to meet the 2015 targets. This includes growing recognition of the need to increase the volume of resources made available to poor countries committed to the policy and institutional changes needed to reduce poverty and achieve the other targets; and to enhance the effectiveness of this aid, including by untying it. The UK has already untied its aid, and pledged to increase the oda/GNI ration from 0.32 per cent. in 2000 to 0.33 per cent. by 2003–04. Substantial progress is being made towards the key 2015 target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty. While regional progress varies, the best available evidence suggests that on present trends the global target will be met but some of the targets, particularly the reduction of maternal mortality, will not be met. Progress varies between regions and countries. Very few African countries are on track to meet the targets.

### Bangladesh

25. **Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the programme to develop the technical competence of engineers in Bangladesh. [21907]

**Clare Short:** My Department has just completed a successful five-year project to strengthen the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh and to establish an Engineers Registration Board to enable Bangladeshi engineers to be internationally recognised within the various branches of the engineering profession.

We have recently commenced a new project to strengthen the professional engineering associated in eight developing countries (including Bangladesh) following on from the success achieved to date under the previous project.

### Corruption

27. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's priorities are for tackling corruption. [21909]

**Clare Short:** The priorities of our bilateral programmes are to support national strategies which address both enforcement action against corruption, such as strong and effective anti-corruption agencies, and preventive measures, such as strengthening capacity for public sector budgetary and financial management, procurement, accounting and audit; reforming civil service management, enhancing public oversight through strengthened parliamentary committees, developing measures to reduce judicial corruption and supporting civil society to promote transparency and accountability in public life.

At the multilateral level, negotiations for a United Nations Convention Against Corruption commence in January. This is a major opportunity to develop global standards for tackling corruption and improving international co-operation. We will be playing an active role in these discussions.

We attach importance also to strengthening collaboration with other bilateral development agencies and multilateral partners, in particular through supporting the implementation conventions against bribery in international trade and strengthening regional anti-money-laundering mechanisms.

### Pakistan

28. **Liz Blackman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's assistance to Pakistan. [21910]

**Clare Short:** We are committed to supporting Pakistan's economic and social development for the long haul. This includes support for the Road Map to Democracy announced by President Musharraf in August 2001, which envisages national elections by October 2002. We are working closely with the international financial institutions and other multilateral organisations to ensure sustainable improvements in the lives of poor people in Pakistan. Our bilateral assistance is designed as a contribution to this wider international effort; and my Department meets the UK share of expenditure by the World bank, Asian Development bank, European Commission and UN agencies.

Our bilateral programme is focused on three objectives: creating the economic conditions for poverty reduction; strengthening health systems and improving quality and management in education. These are pursued through support to the process of devolution; support to rural livelihoods; and support to the development of the poverty reduction strategy paper.

In health, we are working to improve access to—and quality of—public health services, especially for the poorest. For example, we are helping to improve reproductive health through support for social marketing of condoms through Population Services International. We are also working up an HIV/AIDS drug harm prevention project. On education, we are supporting the implementation of the devolution of education management to provincial and district levels in North West Frontier Province and Northern Areas. We are also helping to raise quality standards by collaborating on reform of the National Education Assessment System.

In terms of support for the political reform effort, examples of these are the assistance my Department is providing to improve the quality of governance by supporting the Elections Commission in the run up to next year's provincial and national elections, and the National Reconstruction Bureau in its deliberations on constitutional reform. We are also focused on working with the appropriate Government Departments and civil society groups to address gender discrimination and violence against women.

In recognition of Pakistan's reform progress to date, and to support the new three-year Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility agreed with the IMF earlier this month, I have allocated a further £15 million for budgetary aid this financial year, and £45 million for each of the subsequent two years. This is in addition to the on-going technical assistance programme, and represents a major increase in our engagement with Pakistan's medium-term reform programme.

As announced in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 802W, I have also allocated £11 million of short-term assistance to help host communities affected by the refugee influx.

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the projects which she is funding in *(a)* part and *(b)* whole in Pakistan; and what is the cost involved in each case. [22978]

**Clare Short:** The following projects are being, or have been, funded by my Department in the current financial year 2001–02. Implementation periods can range between a few weeks to several years.

*Pakistan bilateral aid programme*

| *Projects* | *Project budget (£000)* |
|---|---|
| *Education* | |
| Punjab Middle School Project | 4,900 |
| NWFP Primary Education (including contribution to PEPCO) | 6,500 |
| Northern Areas Education | 3,900 |
| Sindh Education Foundation | 150 |
| Support for National Education Foundation | 167 |
| Support to IED, Aga Khan Uni—Policy Research and Decision Making Education | 80 |
| National Education Assessment System and MSU Workshops | 140 |
| WB and BC Courses on Education Reform | 91 |
| Review Present Status of EMIS and Edu GIS in Pakistan | 33 |
| Sub total | 15,961 |
| *Health* | |
| Private Sector Population KSM/FG | 9,886 |
| Chitral Primary Health Care III | 3,380 |
| PAVHNA: Phases I and II | 4,382 |
| Surveys of Sexually Transmitted Diseases | 700 |
| Evaluation of Lady Health Workers Programme | 1,207 |
| Lady Health Worker Programme | 5,200 |
| FPAP Doorsteps Project | 517 |
| Social Marketing of Condoms (PSI/SMP) | 4,073 |
| The Network | 1,808 |
| Marie Stopes International—Khaipur | 1,828 |
| HIV-Aids Drug Harm Reduction—Main Project | 600 |
| Neelum Valley AJK | 1,186 |
| Health and Population Section (including Hon. and P Adviser) | 1,327 |
| TB Scoping Mission (PPP) and Follow-up | 75 |
| NWFP Devolution/Reform Support—Prep | 50 |
| HIV Aids Mainstreaming | 20 |
| NWFP Drugs | 1,000 |
| Balochistan Drugs | 1,000 |
| Sub total | 38,239 |
| *Water/Sanitation* | |
| Rural Water Supply and Sanitation NWFP | 6,500 |
| Sub total | 6,500 |

*Pakistan bilateral aid programme*

| *Projects* | *Project budget (£000)* |
|---|---|
| *Human Rights (including Gender Equality)* | |
| Protect Rights and Livelihoods of Working Children | 1,225 |
| JPO for UNICEF (Shiona Hood) + Extension | 232 |
| Gender Equality Project | 2,800 |
| Violent Crimes Against Women (VCAW) | 700 |
| Safety, Security and Access to Justice | 90 |
| Sub total | 5,047 |
| *Economic Management/Public Sector Reforms* | |
| Pakistan WTO Trade Policy Project | 1,081 |
| General Sales Tax Reforms Phases 1-III | 2,378 |
| Governance and World bank (includes NAB, NRB and Civil Service Reform (TR)) | 170 |
| Social Sector Public Expenditure Analysis | 40 |
| PRGF Budget Support | 15,000 |
| Sub total | 18,669 |
| *Electoral Systems Transition to Democracy* | |
| UNDP Support for Elections | 1,200 |
| Analysis of Local Elections (PATTAN) | 50 |
| Democracy Study | 100 |
| Support for Democratic Elections | 63 |
| Sub total | 1,413 |
| *Corruption* | |
| National Accountability Bureau (NAB) | 81 |
| Anti-Corruption Strategy | 350 |
| Sub total | 431 |
| *Sustainable Livelihoods* | |
| AKRSP Chitral Phase III | 8,120 |
| AKRSP Gilgit 1997–2001 | 8,000 |
| Lachi Poverty Reduction Project | 2,900 |
| NWFP SRSP Capacity Building | 1,830 |
| Alternative Patterns of Land Tenure (Haris Gazdar Study) | 52 |
| RSP Network Project | 1,032 |
| Faisalabad Area Upgrading I-G.cd 018–001 | 12,520 |
| Traidcraft 'PRIDE' Feasibility Study | 90 |
| Micro Finance for Women—KASHF | 3,200 |
| Micro Finance Group | 300 |
| SRSP Community Infrastructure | 1,120 |
| Sub total | 39,164 |
| *Poverty Policy* | |
| Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) | 2,562 |
| Assistance to PIHS Phase II + Extension | 1,498 |
| Building Capacity for Poverty Analysis—Main Project | 300 |
| Sub total | 4,360 |
| *Environment* | |
| Clean Fuels Study | 165 |
| Sub total | 165 |
| *Other* | |
| Small Grants Scheme (SGS) | 176 |
| BHC Development Section Project (BHCDSP) | 2,920 |
| Sub total | 3,096 |
| *Projects funded by Civil Society Department* | |
| *Civil Society Challenge* | |
| Population Concern—Integrated Rural Reproductive Health Project (Lahore) | 210 |
| *Joint Funding Scheme* | |
| Learning for Life—Community Education Programme | 237 |
| Population Concern—Kohat Family Planning and Mother and Child Health | 278 |
| Sub total | 725 |
| Total | 133,770 |

## Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, "Winning the Generation Game", *(a)* what progress her Department has made and *(b)* what future plans her Department has for acting on them; and if she will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24199]

**Clare Short:** The information is as follows:

*Conclusion 6:*

My Department will within the next few weeks publish a booklet for staff on alternative working patterns. The booklet, which has been approved following discussion by a staff Consultative Group on Diversity, will explain the options available for adjusting working patterns in a way which will permit part-time working or downshifting.

*Conclusion 7:*

My Department already makes extensive use of retired staff for suitable short-term assignments.

*Conclusion 8:*

A review of the implications of allowing staff to serve to age 65 is in hand and will be completed by 31 March 2002.

*Conclusion 9:*

My Department has decided not to introduce a short service concession on the grounds that a considerably smaller proportion of men rather than women would be able to comply with the criterion of having less than 20 years service and that the adoption of such a condition would therefore be potentially indirectly discriminatory under s.1 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 as amended. There are also potential difficulties associated with the concept of the "normal age of retirement" which defines the upper age limit applicable to complaints of unfair dismissal in terms of s.109 of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

*Conclusion 10:*

Discrimination on grounds of age is already forbidden by my Department's Equal Opportunities policy as published in our Staff Handbook (and has been for some years).

*Conclusion 11:*

Is for action by the Cabinet Office rather than Departments.

*Conclusion 12:*

My Department already recruits a considerable number of staff (particularly in professional and specialist grades) in mid to late career and age does not figure in our recruitment advertising or in our selection processes.

## Refugees (Former Yugoslavia)

**Tony Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to support internally displaced people and refugees within the former Yugoslavia during the winter months. [23263]

**Clare Short:** Humanitarian assistance from the international community, including assistance for internally displaced persons and refugees, is co-ordinated by the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the European Commission Humanitarian Affairs Office (ECHO). The UK provides funds for these agencies, including 19.7 per cent. of the ECHO budget.

We are not planning to provide bilateral assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons this winter. By agreement with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, our bilateral programme focuses on providing technical assistance for institution and capacity building, and for economic and social reform. We aim to address the longer-term needs of poor people in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia by helping to restructure the economy, strengthen public administration and improve the delivery of social and health care services. This strategy is described in the DFID country strategy paper for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

## Nigeria

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what actions her Department has taken to further good governance in the oil producing states of Nigeria. [21858]

**Clare Short:** My Department is focusing on three key areas of assistance in Nigeria: a governance and economic reform programme at federal level, with particular emphasis on strengthening the justice sector (including the police), implementing key economic reforms and promotion of an effective poverty reduction strategy; support in the continuing fight against HIV/AIDS; and working closely with four identified reforming states of the 36 states of Nigeria to demonstrate that reform can deliver practical benefits for the poor. None of our four focal states, Benue, Jigawa, Ekiti and Enugu, is oil producing. However, DFID supports good governance in oil producing states through the European Commission, which is implementing a large programme of small-scale community driven projects. These projects implement progressive and participatory community development, with the aim of enhancing the voice of the communities to articulate effective demand on services from state and local government. The programme is operational in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states and will expand to a further three states. A DFID-seconded official has assisted the Delegation of the Commission in the development and implementation of this programme.

## Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the OECD convention on bribery and the impact it will have on the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. [21859]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** I have been asked to reply.

Part 12 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 is intended to meet two recommendations made by the Organisation for Economic, Co-operation and Development (OECD) Bribery Working Group. The provisions provided for two changes in the law to ensure that: it covers the bribery of foreign public officials, ministers, Members of Parliament and judges; and the United Kingdom has jurisdiction over acts committed by our nationals and companies abroad.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Lone Parents

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many lone parents who have participated in the new deal for lone parents have later returned to income support, broken down into *(a)* those who originally left the NDLP because they found work, *(b)* those who left the NDLP to return immediately to income support and *(c)* those who left the NDLP for other reasons. [7911]

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish an evaluation of the proportion of lone parents who return to income support within *(a)* one month, *(b)* six months and *(c)* one year of finding work under the new deal. [7985]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Information on the number of lone parents returning to income support will be included in the evaluation of the new deal for lone parents national programme, which is expected to be published in spring 2003.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 9 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 371W, for what reason the publication of the evaluation of the new deal for lone parents has been put back to 2003. [7912]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The publication of the evaluation of the new deal for lone parents (NDLP) national programme has been delayed until spring 2003 to extend the data collection period thereby increasing the quantity of available data on NDLP participants and non-NDLP participants. This will allow the evaluation team to present a more informed and accurate evaluation.

### Young People

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of persons leaving *(a)* the gateway period and *(b)* each of the four options in the new deal for young people entered (i) unsubsidised jobs and (ii) sustained jobs in each year since the inception of the new deal for young people. [7977]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The table shows the proportion of all new deal for young people leavers who move into sustained, unsubsidised jobs from the gateway stage of the programme and from each of the options. In addition to these job outcomes we know from survey findings that around two-thirds of young people who leave options for unknown destinations do in fact find work.

There is an on-going programme of database development to capture outcomes. For the subsidised employment option in particular, the figures prior to 2001 reflect follow-up work with employers to capture lost performance. This exercise will be repeated for 2001 leavers and we expect the figure of 37 per cent. to be revised in line with previous years' figures.

*Proportion of new deal leavers moving into jobs by year*

*Percentage*

| *Stage of leaving new deal* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* | *2001*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gateway | 49 | 45 | 44 | 42 |
| Subsidised employment | 56 | 51 | 51 | [2]37 |
| Full-time education and training | 38 | 32 | 31 | 30 |
| Voluntary sector | 37 | 33 | 33 | 31 |
| Environmental task force | 33 | 30 | 31 | 30 |

[1] To end of July
[2] Initial figure
*Note:*
By definition, all jobs gained by new deal leavers are sustained, unsubsidised jobs (ie to have left the programme, they must not re-claim jobseeker's allowance within 13 weeks).
All figures are immediate destinations on leaving new deal
*Source:*
New Deal Evaluation Database

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of persons on each of the four options in the new deal for young people have left the option and returned to benefits in each year since the inception of the new deal. [7984]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The information is in the table. Around one-third of young people starting the new deal go onto one of the options. The figures in the table therefore relate only to this group of new dealers. The design of the new deal includes a period of follow-through during which people return to JSA if they don't move into work immediately at the end of an option. The follow-through provides each individual with help to make the most of the skills they have gained on their option so that they can find work as soon as possible.

*Proportion of people who left direct from the option and returned to claim jobseeker's allowance*

*Percentage*

| *New deal option* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* | *2001*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subsidised employment | 50 | 39 | 37 | 39 |
| Full-time education and training | 67 | 69 | 63 | 65 |
| Voluntary sector | 63 | 67 | 62 | 65 |
| Environmental task force | 69 | 67 | 64 | 64 |

[1] To end of July
*Source:*
New Deal Evaluation Database

### Third-age Apprenticeships (Wirral)

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to develop third age apprenticeships in the Wirral. [15594]

**Mr. McCartney:** Third age apprenticeships are still in the early stages of development. Their purpose is to increase the take up of training within the new deal 50-plus programme, and to engage more directly with employers in particular sectors of the market rather than in particular locations.

The new deal 50-plus is already operational in the Wirral, helping with the recruitment and training of older people. In the first 18 months of national operation the new deal 50-plus has helped over 51,000 people back into work. Up to the end of September 2001, 382 people in the Wirral unit of delivery area had returned to work with the help of the Employment Credit[1].

[1] *Source:*
New Deal Evaluation Database

## Departmental Initiatives

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list for each *(a)* area-based and *(b)* other regeneration-related initiative for which his Department is responsible (i) the amount budgeted and (ii) the total expenditure in each financial year for the planned lifetime of each initiative *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [16432]

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list for each *(a)* area-based and *(b)* other regeneration-related initiative for which his Department is responsible (i) the amount budgeted and (ii) the total expended in each financial year for the planned lifetime of each initiative. [14037]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown** *[holding answer 20 November 2001]:* Action Teams for Jobs are the Department's main Area-Based Initiative. They are based in some of the most employment-deprived areas of Great Britain and work closely with local regeneration-related initiatives.

Action teams were announced as a one-year initiative in the March 2000 Budget. Three pathfinder Teams started in June 2000, 37 others followed in mid-October 2000, all completed their first year on 12 October 2001. Although final figures are not yet available, initial results indicate that the Teams have engaged over 38,000 clients and helped 41 per cent. (over 15,500) of them into work.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget that the initiative would be extended to March 2004 and expanded to include seven new areas, while a number of existing areas would be divided to sharpen their focus on the most disadvantaged areas. By 2002 there will 63 action teams across GB.

Information on action team budgets and expenditure is not available in the form requested. £45.5 million was available for the original 40 teams for their initial one-year life-span. £133 million in total has been allocated to the initiative for the period October 2001 to March 2004.

An action team has been operating in the area covered by the Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland Employment Zone since October 2000. It did not originally include any part of the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. However, in March 2001 the Team's remit was extended to cover certain disadvantaged groups across the whole of Redcar and Cleveland.

From January 2002 there will be two separate action teams in the Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland area. One in Middlesbrough, covering 13 wards with high levels of worklessness (Ayresome; Beckfield; Beechwood; Berwich; Easterside; Grove Hill; Hemlington; North Ormsby; Pallister; Park End; St. Hilda's; Stainton and Thornton and Thorntree) and another in Redcar and Cleveland covering six wards (Coatham; Newcomen; Grangetown; South Bank; Kirkleatham and Easton). The Middlesbrough Action Team will include two wards in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency, Hemlington and Park End.

The current Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland Action Team has been allocated £625,000 for the period October 2000 to December 2001. The new Middlesbrough Action Team has been allocated £760,000 a year from January 2002 and the new Redcar and Cleveland Action Team has been allocated £500,000 a year.

Another Area-Based Initiative is the Employment Zone initiative which was introduced in April 2000 to test out an alternative approach to delivering help to long-term unemployed people find work. They are located in 15 areas of the country where there are high concentrations of long-term unemployment.

Originally intended to run for two years until March 2002, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced in February 2001 that the Zones would be extended for one year until March 2003.

The amount budgeted and the total expenditure to date is as follows:

*£ million*

| *Year* | *Budget* | *Spend* |
|---|---|---|
| 2000–01 | 52.945 | 68.273 |
| 2001–02 | 83.374 | — |
| 2002–03 | 53.574 | — |

The Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland Employment Zone covers the following wards in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency: Hutton, Guisborough, Saltburn, Skelton, Belmont, Brotton, Lockwood, Loftus, Hemlington and Park End. The Zone's total expenditure for the financial year 2000–01 was nearly £3.2 million.

It is not possible to identify other specific regeneration-related expenditure in any meaningful way. All the programmes run by the Department for Work and Pensions aim to support the Government's overarching commitment to tackling social exclusion and poverty and improving economic growth. We are doing this in particular by providing a joined-up approach to employment and benefit policies for people of working age, with a single modern, nationwide point of delivery for advice and support on jobs and benefits through Jobcentre Plus; and by introducing a new Pension Service to provide advice and support to today's and tomorrow's pensioners, including the introduction of the pension credit.

## New Deal

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Glasgow *(a)* are unemployed and *(b)* have found work from the new deal. [21665]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The information is as follows:

*(a)* There are currently 17,992 unemployed claimants in Glasgow, a fall of one-third since 1997.

*(b)* The available information is in the table.

| *Programme* | *Number of people helped into work in the Glasgow Unit of Delivery area*[1] |
|---|---|
| New deal for young people | 6,369 |
| New deal 25 plus | 1,071 |
| New deal for lone parents | 2,073 |
| New deal 50 plus[2] | [3]907 |
| New deal for partners | [4]32 |
| Total | 10,452 |

[1] Up to the end of September 2001
[2] Employment credit claims
[3] At end of October 2001
[4] At 26 October 2001—Source: Employment Service Labour Market System
*Source:*
New Deal Evaluation Database

The information is not available for the new deal for disabled people.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* record is kept and *(b)* assessment is made of the destinations of people who leave the new deal for 50-plus for employment. [18056]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Records are kept of participants in new deal 50-plus who have entered work with the support of the new deal 50-plus employment credit, broken down by gender, ethnicity, disability and type of employment (full-time, part-time or self-employed). An assessment of the destinations will be covered by the evaluation of the programme.

**Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how much public money has been given to each private company in Leicester operating a new deal initiative; [20258]

(2) how much public money has been spent on the new deal in the city of Leicester. [20257]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The total expenditure on new deal programmes in the Leicestershire unit of delivery since the introduction of new deal in April 1998 until the end of October 2001 is £22,283,937. This includes staffing costs for the Employment Service, programme expenditure and other associated costs.

It is not possible to give details of how much public money is given to individual private companies involved in the programmes, as this would be a breach of commercial confidentiality.

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what steps he is taking to prevent *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* monopoly training agencies diverting new deal training budgets from training provision to administrative budgets; [20758]

(2) what action he will take to ensure that the organisations that provide training for new deal trainees receive the bulk of money allocated for the purpose; [20756]

(3) if he will take action to prevent *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* other training agencies from top-slicing the individual cash allocation for training each new deal trainee in such a way that the bulk of the budget goes for administration rather than training. [20757]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Costs associated with training provision are reflected in the contract price. Payment is made to contractors in line with actual performance in delivering training to agreed standards.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 160W, what proportion of the number of people leaving for *(a)* employment and *(b)* sustained employment in Government Departments represents of the (i) total number of people leaving the new deal for the long-term unemployed and (ii) the number of people leaving the new deal for the long-term unemployed for employment. [18040]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Soft Skills

**Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the soft skills promoted by his Department; and if he will make a statement on how they relate to hard skills. [18904]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** There is no formal list of soft skills provided through the Department's employment and training programmes. Soft skills relate to good work discipline, attitude and behaviour, which are necessary skills for everyone entering or wanting to re-enter employment. Our programmes include help with motivation, attitude problems, interpersonal skills and customer care skills. These skills relate to hard skills in that both are necessary to find and retain work.

### Benefit Fraud (Publicity Campaign)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the breakdown of the costs of the publicity campaign to tackle benefit fraud. [18985]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 438W.

### Independent Living Fund

**Mr. Mark Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when his Department will publish the results of the quinquennial review into the Independent Living Fund; and what plans he has to abandon its means test. [23141]

**Maria Eagle:** I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for the City of York (Mr. Bayley) today.

### Attendance Allowance

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if adjudicating officers deciding on the eligibility for attendance allowance are advised to consider virtual inability to walk as defined by Cassinelli *v.* Secretary of State for Social Services TLR 6/12/91 as evidence that constant daytime supervision is required. [22959]

**Maria Eagle:** When assessing whether someone satisfies the qualifying conditions for attendance allowance, decision makers (known as adjudication officers until 1999) are advised to take into account, among other things, whether that person needs supervision from another to avoid danger. It is the Department's view that the Court of Appeal in Cassinelli *v.* Secretary of State for Social Services is not relevant here as it did not address the question of supervision and only considered the meaning of "severe discomfort" as it related to mobility allowance, a benefit replaced in 1992 by disability living allowance.

### Industrial Injuries

**Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when Pat Sutton, a constituent, will receive an answer from the Department's Medical Services about her industrial injuries benefit; and if he will make a statement. [20448]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown** *[holding answer 4 December 2001:]* I have written to my hon. Friend.

### Unemployment (Disabled People)

**Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the performance of Disability Employment Service instigated courses in finding work for unemployed disabled people. [11374]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The majority of unemployed disabled people find work through mainstream Jobcentre services and programmes which include vacancy displays, the various New Deals, Work Based Learning for Adults, Programme Centres and Work Trials.

The number of disabled people who entered work using these services last year (to March 2001) totalled 83,523. The number who have entered work this year up to the end of September totals 48,081.

In addition to these services there is a range of specialised support available from the Employment Service Disability Service Teams accessed through Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) who are based in Jobcentres. DEAs support clients who are more significantly disadvantaged in their search for work as the result of a disability and offer a range of additional programmes and services to their clients. These include the Access to Work programme, the Work Preparation programme, Workstep, Residential Work Based Learning for Adults and the Job Introduction scheme.

The number of people helped into work by DEAs last year (to March 2001) totalled 18,754. The number helped into work by DEA's this year, up to the end of September, totals 8,314.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will answer the questions tabled by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak on 15 October, ref. 8410 and 8 October, ref. 7989. [16191]

**Mr. McCartney:** Question 8410 was answered on 30 November and question 7989 was answered on 29 November.

### Winter Fuel Payment (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* women aged over 60, *(b)* men aged over 65 and *(c)* men aged 60 to 65 receive the winter fuel payment in the Buckingham constituency. [22638]

**Mr. McCartney:** The information is not available in the format requested. However, for winter 2000–01, around 5,800 men aged 60 and over and around 8,800 women aged 60 and over in the Buckingham constituency received a winter fuel payment. The figure for this year will be similar.

### Minimum Income Guarantee (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners received the minimum income guarantee in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1998. [22636]

**Mr. McCartney:** The latest figures as at August 1998, 1999 and 2000 show that there were 1,400 pensioners in the Buckingham constituency receiving the minimum income guarantee. By August 2001 this figure had risen to 1,500 pensioners.

### Private Pension Provision

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how his Department plans to encourage private pension provisions. [22664]

**Mr. McCartney:** This Government are committed to encourage private pension provision—through pension education, making saving pay, providing appropriate savings vehicles and better regulation. This strategy goes hand-in-hand with our broader reform of the pensions landscape with introduction of the state second pension and the launch of the pension service.

Our pension education campaign has been driving home the message that those who can afford to save have an obligation to do so. As part of this, combined pension forecasts will ensure that people have the right information to make well-informed decisions on their retirement income.

The introduction of stakeholder pensions has a significant impact the pensions landscape. Stakeholders are safe, flexible and value for money. For the first time, we have also opened up private pensions to non-earners—giving carers and the disabled a chance to build up a private pension. Since October, all employers with five or more employees must offer access to a stakeholder pension, unless they already offer an appropriate alternative, greatly increasing the coverage of private pension saving.

The Association of British Insurers has calculated that by the end of October nearly 300,000 employers had designated a scheme. The figures also show that some 492,000 policies have been sold in the first seven months since the introduction of stakeholder pensions in April.

We are committed to reforming the regulation of private pension provision. That is why we have commissioned Alan Pickering to lead a review of the regulatory regime, and to report in July with a package of measures for simplification. We have already accepted the recommendations of the Myners Review of institutional

investment, are developing proposals to replace the minimum funding requirement with a long-term scheme-specific standard, and have consulted on a package of measures to speed up the winding-up of occupational pension schemes. Better regulation will be better for the individuals—by maintaining their security while removing unnecessary barriers to providing pensions.

From 2003, around half of all pensioners will stand to gain from the new pension credit. For the first time, saving will be rewarded rather than penalised. All single pensioners with weekly incomes of up to £135, and couples with weekly incomes up to £200, will receive a cash top-up. This reward will also be good news for women—around two in three recipients of the credit will be women, as women tend to have smaller pensions than men.

We believe that those who can afford to save for their retirement have an obligation to do so. Our policies will encourage and facilitate that saving, and allow every individual to make informed choices to safeguard their future.

### Housing Benefit

**Mr. Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what records his Department keeps of the number of notified changes to housing benefit claims each year in each local authority; and whether such information is published. [17864]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Data are collected quarterly, through the Housing Benefit Management Information System, on specified changes of circumstances notified to local authorities by people claiming Housing Benefit. This information is not routinely published.

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with local authorities regarding the introduction of an integrated claim form for housing benefit, council tax benefit and other benefits. [18001]

**Malcolm Wicks:** We expect Jobcentre Plus and local authorities to work closely together to provide a coherent service for customers. From next October, Jobcentre Plus offices plan to introduce an electronic process which allows us to collect information on a range of benefits only once and pass relevant housing benefit and council tax benefit claim details to local authorities. We are discussing these plans with the local authority associations on an on-going basis to ensure local authorities play a full role in the new processes we are developing.

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason it is not possible for housing benefit administrators to share data with his Department on benefits other than income support and jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement. [15859]

**Malcolm Wicks:** All local authorities have clerical access to information held by the Department which is relevant to the processing of housing benefit claims.

Electronic access to income support and jobseeker's allowance data is already available through remote access terminals sited in local authorities. We are currently investigating how we can give local authorities tailored electronic access to other Departmental benefit data.

### Jobcentre Plus

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department was involved in consultation with the Health and Safety Executive prior to the removal of glass security screens from new Jobcentre Plus offices. [14236]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Yes.

### Disabled People

**Mr. Mark Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for disabled people in work to be charged on their earnings. [17672]

**Maria Eagle:** This Government are committed to removing barriers to work for severely disabled people, making work possible and making it pay for those who can move into employment. To this end the Departments of Health and for Work and Pensions have both recently announced significant improvements in this area. The Department of Health issued new guidance for local councils setting out a new fairer charging framework for home care services on 23 November requiring councils to disregard earnings in assessing ability to pay a charge by no later than 1 October 2002.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions announced in his uprating statement on 28 November that the earnings rule in the independent living funds will be abolished from April 2002, removing a disincentive for severely disabled people and/or their partners to obtain or retain work, or to seek advancement at work.

### Benefit Take-Up

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action has been taken by each local authority in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01 to increase benefit take-up; how much each campaign has cost; and how many people are employed by each local authority to improve benefit take-up. [15150]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Secondment (BP)

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister how many BP employees are on secondment to the Government; for what purposes; and on what terms. [22990]

**The Prime Minister:** The Government are committed to interchange which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations.

Information about individual secondments to Government from outside organisations is not held centrally.

Since May 1997 there have been no inward secondments from BP to the Cabinet Office, including No. 10.

### Interception of Communications

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister (1) in respect of the allegations made by Lord Ahmed of telephone tapping, for what reason his spokesman departed from the normal policy of neither confirming nor denying; and if he will make a statement; [24375]

(2) if it is his policy that in respect of Members of the House of *(a)* Commons and *(b)* Lords, no authorisation will be given for the interception of communications; and if he will make a statement. [24376]

**The Prime Minister:** As I informed the House on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, column 861, Government policy remains as stated in 1966 by the then Prime Minister, the Lord Wilson of Rievaulx. In answer to questions on 17 November 1966, Lord Wilson said that he had given instructions that there was to be no tapping of the telephones of Members of the House of Commons and that if there were a development which required a change of policy, he would at such moment as seemed compatible with the security of the country, on his own initiative, make a statement in the House about it. The then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, Lord Bassam, confirmed on 27 September 2000 that this policy extended to Members of the House of Lords.

With this long-standing exception in relation to Members of Parliament, it remains the normal policy of the Government neither to confirm nor deny allegations in respect of interception matters.

### National Health Service Review

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will publish the terms of reference of the inquiry into the NHS headed by Adair Turner; and if he will publish the final report; [24092]

(2) if he will publish the review by Adair Turner of the workings of the NHS. [24618]

**The Prime Minister:** Adair Turner is working with my Forward Strategy Unit to provide advice as required on taking forward the NHS Plan and its objectives. Internal policy advice to Ministers remains confidential. Any decisions made by Ministers in the light of it will, of course, be made public.

### European Union

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister what the purpose is of the proposal to create an elected President of Europe discussed at the European Union Summit; if the proposal is subject to unanimity; and what the policy of Her Majesty's Government is on the issue. [24287]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) in the House on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 34–35.

### Quality of Life Speech

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made on the issues outlined in his Quality of Life speech in April; and if he will make a statement. [21926]

**The Prime Minister:** We are delivering on our commitment to improve the lives of people through the regeneration of our communities and neighbourhoods. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit was established in April 2001, dedicated to ensuring no one is seriously disadvantaged by where they live. Substantial resources have been made available, including the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund which will provide £900 million over the next three years to improve services in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Proposals in the Police Bill and Local Government White Paper will also take forward the liveability agenda, helping to make our streets and neighbourhoods safer, cleaner and more accessible.

## SCOTLAND

### Departmental Spending

**Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total expenditure was on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* polling, *(c)* focus groups, *(d)* design consultants, *(e)* caterers, *(f)* production of departmental publications and *(g)* photographs/photographers by her Department for each year since 1995 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms; what was (A) the annual percentage increase in spending on each category and (B) spending on each category as a percentage of the total departmental running costs; and if she will make a statement. [6922]

**Mrs. Liddell:** The Government are committed to using only whatever media and channels are judged to be the most cost-effective way to deliver the publicity necessary to support the implementation of policy. Paid advertising is only resorted to after careful consideration of the cost benefits.

As the volume of information requested spans Scottish Office/Scotland Office dates, I shall write to the hon. Member with the information as soon as possible.

### Press Notices

**Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by her Department during the Summer recess. [9226]

**Mrs. Liddell** *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* 59 press notices were issued during the summer recess. They are published on the Scotland Office website, which is freely available to the public. No consultation documents were issued during the period.

### Departmental Promotions

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much her Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if she will make a statement. [12276]

**Mrs. Liddell:** The Scottish Office spends on information literature, advertising and campaign material are listed:

£

| *Year* | *Total spend* |
|---|---|
| 1995–96 | 2,778,000 |
| 1996–97 | 3,778,621 |
| 1997–98 | 3,344,245 |
| 1998–99 | 5,644,262 |
| 1999-June 1999 | 878,330 |

The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The spends on information literature, advertising and campaign material since this date are listed.

£

| *Year* | *Total spend* |
|---|---|
| 1 July 1999–2000 | 1,131.63 |
| 2000–01 | 322,136.64 |

### Departmental Name Change

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost was of re-branding her Department following its name change after the general election. [17863]

**Mrs. Liddell:** My Department did not change its name after the general election.

### Air Services

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with *(a)* airline companies and *(b)* others regarding the extra costs of flights to and from Scotland since 11 September. [22969]

**Mrs. Liddell:** On 3 December I hosted a meeting attended by most of the major airlines, airport operators, business representatives and development and tourism agencies.

While some of the airlines have experienced additional security costs following the events of 11 September, a number of operators confirmed that they were successfully generating new business.

### Night Flights

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what discussions she has had with representatives of the airline industry regarding the noise of night flights arriving at or departing from Scottish airports; [22966]

(2) what complaints the Government have received about the noise of night flights from people living under the flight path or close to *(a)* Edinburgh Airport, *(b)* Glasgow Airport and *(c)* Aberdeen Airport. [22967]

**Mrs. Liddell:** The control and regulation of noise generated by the use of airports in Scotland is a devolved responsibility and is therefore a matter for the Scottish Executive.

### Tourism

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the impact on Scottish tourism of the additional costs imposed on flights to and from Scotland since 11 September. [22968]

**Mrs. Liddell:** Sponsorship of the tourism industry in Scotland is a matter for the Scottish Executive and Visit Scotland.

### Boundary Commissions

**Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure the publication of alternative proposals made by electoral boundaries commissions to the Boundary Commissioners, at the same time as the commissioners publish their proposals for boundary changes. [23494]

**Mrs. Liddell:** The publication of provisional recommendations for parliamentary constituencies is a matter solely for the Boundary Commission for Scotland in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended.

### Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, 'Winning the Generation Game', *(a)* what progress her Department has made and *(b)* what future plans her Department has for acting on them; and if she will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24194]

**Mrs. Liddell:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Minster of State, Cabinet Office, at column 335.

## WALES

### EU Structural Funds

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the reason for the projected change in the level of receipts from the EU from 2001–02 to 2002–03. [24836]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** The projected level of receipts from the EU shows a progressive increase between 2001–02 and 2002–03 to reflect the expected build-up of spend in the Structural Fund programmes. The management of EU Structural Funds is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

### Government Accounts

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the financial implications of the participation by his Department in the whole of Government Accounts project. [24729]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** I expect any net additional costs to be minimal.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the reason for the change in the cost of depreciation from 1999 to 2001 to 2001 to 2004. [24733]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** The implementation of Resource Accounting and Budgeting has altered the way that depreciation is reflected in Government accounts. Depreciation factors reflect best accounting practice and may vary depending on the nature of the asset involved.

### Learning and Skills Act

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the costs to public funds of the implementation in Wales of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. [24760]

**Mr. Touhig:** This is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

### Business Plan

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what cost savings have been identified by his Department's preparation of an annual business plan. [24731]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** My Department's financial provision for capital expenditure and for paybill and general administrative expenditure is constant in cash terms over the period 2001–02 to 2003–04. This provides an automatic mechanism for delivering cost savings at least equal to the rate of inflation each year.

### Welsh Assembly

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the funding settlement for the Welsh Assembly for 2001 to 2004. [24762]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement I made to the Welsh Grand Committee on 19 July 2000.

### Departmental Operating Costs

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the reasons for the change in the operating costs of his Department from *(a)* 1999–2000 to 2000–2001 and *(b)* 2000–01 to 2001–02. [24735]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** My Department came into being on 1 July 1999 and so was operational for only three-quarters of the financial year 1999–2000.

Annexe 3 of the Departmental Report 2001 shows an estimated outturn on "paybill and general administrative expenditure" of £2.259 million in 2000–01 and projected expenditure of £2.279 million in 2001–02. This is a change of less than 1 per cent.

### Departmental Payments

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on progress with his Department's target for making payments in accordance with the applicable timetable where a contract applies; [24757]

(2) if he will make a statement on progress with the target of paying accounts within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice. [24756]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** Over the last three months, my Department has on average paid 88 per cent. of its bills on time each month.

### Capital Charges

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the reason for the change in the cost of capital charges from 1999–01 to 2001–04. [24730]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** The treatment of capital charges has altered during this period with the introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting.

For my Department, the cost of capital arises essentially from the headquarters building (Gwydyr House) and its contents. Gwydyr House was professionally valued on 31 March 2000 and under current accounting policies is due to have professional revaluations every five years.

The cost of capital charge is applied to average net assets of a department over a financial year and is charged at 6 per cent. which is the Treasury's discounted rate.

### Children's Commissioner for Wales

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. [24761]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** This is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

### Departmental Expenditure Limit

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the reason for the change in the capital departmental expenditure limit from *(a)* 1999–2000 to 2000–01 and *(b)* 2000–01 to 2001–02. [24734]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** The capital Departmental Expenditure Limit attributable to my Department meets those administrative costs which are of a capital nature—primarily the need to maintain, refurbish, and improve access to, Gwydyr House. Changes in provision are agreed in the light of expected pressures.

### Information Systems

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on changes resulting from his Department's development of its financial and management information systems. [24732]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** My Department's financial and management information systems are being further upgraded; the changes which may result are not yet known.

### Brynglas Tunnels

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the Welsh Assembly on the effects on the future economy of Wales of traffic congestion at the Brynglas Tunnels. [24393]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** I meet regularly with the First Minister when we discuss a range of matters, including the economy and the transport infrastructure in Wales.

The new Southern Distributor Road recently announced by Newport county borough should greatly improve the road network in the Newport area and help provide a boost to economic development prospects.

The National Assembly is considering other options to alleviate congestion around Newport.

### Job Losses (Nantgarw)

**Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what co-operation he has had with the National Assembly in developing a response to the job losses at G.E. Aircraft Engine Services at Nantgarw in South Wales. [23399]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** I regret the decision taken by General Electric to shed around 350 jobs at its plant in Nantgarw and the effect this decision will have on those who will lose their jobs and the effects on their families and the community.

The First Minister met representatives of GE in September of this year. I know that Assembly officials have been in regular contact with GE and will offer and provide whatever support they can.

### Staff Numbers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were employed in his Department in each of the last four years. [23788]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** Figures are published in annual Departmental Reports.

### Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, 'Winning the Generation Game', *(a)* what progress his Department has made and *(b)* what future plans his Department has for acting on them; and if he will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24195]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** My Department does not employ any staff directly and so is limited in its capacity to influence the terms on which they are employed.

However I should be delighted to welcome a higher proportion of older people among those being seconded to the Wales Office from other organisations.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Housing Benefit

**Mr. Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will publish the list of the changed circumstances a housing benefit claimant must report. [17867]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The duty to notify changes of circumstances is set out in regulation 75 of the Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987. Subject to the exceptions set out in regulation 75(2), the regulation provides that a person claiming housing benefit has a duty to notify the local authority in writing of any change of circumstances that he or she might reasonably be expected to know might affect his or her right to housing benefit, the amount of benefit or his or her receipt of benefit. It is not possible to provide a definitive list of relevant changes as these will depend on each person's individual circumstances.

How people are made aware of their responsibility to notify changes of circumstances is a matter for individual local authorities to decide upon. However, we have developed a model housing benefit and council tax benefit claim form which local authorities are encouraged to use. The guidance for completing the form includes a list of many of the common changes which must be reported.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will list in date order the housing benefit regulations and amendments to them issued since September 2000; [7904]

(2) how many *(a)* sets of housing benefit regulations, *(b)* number of housing benefit regulations, *(c)* amendments to housing benefit regulations and *(d)* housing benefit circulars there have been in each year since 1988. [7905]

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will list the date and nature of each of the changes to housing benefit regulations that have been made since April 1997; [15858]

(2) if he will list the dates and subject matters of the circulars he has sent to local authorities on *(a)* housing benefit administration and *(b)* measures to tackle housing benefit fraud since April 2000. [15860]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many regulatory changes affecting the administration of housing benefits have been made *(a)* in each year since 1997 and *(b)* in each month since July 2000; [19503]

(2) how many departmental circulars modifying housing benefit rules have been issued *(a)* each year since 1997 and *(b)* each month since July 2000. [19504]

**Malcolm Wicks** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* Many of the changes we have made to the housing benefit and council tax benefit schemes since 1997 support our wide-ranging welfare reform initiatives.

We recognise the need to ensure that the impact of such change on local authorities is fully taken into account before implementation. We are, therefore, establishing a

Regulation Scrutiny Group, including local authority representatives, to consider future proposed regulations, and to report on the implications for local authorities.

The available information on the number of sets of housing benefit regulations, statutory instruments containing regulations amending housing benefit provisions and circulars issued is in the table.

| Year | Sets of housing benefit (HB) regulations | Statutory instruments containing regulations amending HB provisions | Number of HB circulars issued |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1988 | 3 | 3 | 20 |
| 1989 | 2 | 2 | 25 |
| 1990 | 3 | 8 | 23 |
| 1991 | 3 | 6 | 20 |
| 1992 | 4 | 11 | 35 |
| 1993 | 5 | 11 | 46 |
| 1994 | 5 | 10 | 34 |
| 1995 | 7 | 13 | 58 |
| 1996 | 4 | 16 | 57 |
| 1997 | 8 | 18 | 83 |
| 1998 | 4 | 14 | 89 |
| 1999 | 4 | 15 | 81 |
| 2000 | 5 | 23 | 73 |
| 2001[1] | 8 | 20 | 74 |

[1] To October 31

Information on the number of individual provisions, including how they affect administration, within each set of regulations and amendments to them could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, a list of sets of regulations affecting housing benefit (including amendments to these regulations) made between 1 September 2000 and 10 December 2001 has been placed in the Library.

The numbers of departmental circulars identified as giving guidance on changes to housing benefit rules for each year since 1997 and each month since July 2000 are in the table.

| Year/month | Number |
|---|---|
| 1997 | 47 |
| 1998 | 41 |
| 1999 | 43 |
| *2000* | |
| January to June | 21 |
| July | 3 |
| August | 1 |
| September | 6 |
| October | 2 |
| November | 5 |
| December | 3 |
| Total | 41 |
| *2001* | |
| January | 3 |
| February | 4 |
| March | 5 |
| April | 6 |
| May | 3 |
| June | 2 |
| July | 2 |
| August | 4 |
| September | 2 |
| October | 6 |
| November | 3 |
| December | 1 |
| Total[1] | 40 |

[1] To 30 November

*Note:*
Circulars that confirm, consolidate or reinforce previous guidance are not included. Circulars that interpret changes to rules in relation to the Verification Framework are also not included.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was the figure for expenditure on the housing benefit under occupation pilot that was not specified on page 103 of the 2001 Departmental report. [18917]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The under-occupation pilot encourages housing benefit recipients living in under-occupied social housing to move to smaller and cheaper accommodation in order to make more efficient use of housing stock. The pilot is expected to run until 2003. Estimated expenditure in 2000–01 was £17,335. This figure is subject to adjustment on receipt of audited claims from participating authorities.

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the *(a)* costs and *(b)* savings to the housing benefit budget in each region in England of the introduction of rent restructuring in (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [19820]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The information is not available in the format requested.

Initial estimates suggest that the overall public expenditure cost of rent restructuring, taking account of housing benefit payments, rental income of councils and grant requirements for new housing association developments is broadly neutral.

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what percentage of all *(a)* council and *(b)* registered social landlord tenants in each London local authority are in receipt of housing benefit; [19911]

(2) what percentage of *(a)* council and *(b)* registered social landlord tenants in each London local authority are pensioners and of these what proportion are in receipt of housing benefit. [19821]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Information is not available in the format requested.

The total number of local authority and social landlord tenants by local authority is not collected centrally. Reliable estimates of the number of pensioners in receipt of housing benefit and living in either local authority or social landlord housing by each London local authority are not available.

## Disability Living Allowance

**Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of and how many people in receipt of disability living allowance have mental health problems. [20783]

**Maria Eagle:** At 31 May 2001, about 267,500 recipients of disability living allowance—almost 12 per cent. of the total number—had mental health problems recorded as

their principal disabling condition. In addition, about 222,200 recipients—almost 10 per cent. of the total number—had learning difficulties so recorded.

**Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of claimants in receipt of the mobility components of disability living allowance do so because of mental health problems. [20784]

**Maria Eagle:** At 31 May 2001, about 12 per cent. of people who receive the mobility component of disability living allowance had mental health problems recorded as their principal disabling condition. In addition, about 10 per cent. had learning difficulties so recorded.

**Valerie Davey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many awards of disability living allowance have been made in each of the last three years to people suffering with sickle cell anaemia. [22178]

**Maria Eagle:** This information is not available in the form requested. About 600 awards of disability living allowance are made each year to people with blood disorders recorded as their principal disabling condition. Some of these cases may involve sickle cell anaemia.

### Jobcentre Plus

**Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what training front-line staff of Jobcentre Plus receive on working with clients with mental health problems. [20782]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** All staff working in the Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices work through an open learning module on disability awareness. This covers different types of disabilities including mental health. We are also developing a two-day trainer-led event for front line Jobcentre Plus staff. This includes information on working with customers with mental health conditions provided by The Mental Health Foundation. Our training provision also makes use of a video from the Employers' Forum on Disability.

### New Deal

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 901W, on the new deal, to the hon. hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) how many of the new deal starts in his Department resulted in sustained employment for the person concerned in the Department; if he will give a breakdown of these starts by branch of the new deal; and how many of the starts in other Government Departments resulted in sustained employment for the person concerned in the Department in question. [21267]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** This information is not collected centrally for all of the Department and its agencies, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, in the Employment Service (ES) up to October 2001, of the 768 people taken on under the new deal for young people and new deal 25 plus, 284 have gained permanent employment with the ES and a further 87 have found permanent employment outside the ES.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21312]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Information follows on the number of people employed by the Employment Service under the new deal for young people. Information for the rest of the Department is not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

Up to October 2001, the Employment Service had recruited 688 people under new deal for young people. The subsidy had been claimed for 562 of these at a cost of approximately £1.3 million. The Employment Service has also taken on 2,254 new deal jobseekers under its normal recruitment processes. This figure includes people on new deal for young people and new deal 25 plus and cannot be broken down. These recruits have been treated the same way as other employees and have generated no extra costs to public funds.

### Wirral Young Carers Project

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to pay Wirral Young Carers group the money from the European Social Fund applied for in 2000. [21407]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Payment in respect of the Wirral Young Carers project will be progressed as quickly as possible when an application for an advance claim is received from Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.

### Maternity Allowance

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Glasgow receive the sure start maternity grant. [21666]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The information is in the table:

| *Benefits Agency District* | *Number of sure start maternity grants made between 27 March 2000[1] and 31 October 2001* |
|---|---|
| Glasgow East | 1,250 |
| Glasgow North | 1,735 |
| Glasgow South | 2,380 |
| Total | 5,360 |

[1] Sure start maternity grants replaced the social fund maternity payment for any child born or adopted on or after 11 June 2000 at the rate of £200 for each child. 27 March 2000 is the earliest date on which a claim for a sure start maternity grant could be made.

*Notes:*

1. The payments were raised to £300 from 18 September 2000 and the rate is set to increase again to £500 in 2002.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest five

*Source:*

Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management System

### Maternity Pay

**Richard Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much small employers will be able to recover for the statutory maternity pay they pay out from 6 April 2002. [24995]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Currently small employers whose gross national insurance payments in a tax year are £20,000 or less (the small employers relief threshold) can recover 100 per cent. of the Statutory Maternity Pay they pay out plus an additional amount, currently 5 per cent., in compensation for the employers share of national insurance contributions due on SMP payments. The compensation rate is reviewed each year based on a formula which compares the employers' share of national insurance paid on SMP with the total amount of SMP paid by all employers.

From 6 April 2002 the threshold is being doubled to £40,000. This will mean that an additional 10,000 employers a year will qualify and in all around 60 per cent. of all employers paying SMP in a year will get full reimbursement. At the same time the additional compensation rate is being amended to 4.5 per cent. in line with the estimates made of SMP due to be paid and employers' national insurance costs on those payments from April 2002. Regulations will shortly be laid to achieve these changes.

### Disability Rights Task Force

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proposals have been made by the Disability Rights Task Force; and how they will be implemented. [21808]

**Maria Eagle:** The Disability Rights Task Force issued two reports. The first was on a Disability Rights Commission, which we established in April 2000. The second was on comprehensive civil rights, on which we published our response, "Towards Inclusion", in March 2001. Copies of "Towards Inclusion" are available in the Library.

### Departmental Staff (Home Working)

**Mr. Challen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21828]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The Department for Work and Pensions is committed to the Work-Life balance of its staff. A range of flexible working patterns including part time working, job sharing and homeworking is available to staff by agreement with their management. The flexibility to work at home is most frequently used on an ad-hoc basis, but there are individuals who have homeworking as a regular part of their working pattern. The Department is currently looking at ways in which data on the number of people taking up the flexibility can be captured.

The Department for Work and Pensions publicises its policy on flexible working and encourages managers to respond positively to requests as part of their commitment to the diversity agenda. Although the current disparate IT systems allow varying degrees of access to systems at the office, the Department is developing IT infrastructures, complete with the necessary security measures that will in the future allow more flexible and widespread access to office IT systems from home.

### Departmental Spending

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 81W, on departmental underspend, how he intends to spend the money transferred to his Department from underspend in the Department for Education and Skills in financial year 2000–01. [22777]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Of the £326 million, £220 million is ring fenced for European Structural Funds and was included in Department's Estimate at the Winter Supplementary. The Remaining £106 million was available end year flexibility within the Employment Opportunities Fund.

The Department has included £52.6 million in its estimate at the Winter Supplementary; this has been allocated to the new deal programmes. DfES has included £40 million in their estimate at the winter supplementary and allocated it to new deal for Schools. Any further draw down will need to be agreed with the Treasury.

### Winter Fuel Allowance (Battersea)

**Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Battersea will receive the £200 winter fuel allowance this winter. [22943]

**Mr. McCartney:** Winter fuel payments are made to most people aged 60 and over, regardless of whether they receive a state retirement pension. The rate is either £200 or £100, depending on whether the person lives alone or with another eligible person. Around 10,400 people in Battersea received a winter fuel payment last year and, of these, around 6,800 received a payment at £200. We expect the figures for this year to be similar.

### Benefits (Epsom and Ewell)

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the Epsom and Ewell constituency receive *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* carers allowance. [23428]

**Maria Eagle:** There were 1,795 recipients of disability living allowance in Epsom and Ewell at 31 May 2001.

No information is available on invalid care allowance by parliamentary constituency. At 30 September 2001 there were 379,780 recipients in Great Britain.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applicants for carers benefit in the Epsom and Ewell constituency have had their claims refused in each of the past five years. [23427]

**Maria Eagle:** This information is not readily available for individual constituencies.

### Pension Credit

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library *(a)* a summary and *(b)* a complete set of responses to the Pension Credit consultation paper. [24242]

**Mr. McCartney:** The responses were placed in the Library on 28 November.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the pension credit, the method of application and who is eligible to receive it. [19364]

**Mr. McCartney** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend's oral statement on 28 November.

A Bill to implement the Government's proposals for Pension Credit was introduced in the House of Lords on 28 November 2001. Copies of the Bill and the explanatory notes have been placed in the Library, together with a booklet, "The Pension Credit: the Government's proposals setting out how Pension Credit will work". Copies are also available in the Vote Office.

## Advertising Campaign

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 828W, which section of the table shows the costs of the 'What Have You Got to Offer?' advertising campaign. [24230]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The information is in the table.

£

| | *Advertising and Media* | *Other costs* |
|---|---|---|
| Targeting benefit fraud | 5,747,000 | 402,252 |
| National Benefit Fraud Hotline advertising | 425,178 | |
| Minimum Income Guarantee | 3,365,000 | 176,000[1] |
| Inherited SERPS | 340,000 | 345,000 |
| Winter Fuel Payments | 616,000 | 294,000 |
| Pensions Education[3] | 5,232,000[2] | 1,297,000 |
| Bereavement Benefits | 155,000 | 90,000 |
| New Deal for Young People | 558,201 | 951,728 |
| New Deal 50+ | 2,175,367 | 63,793 |
| New Deal Partners | 99,445 | 67,310 |
| Action Teams for Jobs | 58,504 | 440 |
| New Deal for Lone Parents | 2,292,000 | 295,000 |
| "What have you got to offer" | 2,946,997 | 152,625 |
| New Deal for Disabled People | 31,372 | 240,387 |

[1] This includes £30,985 customer research into a new MIG claim form which straddled two financial years.

[2] The overall Pensions Education marketing budget figure remains unchanged at £6,529,062 (which was rounded to £6,530,000). Within this total, the advertising media and production cost given previously has changed from £5,212,000 to £5,232,000. This takes account of some photography costs that were previously included as part of "other costs", but can be directly attributed to advertising.

[3] In addition to the total of £6,529,062 (which was rounded to £6,530,000) £103,370 was spent on completing our previous pensions education activity (with a Monopoly theme) that preceded the new "Working Dogs" campaign, as well as some developmental work that was undertaken before the new Working Dogs Campaign was launched.

## Older People

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what preparatory work his Department is undertaking in conjunction with other departments for the UN World Assembly for Older People in Madrid next March. [23121]

**Mr. McCartney:** Our preparation for the United Nations' World Assembly on Ageing is on schedule and is being taken forward in close co-operation with other government departments and older people's organisations.

Much of the work to date has focused on developing the main objective of the Assembly—the International Strategy on Ageing. Consultation with colleagues across Government and the voluntary sector has helped to shape the UK's contribution to the Strategy.

The current draft can be found on www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/waa.

The World Assembly will be an important event and we will be working closely with our colleagues across government, older people's organisations and older people themselves to finalise our plans.

## Pensioners (Benefits)

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimates he has made of non-take-up of means-tested benefits by pensioners by *(a)* expenditure and *(b)* caseload in (i) the English regions, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) Northern Ireland. [24034]

**Mr. McCartney:** Estimates for non-take-up of income-related benefits (council tax benefit, housing benefit, income support, jobseeker's allowance) by pensioners are available for Great Britain and can be found in the DWP publication "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up 1999–2000". Copies are available in the House of Commons Library. No estimates are available for different parts of Great Britain.

## Unemployment (West Wiltshire)

**Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many young people in Wiltshire have gained employment under the new deal; and what percentage this represents of all unemployed young people. [18406]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Up to the end of September 2001, the new deal had helped 1,888 young people move into work in the Wiltshire Employment Service district. There are currently 919 unemployed young people in the district.

Setting the stock of unemployed young people at a point in time against the flow of young people into jobs through the new deal is not a meaningful comparison. However, in Wiltshire long-term youth unemployment has fallen by 70 per cent. since the new deal started. Although some of this reduction is a result of this Government's success in delivering steady economic growth, the new deal for young people has also played an important role.

## Landlords (Compensation Payments)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what were the figures for compensation payments to landlords that were not specified on page 103 of the 2001 Departmental report. [18905]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The compensation scheme ended in April 2000 when the transitional housing benefit scheme was implemented.

The information requested is in the table.

£

| Year | Outturn |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 6,000 |
| 1998–99 | 363,000 |
| 1999–2000 | 140,000 |
| 2000–01 (estimated) | 27,000 |

*Note:*
Figures are rounded to the nearest £1,000

### IS and IT Services (Savings)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the saving from the contract for IS and IT services to deliver new wide area network services. [18983]

**Mr. McCartney:** The contract price of the new WAN service is broadly comparable to that of the old one.

However, the Department will receive a significantly improved service in the areas of service flexibility, performance, management information and security, and so position the Department to further modernise its IT in the future.

### Council Tax Benefit

**Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review the council tax benefits restriction scheme; and if he will make a statement. [19041]

**Malcolm Wicks:** We have no plans to review the present council tax benefit restrictions.

Since 2 July 2001, local authorities have been able to make discretionary housing payments to those people entitled to housing benefit and council tax benefit who require additional financial assistance with their rent or council tax. This includes those whose council tax benefit has been restricted. These payments are at the discretion of the local authority and subject to an annual cash limit.

### Departmental Expenditure Limits

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [20670]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The level of wage costs within departmental budgets this year and in future years will be dependent upon negotiations. Departmental reports published next spring will give full retrospective costs.

### Stakeholder Pension Schemes

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if contracted-in stakeholder pension schemes will be deregistered. [21441]

**Mr. McCartney** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority has written to the four stakeholder pension schemes that are not contracted-out, and they have the opportunity of applying for contracted-out status.

### Pensions

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish draft regulations to facilitate the equalisation of benefits for pensions schemes being wound up. [23771]

**Mr. McCartney:** We do not propose to publish draft regulations. Equalisation of benefits in pension schemes is a matter for the trustees of schemes.

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the reports by the Pension Provisions Group entitled (1) "Pensions and the Labour Market"; [23772]

(2) "Pension Provision and Self-Employment". [23773]

**Mr. McCartney:** We welcome the "Pensions and the Labour Market" report. We are pleased to note that the group has concluded that our pension reforms, together with measures to encourage and facilitate paid work,

"should improve the overall level of pension provision".

We share the Pension Provision Group's view that good quality, occupational pension schemes will continue to work well for large numbers of people.

We also welcome the group's report on pension provision and self-employment. It makes a useful contribution to the debate on this important issue.

### Tax Credits

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the cost savings arising from the simplification of income support and the income based element of the jobseeker's allowance as a consequence of the provisions of the Tax Credits Bill. [23998]

**Malcolm Wicks** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* Paragraph 210 of the explanatory notes to the Tax Credits Bill says that there are expected to be annual reductions in expenditure across DWP policy responsibilities amounting to £4 billion, arising from the abolition of the child related elements of IS/JSA, the new deal 50 plus employment credit and child dependency increases.

### Benefits (South Shields)

**Mr. Miliband:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in South Shields are claiming *(a)* incapacity benefit, *(b)* working families tax credit and *(c)* children's tax credit. [23770]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]*: The available information is in the table.

*Recipients of incapacity benefit and working families tax credit in the South Shields parliamentary constituency*

| Benefit/tax credit | Number |
|---|---|
| Incapacity benefit [1,2,3] | 5,600 |
| Working families' tax credit [2,3] | 2,500 |

[1] Excludes a small number of cases held clerically.
[2] Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
[3] Estimates based on 5 per cent. samples and are subject to error.
*Notes:*
1. Incapacity benefit figures are for August 2001. Working families tax credit figures are for May 2001.
2. Children's tax credit figures are not available by parliamentary constituency.

*Source:*
Incapacity Benefit Quarterly Statistical Inquiry August 2001.
Working families' tax credit quarterly statistical Inquiry May 2001.

### Means-tested Benefits

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will give the latest annualised cost of means-tested benefits for those also in receipt of a retirement pension, broken down by *(a)* minimum income guarantee payments, *(b)* housing benefit, *(c)* council tax benefit, *(d)* disability benefits and *(e)* other benefits. [23329]

**Mr. McCartney** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* Forecast expenditure for 2001–02 on income-related benefits for the pensioner group[1] is given in the table:

| | £ million[2] |
|---|---|
| Minimum income guarantee[3] | 4,530 |
| Housing benefit | 4,460 |
| Council tax benefit | 1,390 |
| Social fund | 35 |
| Total | 10,415 |

[1] Statistics for the pensioner group in income-related benefit include benefit units in which the claimant is a man aged 60–64 as well as those in which the claimant is over pension age.
[2] Figures are rounded to the nearest £5 million and are consistent with social security totals published in the pre-Budget Report 2001.
[3] Expenditure on minimum income guarantee includes premiums related to disability where relevant.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Judges' Accommodation

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 840W, on judges' accommodation, if he will publish *(a)* the terms of reference and *(b)* the comparison made of the value for money provided by judges lodgings undertaken as part of the triennial review of judges lodgings. [23912]

**Mr. Wills:** The notional comparison referred to in my previous reply was undertaken merely to test the overall assumption that lodgings should continue to be the main method by which accommodation is provided. The terms of reference were to compare the cost of lodgings with alternative forms of accommodation providing appropriate standards of security, privacy and comfort. Hotel costs were calculated on the assumption that the judge and his clerk would be accommodated in a high quality hotel, that the judge would occupy a suite of rooms consisting of a double bedroom, a lounge/study and en-suite bathroom facilities, and that the clerk would have a single room with en-suite bathroom facilities. Allowance was also made for other associated costs e.g. transport to and from court.

This comparison was an academic exercise using notional representative costs and only formed a small part of the triennial review. Additionally, the costs attributed to hotel use excluded any additional security costs that would inevitably be required to provide the safe and secluded environment provided by lodgings. It would therefore be misleading to publish the comparison.

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the average cost of running judges' lodgings per judge accommodated at each of the individual lodgings in the Lodging Estate for the financial years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [24128]

**Mr. Wills:** It has not been possible in the time available to provide the average cost per judge accommodated for each lodgings. However, the following four tables show the average cost per judge week for each of the lodgings based on:

Total costs;

Total costs excluding capital charge; and

Costs solely attributable to judicial occupation.

The figures for 2000–01 are yet to be audited and may therefore be subject to slight change.

*Judges lodgings costs per judge week used 2000–01*

| *Lodgings* | *Total cost* | *Total cost (ex. capital charge)* | *Judicial cost* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Birmingham | 3,533.91 | 2,699.39 | 1,575.38 |
| Leicester | 4,762.45 | 4,762.45 | 2,014.00 |
| Lincoln | 4,243.80 | 4,243.80 | 1,394.48 |
| Nottingham | 4,390.58 | 3,673.53 | 1,713.84 |
| Northampton | 6,656.09 | 6,656.09 | 2,957.22 |
| Oxford | 7,151.67 | 7,151.67 | 3,027.67 |
| Stafford | 4,795.15 | 4,795.15 | 1,475.21 |
| Warwick | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Worcester | 4,156.39 | 4,156.39 | 2,494.23 |
| Hull | 1,531.60 | 1,531.60 | 531.60 |
| Leeds | 3,396.48 | 3,396.48 | 1,875.43 |
| Plawsworth | 3,609.13 | 3,162.78 | 1,577.22 |
| Sheffield | 5,648.90 | 4,930.35 | 1,887.64 |
| Carlisle | 2,894.76 | 2,894.76 | 1,380.47 |
| Liverpool | 2,572.33 | 2,572.33 | 1,464.24 |
| Manchester | 3,545.65 | 3,204.06 | 1,768.03 |
| Preston | 4,923.96 | 3,774.42 | 2,345.18 |
| Chelmsford | 8,006.79 | 8,006.79 | 1,325.09 |
| Lewes | 7,324.39 | 7,324.39 | 1,851.19 |
| Maidstone | 9,562.82 | 6,599.90 | 1,624.16 |
| Norwich | 7,668.02 | 5,859.42 | 1,443.11 |
| Reading | 7,879.09 | 4,609.15 | 2,750.35 |
| St. Albans | 6,517.64 | 4,086.66 | 2,154.30 |
| Caernarfon | 4,621.95 | 4,621.95 | 2,365.17 |
| Cardiff | 3,765.72 | 3,348.43 | 2,056.06 |
| Chester | 7,678.89 | 6,800.42 | 2,408.72 |
| Mold | 9,141.94 | 9,141.94 | 2,546.64 |
| Swansea | 5,662.69 | 5,005.88 | 2,362.40 |
| Bristol | 4,591.42 | 4,591.42 | 1,676.56 |
| Exeter | 2,214.01 | 2,214.01 | 972.89 |
| Plymouth | 3,568.68 | 3,568.68 | 1,857.96 |
| Truro | 3,317.57 | 3,317.57 | 1,026.95 |
| Winchester | 4,615.57 | 2,899.21 | 1,666.25 |

*Judges lodgings costs per judge week used 1999–2000*

| *Lodging* | *Total cost* | *Total cost (ex. capital charge)* | *Judicial cost* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Birmingham | 2,876.90 | 2,289.93 | 1,449.13 |
| Nottingham | 4,702.90 | 4,003.62 | 1,866.48 |
| Leicester | 3,303.62 | 3,303.62 | 1,227.78 |
| Oxford | 4,108.95 | 4,108.95 | 1,956.76 |
| Worcester | 4,138.25 | 4,138.25 | 2,158.81 |
| Lincoln | 4,175.64 | 4,175.64 | 1,602.87 |
| Northampton | 5,441.63 | 5,441.63 | 2,363.53 |
| Stafford | 3,569.39 | 3,569.39 | 1,450.80 |
| Warwick | 1,305.70 | 1,305.70 | 1,128.76 |
| Leeds | 2,824.77 | 2,824.77 | 1,676.55 |

*Judges lodgings costs per judge week used 1999–2000*

| Lodging | Total cost | Total cost (ex. capital charge) | Judicial cost |
|---|---|---|---|
| Plawsworth | 2,971.92 | 2,444.50 | 1,599.24 |
| Sheffield | 7,098.81 | 6,437.52 | 1,791.37 |
| Carlisle | 3,068.06 | 3,068.06 | 1,138.70 |
| Liverpool | 2,743.22 | 2,743.22 | 1,325.40 |
| Manchester | 3,455.46 | 3,131.71 | 1,983.10 |
| Preston | 3,922.62 | 2,951.78 | 1,941.19 |
| Chelmsford | 3,361.45 | 3,361.45 | 863.91 |
| Lewes | 6,016.60 | 6,016.60 | 1,862.79 |
| Maidstone | 7,798.97 | 5,855.74 | 1,738.38 |
| Norwich | 4,836.31 | 3,910.96 | 1,257.34 |
| Reading | 5,155.12 | 3,480.41 | 2,536.65 |
| St. Albans | 6,526.01 | 4,384.25 | 2,242.23 |
| Caernarfon | 5,296.55 | 5,296.55 | 3,388.50 |
| Cardiff | 3,552.48 | 3,135.69 | 1,890.13 |
| Chester | 4,999.98 | 4,304.70 | 2,372.98 |
| Mold | 10,131.43 | 10,131.43 | 2,070.52 |
| Swansea | 6,196.83 | 5,312.62 | 2,547.83 |
| Bristol | 3,315.83 | 3,315.83 | 1,411.90 |
| Exeter | 3,482.10 | 3,482.10 | 810.02 |
| Plymouth | 5,623.55 | 5,623.55 | 2,625.57 |
| Truro | 4,996.84 | 4,996.84 | 1,306.44 |
| Winchester | 3,461.95 | 2,754.38 | 1,624.54 |

*Judges lodgings costs per judge week used 1998–99*

| Lodging | Total cost | Total cost (ex. capital charge) | Judicial cost |
|---|---|---|---|
| Birmingham | 2,856.91 | 2,357.07 | 1,487.28 |
| Nottingham | 2,802.23 | 2,404.89 | 1,615.48 |
| Leicester | 3,769.64 | 3,769.64 | 2,103.60 |
| Oxford | 5,284.32 | 5,284.32 | 3,234.05 |
| Worcester | 3,491.08 | 3,491.08 | 1,546.46 |
| Lincoln | 3,988.73 | 3,988.73 | 1,313.98 |
| Northampton | 5,021.86 | 5,021.86 | 2,567.08 |
| Stafford | 5,306.43 | 5,306.43 | 817.91 |
| Warwick | 1,644.05 | 1,644.05 | 1,392.05 |
| Leeds | 3,852.17 | 3,852.17 | 2,169.48 |
| Plawsworth | 3,840.67 | 3,271.12 | 1,580.26 |
| Sheffield | 6,252.50 | 5,679.93 | 1,948.07 |
| Carlisle | 2,648.33 | 2,648.33 | 1,336.01 |
| Liverpool | 3,892.21 | 3,892.21 | 1,899.50 |
| Manchester | 2,830.63 | 2,568.57 | 1,764.47 |
| Preston | 6,479.53 | 5,403.21 | 2,529.82 |
| Chelmsford | 3,038.26 | 3,038.26 | 693.29 |
| Lewes | 5,464.20 | 5,464.20 | 2,454.96 |
| Maidstone | 7,834.84 | 6,568.36 | 1,625.89 |
| Norwich | 4,596.76 | 3,873.48 | 1,434.15 |
| Reading | 6,621.13 | 4,953.60 | 2,883.90 |
| St. Albans | 8,558.11 | 5,916.78 | 2,237.04 |
| Caernarfon | 5,356.68 | 5,356.68 | 1,740.05 |
| Cardiff | 3,516.80 | 3,136.46 | 1,981.07 |
| Chester | 5,834.61 | 5,150.78 | 2,857.79 |
| Mold | 5,641.53 | 5,641.53 | 1,438.88 |
| Swansea | 11,842.66 | 10,507.26 | 3,123.63 |
| Bristol | 2,983.57 | 2,983.57 | 1,528.26 |
| Exeter | 4,102.47 | 4,102.47 | 1,241.47 |
| Plymouth | 3,377.18 | 3,377.18 | 1,749.64 |
| Truro | 2,821.11 | 2,821.11 | 1,209.87 |
| Winchester | 3,962.79 | 3,163.77 | 1,747.46 |

*Judges lodgings costs per judge week used 1997–98*

| Lodging | Total cost | Total cost (ex. capital charge) | Judicial cost |
|---|---|---|---|
| Birmingham | 2,986.24 | 2,164.86 | 1,594.29 |
| Nottingham | 4,170.22 | 3,477.96 | 1,860.28 |

*Judges lodgings costs per judge week used 1997–98*

| Lodging | Total cost | Total cost (ex. capital charge) | Judicial cost |
|---|---|---|---|
| Leicester | 3,250.92 | 3,250.92 | 2,292.38 |
| Oxford | 5,314.22 | 5,314.22 | 2,898.02 |
| Worcester | 3,875.66 | 3,875.66 | 2,142.06 |
| Lincoln | 4,633.50 | 4,633.50 | 1,597.65 |
| Northampton | 9,203.92 | 9,203.92 | 2,171.35 |
| Stafford | 4,453.38 | 4,453.38 | 944.64 |
| Warwick | 1,342.73 | 1,342.73 | 1,389.23 |
| Leeds | 4,188.48 | 4,188.48 | 2,277.69 |
| Plawsworth | 2,931.25 | 2,462.51 | 1,589.49 |
| Sheffield | 7,133.36 | 6,899.23 | 2,247.91 |
| Carlisle | 2,594.40 | 2,594.40 | 1,145.03 |
| Liverpool | 3,755.24 | 3,755.24 | 1,860.92 |
| Manchester | 2,258.38 | 2,204.99 | 1,840.68 |
| Preston | 5,091.80 | 4,760.03 | 3,369.78 |
| Chelmsford | 7,173.80 | 7,173.80 | 1,089.71 |
| Lewes | 6,082.34 | 6,082.34 | 2,483.14 |
| Maidstone | 5,626.91 | 4,341.27 | 1,689.13 |
| Norwich | 5,906.86 | 5,385.04 | 1,653.75 |
| Reading | 6,832.71 | 6,063.71 | 3,847.25 |
| St. Albans | 7,522.03 | 6,379.12 | 2,468.59 |
| Caernarfon | 7,007.99 | 7,007.99 | 3,864.64 |
| Cardiff | 2,462.49 | 2,439.58 | 1,817.53 |
| Chester | 4,651.06 | 3,736.86 | 2,076.27 |
| Mold | 12,783.80 | 12,783.80 | 3,002.27 |
| Swansea | 5,787.72 | 5,429.20 | 2,874.06 |
| Bristol | 2,590.13 | 2,465.39 | 1,432.53 |
| Exeter | 4,144.44 | 4,144.44 | 1,084.05 |
| Plymouth | 3,089.98 | 3,089.98 | 1,734.57 |
| Truro | 3,888.54 | 3,888.54 | 1,408.22 |
| Winchester | 2,457.83 | 2,357.20 | 1,576.91 |

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the capital value of the leasehold Lodging Estate in which his Department accommodates judges on circuit. [23705]

**Mr. Wills:** Of the leasehold Lodgings Estate only two have a notional capital value (as the rents are nominal and/or historic). These are the lodgings at Birmingham and Winchester, with a combined estimated capital value of £2.75 million. The remainder are held under leases where the rents are reviewed frequently and which therefore have no capital value to the Department.

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to the answer given on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 840W, on judges' accommodation, how many *(a)* butlers, *(b)* cooks and *(c)* security personnel are employed by the Lord Chancellor's Department to look after judges on circuit. [23916]

**Mr. Wills:** Details of the numbers of butlers and chefs/cooks employed to look after judges on circuit were provided in my earlier answer given on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 840W. The answer also states that we do not employ dedicated security staff at lodgings. All staff are expected to be vigilant and ensure that the lodgings are secure at all times.

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his definition is of a guest house of the Wolsey Lodge variety; and how it is differentiated from other forms of accommodation for judges on circuit. [24100]

**Mr. Wills:** I am advised that "Wolsey Lodges" are a consortium of privately owned homes providing a small number of quality rooms for temporary rental. While the properties vary in size and style, they are essentially a public hotel chain. As such Wolsey Lodges are completely different from the network of private lodgings maintained by the Court Service to provide accommodation for High Court judges while on circuit.

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 840W, on judges' accommodation *(a)* if the comparison made of the value for money provided by judges' lodgings examined each judges' lodgings individually and *(b)* which judges' lodgings were assessed not to provide value for money. [23911]

**Mr. Wills:** As stated in my earlier answer, the notional comparison undertaken as part of the triennial review was merely to test the overall assumption that lodgings should continue to be the main method by which accommodation is provided. It did not form the main value for money examination within the review.

While a comparison was made for each judges' lodgings individually, the 'hotel alternative' costs were indicative only and did not include additional security costs which would necessarily be incurred for the protection of Her Majesty's High Court judges. It would therefore be misleading to base any decision on the future viability of individual lodgings on this comparison and to publish details of the same.

It should also be recognised that, when discussing alternatives to lodgings, cost is not the only issue. The availability and proximity of suitably secure, private and comfortable accommodation has also to be considered.

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 840, on judges' accommodation, what action has been taken since publication of Lord Justice Auld's report to assess the value for money provided by individual judges' lodgings; and what action will be taken in respect of judges' lodgings assessed not to provide value for money in line with the recommendations of the Auld report. [23917]

**Mr. Wills:** As my hon. Friend is aware, Sir Robin Auld's report was only published on 8 October. Public consultation on his recommendations takes place up to 31 January 2002.

Consequently, no new assessment of the value for money provided by individual lodgings is being considered until this period of consultation has concluded. The Lord Chancellor will then decide on a course of action with regard to lodgings in the light of this and the findings of the triennial review.

## Remand Prisoners

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance he issues to courts on sending their record of a remand decision to the prison where a defendant is remanded to custody; and which courts follow this practice. [23904]

**Mr. Wills:** All magistrates, Crown and county courts produce a warrant when remanding an individual to custody. This is given to the person or organisation transporting the individual to prison, and then handed over at the place of detention.

## Legal Aid

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will break down the contract allocation for legal aid in London. [23295]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** The number of solicitor and not-for-profit contractors in the London region, by category of law, as at the end of March 2001, was as follows:

| | *Solicitors* | *Not-for-profit* |
|---|---|---|
| Family | 413 | 2 |
| Mental health | 59 | 4 |
| Debt | 23 | 22 |
| Employment | 39 | 22 |
| Consumer | 32 | 3 |
| Housing | 222 | 30 |
| Welfare benefits | 65 | 43 |
| Education | 12 | 0 |
| Community care | 23 | 0 |
| Actions against the police | 18 | n/a |
| Public law | 9 | n/a |
| Immigration | 266 | 37 |
| Personal Injury | 183 | n/a |
| Clinical Negligence | 70 | n/a |
| Additional Tolerance | 438 | n/a |

*Note:*
Not-for-profit organisations are not awarded contracts for actions against the police, public law, personal injury, clinical negligence or additional tolerance work.

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the civil legal aid budget was in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01; and how much was spent on the different categories of law. [23300]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** In the financial year 1999–2000 the Legal Aid Board was allocated provision of £1,182.1 million of the overall legal aid budget. There was not a predetermined sum allocated to civil legal aid. A net total of £768.5 million was spent on civil legal aid.

In 2000–01, the Legal Services Commission was allocated a provision for the Community Legal Services Fund of £781 million.

The Legal Services Commission, and the Legal Aid Board before it, spent the following amounts on civil representation in the different areas of law in 1999–2000 and 2000–01:

*£000 gross*

| *Category* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|
| Family | 390,895 | 421,094 |
| *Non-family* | | |
| Actions against the police | 9,149 | 9,869 |
| Clinical Negligence | 43,229 | 52,779 |
| Community Care | 0 | 42 |
| Consumer | 39,617 | 37,031 |
| Debt | 5,865 | 6,329 |
| Education | 0 | 263 |

£000 gross

| Category | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 |
|---|---|---|
| Employment | 1,368 | 1,542 |
| Housing | 36,641 | 37,861 |
| Immigration and nationality | 3,130 | 3,497 |
| Mental Health | 44 | 237 |
| Personal Injury | 261,623 | 267,060 |
| Public Law | 8,231 | 9,775 |
| Welfare benefits | 353 | 470 |
| Miscellaneous | 103,514 | 99,904 |
| Non-family total | 512,763 | 526,660 |
| Overall total | 903,658 | 947,754 |

*Note:*
Figures are stated gross since receipts cannot readily be allocated by category of law

In addition, net expenditure on other civil legal aid (legal help, assistance by way of representation and advice and assistance) was £231.7 million in 2000–01 and £208.4 million in 1999–2000. It is not possible to split this into comparable categories because category definitions changed between the two years.

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many full legal aid practitioners there were in *(a)* private practice and *(b)* not for profit contracts in (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01, broken down into (A) housing, (B) immigration, (C) employment, (D) welfare benefits, (E) education, (F) community care and (G) mental health. [23296]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** The number of solicitor contractors by category of law at the end of March 2000 and March 2001, was as follows:

| Category | 2000 | 2001 |
|---|---|---|
| Housing | 733 | 673 |
| Immigration | 419 | 482 |
| Employment | 342 | 300 |
| Welfare benefits | 451 | 391 |
| Education | 31 | 40 |
| Community care | 25 | 38 |
| Mental Health | 322 | 349 |

The number of not-for-profit contractors by category of law at the end of March 2000 and March 2001, was as follows:

| Category | 2000 | 2001 |
|---|---|---|
| Housing | 113 | 115 |
| Immigration | 63 | 66 |
| Employment | 67 | 73 |
| Welfare benefits | 226 | 245 |
| Education | 4 | 4 |
| Community care | 3 | 0 |
| Mental Health | 10 | 6 |

## Community Legal Service

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much has been spent on setting up and maintaining community legal service partnerships in the current financial year; and which budget the funding comes from. [23297]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** As at the end of September, the Legal Services Commission had spent £1,881,500 in the current financial year on setting up and maintaining community legal service partnerships (CLSPs).

The funds allocated to the community legal service partnerships are:

£000

| | Partnership support fund (PSF) |
|---|---|
| Spent so far | 56.5 |
| Allocated | 900 |

The £900,000 allocated is made up of £400,000 from the Commission's grant in aid, and £500,000 from the Community Legal Service (CLS) Fund.

Total staffing costs at the end of September were £1,825,000. This figure relates to the totality of planning and partnership work, and includes some elements not related to CLSP development, such as the support for, and administration of, the Commission's regional legal services committees. As these various functions are so integrated with CLSP development it has not been possible to separate out the expenditure.

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* specialist help providers and *(b)* generalist providers are in operation; and how many specialist help providers were in operation when the community legal service was set up. [23299]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** As at November 2001, the following numbers of providers were in operation:

*(a)* Specialist: 5,463

*(b)* General help: 302

*(c)* General help with casework: 241.

At the time of the launch of the community legal service (CLS) in April 2000 only certain categories of work at what is now known as the specialist level were restricted to specialist suppliers, namely those with a licence granted under the Commission's general civil contract. Other work at what is now known as the specialist level was provided outside the contracted system. All legal help work—formerly known as advice and assistance—was contracted. It is therefore impossible to make a direct comparison between the position before 1 April 2000 and now. There were 5,286 contracted providers of all types in place in April 2000.

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many community legal service partnerships are operating without a specialist help provider in each category of law. [23298]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** The information in the form requested is not readily available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. The Legal Services Commission does not routinely collect information at national level in the terms this question asks.

Community legal service partnerships (CLSPs) do not deliver services. They bring together organisations offering legal and advice services, such as solicitors in private practice, citizens' advice bureaux, law centres, and local authorities, and other funders, providers and users

of legal and advice services. Partners act together to co-ordinate and improve access to, and delivery of, legal services and help to carry out need assessment, gap analysis and planning activity.

The Commission currently records data according to 'bid zones'. 'Bid zones' are geographical areas which form the basis of contracting decisions. Information is recorded highlighting areas where a high level of need has been identified, and indicating whether the need has been met, in order to measure progress against the Commission's objective to develop effective providers operating in those categories of law where a need has been identified. In many areas, there will only be a relatively low level of need identified for specialist categories. In these areas, services are often provided by family practitioners who are authorised to carry out work in other categories under what we call 'tolerances'. The process of assessing priority is a key responsibility of CLSPs.

### Consolidated Fund

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, on how many occasions sums in excess of £10 million were erroneously paid by the Local Chancellor's Department into the Consolidated Fund in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [22550]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** No individual payments in excess of £10 million have been made by the Lord Chancellor's Department into the Consolidated Fund in error in the last 12 months. The Department secured a short surrender of £12,002,137 from the Consolidated Fund to recover moneys wrongly paid into the fund, due to an error in the accounting processes employed by the magistrates courts during the 2000–01 financial year. The mistakes were detected by internal controls and action has been taken to tighten procedures and to ensure that the mistakes are not repeated. None of the individual payments was for £10 million or more, and the funds were recovered from the Consolidated Fund by short surrender.

### Staff Numbers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people were employed in her Department in each of the last four years. [23790]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 256W, by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office.

### Judicial Appointments

**Vera Baird:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps the Lord Chancellor will take to increase the number of women appointed to the judiciary. [23355]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** The Lord Chancellor appoints to judicial office exclusively on merit. The number of women holding judicial office substantially reflects the number of women practitioners in the legal profession with the appropriate period of experience which is usually not less than 20 years. The Lord Chancellor has already introduced a number of initiatives to encourage greater numbers to apply for judicial office and to secure equality of opportunity in the appointments process. For example, he has made information about the appointments procedures widely available; he applies the procedures flexibly in relation to the age and sitting arrangements; he has introduced a work shadowing scheme; he has reviewed the detailed criteria for appointment against which assessments of suitability are made; he is piloting a scheme to encourage applications from those who may think that their career progress to date understates their judicial potential; and has appointed a Commissioner for Judicial Appointments to audit and make recommendations about the appointments procedures and handle complaints. Preparatory work for a pilot assessment centre has begun with a view to running the pilot in 2002. A video about the appointments process will be completed soon. These efforts will continue and be developed with a view to progressive increases in the numbers of women appointed.

**Vera Baird:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has for part-time, permanent judicial appointments. [23349]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** The Lord Chancellor decided that the facility for salaried part-time working should be piloted in the most recent competition for district judge appointments as part of his policy to promote equality of opportunity for judicial appointments. Following the outcome of this pilot, the Lord Chancellor has decided that the facility may be extended to future competitions for appointments to certain other judicial posts.

### Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, "Winning the Generation Game", *(a)* what progress her Department has made and *(b)* what future plans her Department has for acting on them; and if she will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24202]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, at column 335.

### Departmental Expenditure Limit

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment she has made of the reasons for the difference between the final voted departmental expenditure limit and provisional outturn for financial year 2000–01, as listed in the Treasury document, Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn, for Vote V, Lord Chancellor's and Law Officers' Departments, subcategories *(a)* 1 Lord Chancellor's Department and *(b)* 6 HM Procurator General and Treasury Solicitor; and if she will make a statement. [24116]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** *(a)* An analysis of significant discrepancies between the final voted departmental expenditure limit and the actual outturn will be published shortly in the Department's Resource Account.

*(b)* I understand from my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General that the difference between the final voted departmental expenditure limit for Vote V Class 6:

HM Procurator General and Treasury Solicitor and the provisional outturn shown in the Treasury document, Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn results from Appropriations in Aid which were higher than the sum originally estimated. This followed improvements in debt recovery processes in the Treasury Solicitor's Department which resulted in speedier payment of bills for legal services provided to client Departments.

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS

### Head Teachers

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new head teachers were appointed between September 1999 and July 2000 *(a)* in total and *(b)* by ethnic grouping. [8402]

**Mr. Timms:** The estimate of new head teachers appointed to posts in the maintained schools sector in England between March 1999 and March 2000 was 2,330 (provisional).

The number of head teachers appointed by ethnic origin is not collected centrally.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many head teachers have left the profession since 1997. [10442]

**Mr. Timms:** Head teachers who are no longer in service as heads in the maintained schools sector in England since 1997 are given in the table. The numbers include teachers who are still in service but are not serving as heads.

| | *Heads leaving in year prior to March 1998* | *Heads leaving in year prior to March 1999* |
|---|---|---|
| Retired | 1,980 | 850 |
| Left service for reasons other than retirement | 440 | 640 |
| In service in maintained sector but not as a head | 620 | 1,050 |
| Total wastage | 3,040 | 2,550 |

The most recent reliable data available are for March 1999.

Numbers are rounded to the nearest 10. Totals may not appear to be the addition of the component parts because of rounding.

Some teachers who have left service will return after a career break.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many special school heads have left the profession in the past three years. [20110]

**Mr. Timms:** The head teachers who have left service as heads in the maintained special schools sector in England in the last three years are given in the table. These include teachers who are still in service but are not serving as heads.

| | *Heads leaving in year prior to March 1997* | *Heads leaving in year prior to March 1998* | *Heads leaving in year prior to March 1999* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Retired | 110 | 100 | 50 |
| Left service for reasons other than retirement | 20 | 30 | 30 |
| In service in maintained sector but not as a head | 40 | 40 | 50 |
| Changed phase, still a head in the maintained sector | [1] | 10 | 10 |
| Total wastage | 170 | 180 | 150 |

[1] Less than five teachers

The most recent reliable data available are for March 1999.

Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10. Totals may not appear to be the addition of the component parts because of rounding.

Some teachers who have left service will return after a career break.

### Teachers (Offences)

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many teachers were convicted of offences committed on school premises in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 2000; [23417]

(2) how many teachers were subject to criminal investigations as a result of incidents in schools in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 2000. [23418]

**Mr. Timms:** The information is not collected centrally.

### Supply Teachers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many supply teachers are working in Buckinghamshire; and what percentage supply teachers comprise of the total number of teachers in Buckinghamshire expressed as full-time equivalents. [15769]

**Mr. Timms:** 120 occasional teachers on contracts of less than one month were employed in maintained schools in Buckinghamshire for the whole of 18 January 2001, the date of the annual census of teachers in service. That was 2.9 per cent. of the full-time equivalent of regular and occasional teachers working in maintained schools in Buckinghamshire on that day.

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many supply teachers are working in each local education authority area; and what percentage supply teachers comprise of the total number of teachers in each local education authority, expressed as full time equivalents. [15617]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 16 December 2001]:* The numbers of teachers on contracts of less than one month[1] (occasional teachers), employed for the whole day in the maintained schools sector on the 18 January 2001, the date of the annual census of teachers in service, and expressed as percentages of the full-time equivalent of regular and occasional teachers, were as follows:

| | *Occasional teachers* | *Occasional as percentage of all* |
|---|---|---|
| Darlington | 50 | 6.5 |
| Hartlepool | 30 | 3.6 |
| Middlesbrough | 60 | 4.2 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 40 | 3.2 |
| Stockton on Tees | 130 | 6.9 |
| Durham | 270 | 6.0 |
| Northumberland | 190 | 6.8 |
| Gateshead | 130 | 7.3 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 120 | 5.3 |
| North Tyneside | 100 | 5.3 |
| South Tyneside | 80 | 5.0 |
| Sunderland | 80 | 2.9 |
| Blackburn with Darwen | 80 | 5.5 |
| Blackpool | 100 | 8.6 |
| Halton | 60 | 4.9 |
| Warrington | 60 | 3.4 |
| Cheshire | 170 | 3.0 |
| Cumbria | 180 | 4.0 |
| Bolton | 140 | 5.3 |
| Bury | 100 | 6.1 |
| Manchester | 240 | 6.0 |
| Oldham | 30 | 1.4 |
| Rochdale | 130 | 6.6 |
| Salford | 100 | 5.0 |
| Stockport | 120 | 4.9 |
| Tameside | 80 | 4.2 |
| Trafford | 100 | 4.9 |
| Wigan | 170 | 6.2 |
| Lancashire | 340 | 3.3 |
| Knowsley | 40 | 2.8 |
| Liverpool | 130 | 2.9 |
| St. Helens | 60 | 3.5 |
| Sefton | 150 | 5.3 |
| Wirral | 170 | 5.3 |
| East Riding of Yorkshire | 140 | 5.2 |
| City of Kingston upon Hull | 180 | 8.0 |
| North East Lincolnshire | 80 | 5.3 |
| North Lincolnshire | 70 | 5.2 |
| York | 100 | 6.5 |
| North Yorkshire | 270 | 5.1 |
| Barnsley | 140 | 7.9 |
| Doncaster | 100 | 3.6 |
| Rotherham | 140 | 5.3 |
| Sheffield | 210 | 4.7 |
| Bradford | 310 | 6.6 |
| Calderdale | 80 | 4.2 |
| Kirklees | 130 | 3.7 |
| Leeds | 240 | 3.8 |
| Wakefield | 140 | 4.9 |
| Derby | [2]— | 0.1 |
| Leicester | 150 | 5.1 |
| Nottingham | 130 | 5.6 |
| Rutland | 30 | 10.0 |
| Derbyshire | 260 | 4.3 |
| Leicestershire | 180 | 3.5 |
| Lincolnshire | 230 | 4.1 |
| Northamptonshire | 190 | 3.5 |
| Nottinghamshire | 280 | 4.5 |
| Herefordshire | 60 | 4.3 |
| Stoke on Trent | 130 | 6.2 |
| Telford and Wrekin | 90 | 5.8 |
| Shropshire | 100 | 4.6 |
| Staffordshire | 320 | 4.4 |
| Warwickshire | 130 | 2.9 |
| Birmingham | 300 | 2.8 |
| Coventry | 110 | 3.6 |
| Dudley | 120 | 4.2 |
| Sandwell | 90 | 3.4 |
| Solihull | 80 | 3.9 |
| Walsall | 80 | 3.1 |
| Wolverhampton | 150 | 6.0 |
| Worcestershire | 160 | 3.5 |
| Luton | 420 | 20.2 |
| Peterborough | 90 | 5.6 |
| Southend on Sea | 60 | 4.0 |
| Thurrock | 60 | 4.6 |
| Bedfordshire | 130 | 3.7 |
| Cambridgeshire | 90 | 2.1 |
| Essex | 480 | 4.3 |
| Hertfordshire | 120 | 1.3 |
| Norfolk | 220 | 3.4 |
| Suffolk | 240 | 4.2 |
| Camden | 70 | 4.5 |
| City of London | [2]— | 4.5 |
| Hackney | 230 | 13.5 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 230 | 18.6 |
| Haringey | 100 | 5.3 |
| Islington | 120 | 8.4 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 60 | 8.8 |
| Lambeth | 50 | 3.3 |
| Lewisham | 100 | 4.7 |
| Newham | 230 | 8.7 |
| Southwark | 120 | 5.8 |
| Tower Hamlets | 220 | 9.2 |
| Wandsworth | 50 | 3.0 |
| City of Westminster | 80 | 6.1 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 110 | 6.9 |
| Barnet | 100 | 3.5 |
| Bexley | 110 | 5.0 |
| Brent | 100 | 4.7 |
| Bromley | 110 | 4.2 |
| Croydon | 190 | 6.4 |
| Ealing | 100 | 4.1 |
| Enfield | 140 | 5.0 |
| Greenwich | 100 | 4.7 |
| Harrow | 120 | 7.3 |
| Havering | 90 | 4.4 |
| Hillingdon | 90 | 3.9 |
| Hounslow | 50 | 2.5 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 60 | 5.1 |
| Merton | 60 | 4.5 |
| Redbridge | 60 | 2.6 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 110 | 9.4 |
| Sutton | 40 | 2.6 |
| Waltham Forest | 40 | 1.9 |
| Bracknell Forest | 40 | 4.5 |
| Brighton and Hove | 60 | 3.3 |
| Isle of Wight | 60 | 5.1 |
| Medway | 130 | 5.7 |
| Milton Keynes | 80 | 4.5 |
| Portsmouth | 70 | 4.5 |
| Reading | 60 | 5.3 |
| Slough | 60 | 5.3 |
| Southampton | 100 | 5.7 |
| West Berkshire | 30 | 1.9 |
| Windsor and Maidenhead | 20 | 1.7 |
| Wokingham | 40 | 2.7 |
| Buckinghamshire | 120 | 2.9 |
| East Sussex | 150 | 4.0 |
| Hampshire | 520 | 5.5 |
| Kent | 470 | 4.0 |
| Oxfordshire | 130 | 2.6 |
| Surrey | 260 | 3.4 |
| West Sussex | 210 | 3.6 |
| Bath and North East Somerset | 60 | 3.8 |
| Bournemouth | 80 | 6.3 |
| City of Bristol | 150 | 5.1 |

| | Occasional teachers | Occasional as percentage of all |
|---|---|---|
| North Somerset | 70 | 4.6 |
| Plymouth | 170 | 7.1 |
| Poole | 30 | 2.6 |
| South Gloucestershire | 130 | 5.7 |
| Swindon | 50 | 3.5 |
| Torbay | 60 | 5.4 |
| Cornwall | 250 | 6.2 |
| Isles of Scilly | [2]— | 4.5 |
| Devon | 270 | 5.1 |
| Dorset | 100 | 3.4 |
| Gloucestershire | 130 | 2.7 |
| Somerset | 330 | 8.1 |
| Wiltshire | 120 | 3.5 |
| England | 19,590 | 4.6 |

[1] Numbers of occasional teachers are rounded to the nearest ten. The total may not appear to equal the sum of the component parts due to rounding.
[2] Less than 5.

**Mr. Collins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will take steps to eliminate the differences in rates of pay per hour for supply teachers working for Cumbria LEA and those employed by Lancashire LEA; and if she will make a statement. [24047]

**Mr. Timms:** Supply teachers employed by an LEA or by the governing body of a maintained school must be paid under the provisions of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document. The document provides that teachers employed on a short notice basis should be paid a proportion of the remuneration that would be appropriate if they were employed full-time. It is, however, for the individual employer to determine what that proportion should be on the basis of the number of hours worked in the day. An interpretation of how to calculate the appropriate proportion and hours worked per day could differ between two authorities. I am content to allow this flexibility of interpretation to remain.

## Teachers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers in Buckinghamshire schools left the profession before retirement age in each year since 1992. [20131]

**Mr. Timms:** Numbers of qualified teachers who have left full or part time regular service in the maintained schools sector in England since 1992, who were under 60 and who were teaching in Buckinghamshire at the time of leaving are as follows:

| Financial year of leaving | Buckinghamshire | Milton Keynes | "Old" Buckinghamshire[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | — | — | 650 |
| 1992–93 | — | — | 540 |
| 1993–94 | — | — | 440 |
| 1994–95 | — | — | 400 |
| 1995–96 | — | — | 510 |
| 1996–97 | — | — | 500 |
| 1997–98 | — | — | 560 |
| 1998–99 | 320 | 170 | 490 |
| 1999–2000[2] | 310 | 160 | 470 |

[1] Buckinghamshire LEA was split into Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes LEAs as a result of local government reorganisation in 1998.
[2] The most recent year for which data are available is 1999–2000. These data are still provisional.

*Notes:*
1. The figures exclude 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-time teachers not included on the teacher pension scheme records.
2. Some teachers who left service will return after a career break.
3. Leavers include teachers who moved to teach in other countries, or the independent or F/HE sectors, those who were not teaching and not receiving a pension, and those who had left with premature, ill health or actuarially reduced pensions.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the annual average staff turnover has been in secondary schools in the last five academic years. [20106]

**Mr. Timms:** Turnover data are not available for academic years.

The annual average staff turnover of full and part time regular teachers in maintained secondary schools in England in the last five financial years for which data are available are as follows:

| | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Year | Turnover[1] |
| 1995–96 | 15.9 |
| 1996–97 | 16.5 |
| 1997–98 | 18.2 |
| 1998–99 | 15.5 |
| 1999–2000[2] | 15.9 |

[1] Turnover includes teachers leaving regular service in the English maintained sector and changing schools within the maintained sector. Employers do not always notify details of a teacher moving between schools in their employment and so the overall level of turnover quoted is lower than the true level, which is not known.
[2] 1999–2000 data are provisional.

*Note:*
The figures exclude 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-time teachers not included on the teacher pension scheme records.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the annual average staff turnover has been in primary schools in the last five academic years. [20107]

**Mr. Timms:** Turnover data are not available for academic years.

The annual average staff turnover of full and part-time regular teachers in maintained nursery/primary schools in England in the last five financial years for which data are available are as follows:

| | Percentage |
|---|---|
| | Turnover[1] |
| 1995–96 | 14.1 |
| 1996–97 | 13.8 |
| 1997–98 | 15.2 |
| 1998–99 | 13.3 |
| 1999–2000[2] | 14.2 |

[1] Turnover includes teachers leaving regular service in the English maintained sector and changing schools within the maintained sector. Employers do not always notify details of a teacher moving between schools in their employment and so the overall level of turnover quoted is lower than the true level, which is not known.
[2] 1999–2000 data are provisional.

The figures exclude 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-time teachers not included on the teacher pension scheme records.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many newly qualified teachers who began work in London and the South East have left the profession within the five years since 1997. [20261]

**Mr. Timms:** Teachers who gained their teaching qualification in England; were in full or part-time regular service in the maintained schools sector in London or the south-east in March of the year after they qualified; and who were not in service in the maintained schools sector in England five years later, are as follows:

| *Year of qualification/ not in service at* | *Not in service in the maintained sector in England five years after first service* | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Number* | *Percentage* |
| *1991* | | |
| March 1997 | 1,230 | 29 |
| *1992* | | |
| March 1998 | 1,510 | 31 |
| *1993* | | |
| March 1999 | 1,610 | 30 |
| *1994* | | |
| March 2000[1] | 1,860 | 32 |

[1] The most recent year for which data are available is 1999–2000. These data are still provisional.

The figures exclude 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-time teachers not included on the teacher pension scheme records.

Some teachers who leave service will return after a career break.

Leavers include teachers who moved to teach in other countries, or the independent or FE/HE sectors, those who were not teaching and not receiving a pension, and those who had left with premature, ill health or actuarially reduced pensions.

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there are at each *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school in the Portsmouth, South constituency. [21222]

**Mr. Timms:** The information is not available in the form requested.

The numbers of full-time vacancies for teachers in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in Portsmouth local authority in January 2001 were as follows:

| | *Number of vacancies* |
|---|---|
| Nursery and primary | 20 |
| Secondary | 36 |

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers working in the Buckingham constituency took early retirement under *(a)* premature and *(b)* ill-health retirement arrangements in each year since 1997. [23724]

**Mr. Timms:** The information is not available in the form requested. The numbers of teachers from the maintained schools sector in Buckinghamshire local education authority, who took premature or ill-health retirement, were as follows.

| | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Premature | 149 | 58 | 37 | 32 |
| Ill-health | 23 | 14 | 14 | 10 |

[1] Provisional data

*Note:*

There were no teachers who took actuarially reduced pensions

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many days on average were lost per teacher due to sickness in each of the last five years *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the Buckingham constituency. [23725]

**Mr. Timms:** Information for the Buckingham constituency is not collected centrally.

The average number of days of sickness absence taken per teacher in the maintained schools sector in calendar years 1999 and 2000, in the Buckinghamshire local authority area and England were, as follows:

| | *1999* | *2000* |
|---|---|---|
| Buckinghamshire | 4 | 5 |
| England[1] | 5 | 5 |

[1] England figures have been estimated to allow for local authorities that did not make a return. Teacher sickness absence data was not collected centrally before calendar year 1999.

## Teachers (Assaults)

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers were subject to violent assaults in schools in the last year for which records are available. [23497]

**Mr. Timms:** The information is not collected centrally. However, the number of injuries to teachers involving acts of assault or violence in England, Wales, and Scotland reported to the Health and Safety Executive in 2000–01 was 166.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers were assaulted by *(a)* pupils and *(b)* parents in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997; and in how many cases a conviction was obtained. [23723]

**Mr. Timms:** The Department does not hold these data. Buckinghamshire local education authority has informed us that, from 1998 to 31 July 2001, there were 552 assaults on teachers in the county. 541 were by pupils, the majority by pupils in special schools. Eleven were by parents and others. The authority is not aware of any convictions.

## FE Teacher Shortages

**Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings she has had with the Association of Colleges to discuss the shortage of *(a)* teachers and *(b)* lecturers in further education. [23545]

**John Healey:** The Secretary of State met David Gibson from the Association of Colleges (AOC) on 14 November 2001 and also addressed the AOC Conference on 20 November. Additionally, my colleague the Minister for Lifelong Learning and I have each met twice with representatives from the AOC, on 15 June and 31 July, and 12 July and 10 October respectively.

Discussion at these meetings covered a wide range of issues about the FE sector, including recruitment and retention difficulties in some subject areas and the initiatives that Government have introduced to attract new staff to the profession and reward and retain excellent teachers and lecturers, including the Teaching Pay Initiative, Golden Hellos, Student Loan Write Off and Training Bursaries.

### School Buses

**Ms Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps the Government have taken to combat *(a)* bullying and *(b)* vandalism on school buses. [20636]

**Mr. Timms:** Bullying can be a serious problem in and around schools and in December 2000 we launched a new anti-bullying strategy, including a comprehensive new anti-bullying pack for schools with an accompanying video aimed at pupils. We have also required headteachers to draw up anti-bullying policies; these should be kept under regular review with Ofsted involved in carrying out inspections. Although the courts have ruled that a school's duty of care to prevent bullying applies within the school precincts, teachers could discuss bullying on school buses with escorts, the transport company and the local education authority and all three could take action when appropriate.

Vandalism can also be a serious problem on some occasions. It is for the operators of school buses as well as the local education authority to address safety issues including the prevention of bullying or violence. The DTLR has recently published "The School Run" training programme for bus drivers (February 2001), designed to help improve the relationships between bus drivers and young people. The publication also contains "best practice" checklists for schools, bus companies and Passenger Transport Executives, and lesson material alerting children to the dangers of misbehaving on buses.

### Oxford and Cambridge Universities (Admissions)

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy to require Oxford and Cambridge Universities to publish information in respect of student admissions to constituent colleges for the year 2001–02 in standardised format, indicating the number and percentage of *(a)* applications and *(b)* acceptances from (i) private schools, (ii) state selective schools, (iii) state comprehensive schools, (iv) sixth form colleges, (v) tertiary colleges and (vi) other places; and if she will make a statement. [20737]

**Margaret Hodge** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Cambridge and Oxford Universities have published information on admissions for entry in 2001 from both the maintained and independent sector, disaggregated by college. The relevant extracts are in the table. The universities are responsible for the accuracy of this information. Further disaggregation is not held centrally.

We recognise and welcome the efforts made by both universities to widen participation, and urge them to continue this important work.

*Applications and offers at Oxford University broken down by college, for 2001 admissions*

*Percentage*

| *College* | *Applications for maintained* | | *Offers for maintained* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Balliol | 49.6 | (52.5) | 52.7 | (51.1) |
| Brasenose | 39.8 | (40.0) | 44.0 | (41.5) |
| Christ Church | 43.0 | (46.6) | 38.9 | (43.0) |
| Corpus Christi | 57.3 | (60.0) | 51.6 | (55.8) |
| Exeter | 50.9 | (55.7) | 55.6 | (53.1) |
| Harris Manchester | 100.0 | (100.0) | 85.7 | (95.2) |
| Hertford | 69.3 | (65.2) | 67.2 | (61.1) |
| Jesus | 66.6 | (64.1) | 58.3 | (59.5) |
| Keble | 58.4 | (60.8) | 60.0 | (59.7) |
| Lady Margaret Hall | 45.9 | (47.3) | 41.2 | (45.5) |
| Lincoln | 51.5 | (49.0) | 57.0 | (50.0) |
| Magdalen | 56.2 | (53.9) | 51.9 | (49.1) |
| Mansfield | 71.4 | (66.1) | 67.1 | (68.3) |
| Merton | 61.0 | (65.0) | 53.6 | (56.1) |
| New | 54.0 | (54.1) | 49.1 | (49.3) |
| Oriel | 46.1 | (45.1) | 44.6 | (42.6) |
| Pembroke | 45.0 | (43.6) | 54.5 | (47.5) |
| Queen's | 49.5 | (53.1) | 56.8 | (56.4) |
| St. Anne's | 53.0 | (54.2) | 60.7 | (56.6) |
| St. Catherine's | 58.9 | (60.0) | 57.1 | (56.8) |
| St. Edmund Hall | 40.1 | (42.4) | 48.5 | (44.8) |
| St. Hilda's | 62 | (60.5) | 59.8 | (57.2) |
| St. Hugh's | 62.9 | (59.8) | 63.9 | (54.3) |
| St. John's | 67.0 | (65.6) | 66.4 | (64.3) |
| St. Peter's | 49.6 | (46.9) | 52.8 | (50.0) |
| Somerville | 54.6 | (55.1) | 61.3 | (57.6) |
| Trinity | 47.1 | (42.7) | 53.6 | (46.6) |
| University | 45.5 | (48.7) | 42.6 | (45.8) |
| Wadham | 71.2 | (71.1) | 67.5 | (65.5) |
| Worcester | 40.9 | (40.0) | 47.8 | (44.0) |

*Note:*
A three-year average from 1999–01 is shown in brackets

*University of Cambridge*
*Applications and acceptances by college—2001*

| *College* | *Applications for 2001*[1] | | *Acceptances in 2001*[1] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Christ's | 58 | (55) | 51 | (37) |
| Churchill | 68 | (75) | 58 | (68) |
| Clare | 65 | (56) | 59 | (55) |
| Corpus Christi | 56 | (49) | 53 | (39) |
| Downing | 47 | (51) | 46 | (41) |
| Emmanuel | 59 | (61) | 53 | (54) |
| Fitzwilliam | 68 | (71) | 60 | (66) |
| Girton | 62 | (61) | 58 | (61) |
| Gonville and Caius | 46 | (48) | 36 | (48) |
| Jesus | 53 | (57) | 56 | (54) |
| King's | 85 | (84) | 78 | (77) |
| Magdalene | 42 | (42) | 44 | (36) |
| New Hall | 58 | (59) | 55 | (58) |
| Newnham | 64 | (58) | 59 | (49) |
| Pembroke | 57 | (55) | 50 | (50) |
| Peterhouse | 45 | (52) | 43 | (43) |
| Queens' | 60 | (60) | 53 | (55) |
| Robinson | 64 | (65) | 64 | (56) |
| Selwyn | 54 | (58) | 48 | (49) |
| Sidney Sussex | 58 | (55) | 52 | (45) |
| St. Catharine's | 52 | (58) | 51 | (52) |
| St. John's | 55 | (52) | 49 | (45) |
| Trinity | 52 | (56) | 45 | (48) |
| Trinity Hall | 53 | (55) | 50 | (47) |
| All standard Colleges | 58 | (59) | 53 | (52) |

[1] Maintained percentage

*Note:*
Figures in brackets are for last year

### Social Deprivation

**Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish comparisons of academic results between schools with equivalently socially deprived catchment areas. [23350]

**Mr. Timms:** Benchmark information based on national pupil performance in maintained, mainstream schools is published annually in the Department's autumn package. The benchmark data enable schools to compare their performance with other schools grouped according to one measure of social disadvantage, that is, the percentage of children known to be eligible for a free school meal. A copy of the autumn package has been placed in the House of Commons Library; it is also available on the Department's website.

### Individual Learning Accounts

**Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will implement measures to ensure that industry is *(a)* consulted and *(b)* represented in attempts to replace the individual learning accounts scheme. [23544]

**John Healey:** Some discussions have already been held with training providers. We are now about to seek the views of a wider range of stakeholders. This will include representatives of industry and employers, both large and small. The views obtained will be an important element in designing a new ILA-style programme.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she had made of the deadweight cost of individual learning accounts. [19526]

**John Healey:** With any universal offer deadweight will exist. Although not an exact calculation, an assessment of deadweight within the ILA programme can be based upon the evaluation evidence drawn from a series of hypothetical questions. Based on the sample selected the first stage evaluation showed that 44 per cent. of account holders said that they would have been able to pay for their course without their ILA discount.

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the first date her Department was informed of alleged misuse of individual learning accounts. [21305]

**John Healey:** My Department actively engaged learning providers in the development of the individual learning accounts programme. For example, a number of seminars were held with learning providers in 2000, prior to the introduction of the national framework for individual learning accounts, and these continued into 2001. At these events providers expressed a wide range of opinions. In September 2000 James O'Brien, Managing Director, Pitman Training, wrote to Ministers to express concern that the programme was open to abuse, but also said that the cap on public support for each individual's ILA account introduced to help control such abuse had been set at too low a level. This is the earliest correspondence we have traced on the specific topic of potential misuse of the ILA scheme.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many learning providers were registered with the individual learning accounts centre on 27 November. [23109]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* When the individual learning account programme closed on 23 November 2001, there were 8,900 learning providers registered with the ILA centre.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 814W, on individual learning accounts, by whom it is not expected that the Department should offer financial advice. [23580]

**John Healey:** It is not expected within the design or operation of the ILA programme that the Department should provide financial advice to any firm that considered participating in the ILA programme or that was affected by its closure.

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when pending ILA applicants will be validated so that training providers can be paid outstanding money. [23437]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* Officials have, as a matter of priority, been working to validate outstanding claims for payment to learning providers. I can confirm that we will be making payments this week to almost 1,400 providers who had submitted claims up to 21 November. There are, however, a smaller number of claims from around 140 providers, in some cases for significant amounts, on which we need to carry out further checks before payments can be cleared. Officials will be writing this week to all providers whose claims were outstanding up to 21 November to explain the general arrangements for taking forward the processing of existing and future claims.

We are also continuing to work on validating claims made between 21 and 23 November and on dealing with learning booked on the ILA system up to its closure on 23 November. Once we are satisfied that eligible learning has taken place in accordance with the rules of the programme, we will be able to arrange payments to all providers who are not currently subject to investigation, provided that this status does not change following the analysis of recent complaints received.

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what checks were carried out to prevent multiple ILA applications from single addresses. [23439]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* A full common address trawl of the ILA system has been carried out to identify multiple individual applications at the same address. This led to investigations by the Department into 41 providers. As a result 15 providers were suspended from the register of learning providers eligible to receive funds from the ILA programme. Investigations are continuing.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the statement of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State responsible for adult skills the hon. Member for Wentworth (John Healey) of 11 December 2001, *Official Report, Westminster Hall*, columns 218–224WH, on individual learning accounts, what the budget was for ILA by March 2002; and how many of the accounts were budgeted to be used. [23541]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The total budget available in England over the two years 2000–01 and 2001–02 is £202.1 million, which includes £115.1 million which has been recycled from TEC resources. The aim was to have 1 million ILAs opened by March 2002. No precise number was set for ILAs budgeted to be used, as the ILA programme was an entirely new and innovative programme for which take-up could not accurately be predicted in its early years.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 813W, on individual learning accounts, whether there were constraints upon the absolute exercise of the Secretary of State's discretion; and whether the power of the Secretary of State to close down the learning account scheme immediately and without notice was publicised to *(a)* learning account holders and *(b)* learning account providers. [23581]

**John Healey:** The only constraints on the absolute exercise of the Secretary of State's discretion would be where this was inconsistent with natural justice.

The Secretary of State and I took the decision to shut down the programme with immediate effect from 6.30pm on 23 November. That decision was taken to minimise a serious risk to public funds. Under these circumstances, there was no time to notify providers or account holders in advance.

The shutdown meant that neither the ILA account holders database nor the ILA learning providers database was available to us. However, we issued a press statement on 23 November and provided notification of the shut down-on both the Department and Capita websites which we updated as new information became available. We were also able to resume the operation of the ILA helpline for account holders, on a limited basis, on 27 November.

All learning providers were notified by letter on 29 November.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 814W, on individual learning accounts, if she will give reasons for not offering compensation in the circumstances described. [23584]

**John Healey:** The purpose of the ILA scheme was not to give people rights to money but to encourage them to undertake learning.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether her Department has contacted the Data Protection Registrar about possible unauthorised access to the ILA account holders database; and if she will make a statement. [23577]

**John Healey:** The Department has not contacted the Information Commissioner (previously Data Protection Registrar) concerning possible unauthorised access to the ILA account holder's database. The Department's Special Investigations Unit has been working closely with the police and where prima facie evidence of criminal activity has been found the police have been asked to take over investigations.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 813W, on individual learning accounts, if she will pay interest on sums due to learning providers but not paid on time. [23586]

**John Healey:** The Department has no plans to pay interest to learning providers on payments delayed because of the closure of the individual learning account programme on 23 November 2001 following evidence of serious potential fraud and theft.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to which individuals and organisations the individual learning account holders database has been available since April. [23543]

**John Healey:** Learners and potential learners could visit the website (www.my-ila.com) only for information purposes and to request application packs. Registered learning providers could access the database once they had been provided with a user name and password. This allowed them to register courses, book learning and to confirm learning had taken place. Learning providers could only view personal name and address details of individuals registered on courses with that learning provider. Staff in DfES had view access only. The organisation 'learndirect' had a separate although restricted access to allow them to issue application packs to inquirers.

Selected Capita staff at the ILA centre locations in Coventry and Darlington, together with the programme development team at Trowbridge, had operational access to the database in order to administer the programme.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 813W, on individual learning accounts, if she will place in the Library a copy of the rules of the programme. [23587]

**John Healey:** Copies of the definition of eligible learning, the regulations and guidance and the incentives rules have been placed in the Library.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the statement by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State responsible for adult skills the hon. Member for Wentworth (John Healey) of 11 December 2001, *Official Report, Westminster Hall*, columns 218–224WH, on individual learning accounts whether the aim was that all holders should have used their accounts to embark on a course of eligible learning by March 2002. [23542]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* Our aim was to have 1 million account holders by March 2002. By July 2001 we had 1.5 million account holders in England.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list those representations she received before 24 October on the administration of the ILA scheme, distinguishing those which identified the danger of *(a)* fraud and *(b)* financial over-run. [19465]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* I have already announced to the House details about complaints and I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on PQ12290.

We have received a number of representations about fraud from hon. Members, individual learning account holders and individual learning account registered learning providers. It is established practice that the Department is only expected to publish or list correspondence if it has specifically invited stakeholders to write or feedback on an issue and that the information supplied will be placed in the public domain. We have not received any representation about financial over-run.

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether individual learning account numbers were randomly generated. [23435]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* Individual learning account numbers consisted of 10 digits. The first nine digits were sequential; the last digit was randomly selected.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 813W, on individual learning accounts, for what reason those account holders who had not used their accounts by 23 November cannot be subject to a validation process as a condition of being able to undertake eligible learning. [23582]

**John Healey:** The Individual Learning Account programme was closed on 23 November as a result of evidence of serious potential fraud and theft. That decision was taken to minimise a serious risk to public funds. However, subject to new validation arrangements, all eligible learning booked onto the ILA system before 6.30 pm on 23 November will be honoured.

The programme is now closed to the further booking of learning by ILA account holders and learning providers. Account holders who did not have their learning booked onto the ILA system by 23 November will not be able to benefit from a discount on the cost of their learning.

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by what means the Government intend to enable genuine learning providers to access moneys that have been diverted to bogus learning providers. [21078]

**John Healey:** The ILA programme was shut down on 23 November and closed to the further booking of learning by learning providers. Officials are setting up, as a matter of priority, arrangements to validate outstanding payments and claims for payment from learning providers so that the majority of providers, who have acted honestly throughout, can be paid as quickly as possible. We will pay for eligible learning that has already taken place and for learning that is already booked on the ILA Centre's system, providing we are satisfied that eligible learning is undertaken, in accordance with the rules of the programme. Learning which was not booked onto the ILA system before the programme was shut down will not benefit from an ILA discount.

The overall purpose of ILAs was to help people overcome the financial barriers to learning by helping with the costs. The incentives and discounts were placed in the hands of the individual as they are best placed to choose learning that is most beneficial to their training needs. Some learning providers will, as a result, have received an increase in their business because of ILAs. However, learning providers can only access moneys if an account holder has decided to use their ILA to help pay for learning at their establishment.

The Department has already been successful in reclaiming public funds and is actively working with other partner organisations including the police to recover funds wherever possible.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many holders of individual learning accounts have complained to her Department about their account being been used without their authority. [23108]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* As at 30 November 5,732 complaints had been received from individuals about ILA incentives taken without their knowledge, out of over 2.6 million account holders.

## Specialist Schools

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will permit clusters of schools to apply jointly for specialist school status. [23599]

**Mr. Timms:** The published assessment criteria for each specialism permit joint specialist school applications involving two schools. The criteria also allow for collaborative approaches involving associated applications. Arrangements for associated applications involve a group of schools making solo applications or a combination of solo and joint applications, across a range of specialisms as part of a strategic approach to specialist school provision across an area. Each application succeeds or fails on its own merits.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she has collated on the targets agreed by specialist schools consequent on that status and their success in achieving them. [23679]

**Mr. Timms:** Information on the specialist school targets agreed by individual arts, language, technology and sports colleges is not collated but is contained in the development plans and progress reports of each of the 685 specialist schools. These plans and progress reports are retained on individual school files and used in the assessment process for redesignation. Typically, the four-year development plans of an applicant school set between 100 and 400 targets, which focus on a range of school and community strands.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she collates on the success of specialist schools in achieving targets agreed consequent on their status. [23680]

**Mr. Timms:** Specialist schools are required to provide annual reports of the progress they have made in implementing their development plans. Information on the achievement of the targets set in the plans is taken into account alongside a new development plan when they seek redesignation as specialist schools.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will seek a report from HM Chief Inspector of Schools on the level of success of specialist schools in achieving targets consequent on that status. [23681]

**Mr. Timms:** As part of Ofsted's survey of specialist schools, published in October, HMI assessed the progress of schools visited in relation to their targets in order to

examine the impact of the programme on attainment and the quality of provision in designated schools; to evaluate how specialist schools were managing their role and to illustrate good practice. The first main finding in the report confirms that four out of five specialist schools covered by the survey

> "are in large measure achieving the aims of the specialist schools programme and making good use of the advantages it brings".

We believe Ofsted's report will help all specialist schools sustain and accelerate their achievements and see no need at present to commission another survey. However, we do continually review the need for evaluation evidence about the progress of specialist schools in meeting their targets, including the information my Department requests of them in their annual reports.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for each specialist school *(a)* the names of sponsors, *(b)* the amount of money contributed in aggregate by external sponsors and *(c)* the additional resources contributed by her Department. [23682]

**Mr. Timms:** A list of the names of sponsors of each specialist school can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The aggregate contribution of external sponsorship to specialist schools to date is at least £58 million. The additional resources provided for the specialist schools programme by this Department from the academic year 1994–95 to the academic year 2000–01 inclusive is £245 million.

### Education Action Zones

**Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the performance of schools within education action zones. [23675]

**Mr. Timms:** The performance of schools in education action zones continues to improve. They are making useful contributions to raising standards and are closing the gap with national achievements. The most significant impact is being made by primary schools where achievement continues to rise faster than the national rate.

### Examination Results (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the proportion of pupils achieving *(a)* one or more A to C and *(b)* five or more A to C GCSE grades was (i) nationally and (ii) from schools based in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [23721]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The proportion of 15-year-old pupils achieving *(a)* one or more A* to C and *(b)* five or more A* to C GCSE grades in England and the Buckingham constituency since 1997 are as follows:

| | *Academic year* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
| *England—percentage achieving* | | | | | |
| One or more grades A*-C | 70.5 | 71.4 | 72.6 | 73.6 | 74.0 |
| Five or more grades A*-C | 45.1 | 46.3 | 47.9 | 49.2 | 50.0 |
| *Buckingham—percentage achieving* | | | | | |
| One or more grades A*-C | 77.1 | 82.0 | 81.8 | 80.2 | 82.2 |
| Five or more grades A*-C | 54.1 | 54.4 | 57.7 | 56.0 | 60.6 |

### Pupil Absences

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many unauthorised absences there were from schools *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [23722]

**Mr. Timms:** The numbers and percentages of half days missed due to unauthorised absences in maintained primary and secondary schools in England and the Buckingham constituency since 1997 are:

| | *England* | | | | *Buckingham* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *Number* | *Primary Percentage* | *Number* | *Secondary Percentage* | *Number* | *Primary Percentage* | *Number* | *Secondary Percentage* |
| 1996–97 | 5,214,716 | 0.5 | 8,464,617 | 1.0 | 1,265 | 0.1 | 1,589 | 0.2 |
| 1997–98 | 5,436,843 | 0.5 | 9,111,510 | 1.1 | 1,766 | 0.1 | 2,703 | 0.3 |
| 1998–99 | 5,575,015 | 0.5 | 9,395,441 | 1.1 | 874 | 0.0 | 2,288 | 0.3 |
| 1999–2000 | 5,228,644 | 0.5 | 9,165,319 | 1.0 | 885 | 0.0 | 5,210 | 0.5 |
| 2000–01 | 5,356,096 | 0.5 | 9,430,735 | 1.1 | 1,856 | 0.1 | 5,963 | 0.6 |

### School Computers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average number of pupils per computer was in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [23729]

**Mr. Timms:** The information requested is not available centrally.

Information for England for 1998–2001 was published in Statistical Bulletin 09/01 "Survey of Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2001", which is available on my Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/ statistics and from the Library. Information for England is derived from a sample of schools, which is too small to produce reliable information for sub-national areas.

### Muslim Teachers

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of female (i) primary and (ii) secondary school teachers who are Muslims. [23810]

**Mr. Timms:** The information is not collected centrally.

### Teachers (Work Load)

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she plans to take to reduce the time teachers spend on administration. [23977]

**Mr. Timms:** My Department keeps administrative requirements on all schools under continuous review. We have taken a number of actions to reduce the burdens on schools, including simplifying the Standards Fund, providing extra funding for small schools to meet proportionately higher administrative costs and to encourage the development of collaborative approaches to reducing burdens, such as shared ICT technicians, and actively screening all mailings to schools. In addition, in the school year 2000–01, we achieved a significant reduction in the number of pages sent to schools by the Department.

We recognise that there is more to be done to make teaching a more manageable profession. The PricewaterhouseCoopers study of teacher work load, published on 5 December 2001, has put forward further practical ways of addressing work load issues, which the Department and other stakeholders are considering.

### School Partnerships

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which grammar/non-selective school partnerships are in receipt of financial support from her Department; and how much support and what the nature of the partnership is in each case. [24086]

**Mr. Timms:** We have allocated £505,616 to 28 partnerships for the 2001–02 school year. Detailed information on the successful partnerships have been placed in the Libraries.

### Standards Fund

**Jeff Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will announce next year's Standards Fund allocation to local education authorities; and what the increase in the Standards Fund will be. [24279]

**Mr. Timms:** Information on the Standards Fund programme for 2002–03 was issued to local education authorities on 28 September in the form of a circular from the Department for Education and Skills. A copy of the circular has been placed in the Library. Allocations for most of the grants supported under the Standards Fund were notified to local education authorities by the end of November. Allocations for some grants remain to be issued as they are based on information not yet available. The total expenditure to be supported through the Standards Fund in 2002–03 will be £3.6 billion, compared to £3.1 billion in 2001–02. The totals include both Government grant and local education authority contributions.

### Special Educational Needs Tribunal

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many cases set down for a hearing in the Special Educational Needs Tribunal in the latest year for which figures are available were *(a)* abandoned at the instigation of the local education authority, *(b)* abandoned at the request of parents, *(c)* determined in favour of the local education authority and *(d)* determined (i) in whole and (ii) in part in favour of parents. [23942]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The following information gives a breakdown of appeals for 1 September 2000 to 1 August 2001. It gives the number of appeals abandoned at the request of the local education authority and at the request of the parent. The tribunal does not collect information about the outcome of appeals in the format requested. However, information about the number of appeals upheld or partially upheld is available and a table providing this information is also included. A case is listed as "upheld" when any of the points at issue are decided in the parents' favour.

*SEN Tribunal*

Breakdown of appeals information 1 September 2000 to 31 August 2001

Total number of Registrations: 2,728

Total number of Decisions: 1,206

Total number of Withdrawals: 1,368.

How many cases set down for hearing in SENT in the latest year were:

*(a)* abandoned at the instigation of the LEA

Of the total number of withdrawals last year, 699 appeals were withdrawn because the LEA had fully complied with the appeal and therefore not opposed. A further 475 cases were withdrawn because the LEA had negotiated an agreement with the parents.

*(b)* abandoned at the request of the parents

Of the total number of withdrawals last year 40 related to parents changing their minds about the appeals. The remaining 154 cases were withdrawn but the Tribunal does not know the reason.

*(c), (d)*(i), (ii) determined in favour of the LEA and parent in whole or in part

The outcome of the appeals for which the Tribunal issued a decision during the year is summarised in the table:

*Decisions issued in 2000–01*

| | *Upheld*[1] | | *Dismissed*[2] | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Number* | *Percentage* | *Number* | *Percentage* | *Total* |
| *Appeals not involving contents of Statements* | | | | | |
| Refusal to assess | 229 | 67 | 115 | 33 | 344 |
| Refusal to statement | 66 | 70 | 28 | 30 | 94 |
| Refusal to re-assess | 15 | 65 | 8 | 35 | 23 |
| Cease to Maintain | 13 | 62 | 8 | 38 | 21 |
| Total | 323 | 67 | 159 | 33 | 482 |

| | Decisions issued in 2000–01 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Upheld[1] | | Dismissed[2] | | |
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Total |
| *Contents of Statement* | | | | | |
| Parts 2 and/or 3, not 4 | 157 | 89 | 19 | 11 | 176 |
| Parts 2, 3 and 4 | 354 | 92 | 29 | 8 | 383 |
| Part 4 only | 106 | 76 | 34 | 24 | 140 |
| Refusal to change school named | 14 | 70 | 6 | 30 | 20 |
| Failure to name a school | 4 | 80 | 1 | 20 | 5 |
| Total | 635 | 88 | 89 | 12 | 724 |
| Total decisions issued | 958 | 79 | 248 | 21 | 1,206 |

[1] Total upheld appeals includes those cases remitted to the LEA in the Refusal to Statement category
[2] Total dismissed appeals includes strike outs

### Disability Rights Commission

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administration costs of the Disability Rights Commission were in 2000–01; and what she expects them to be in 2001–02. [21295]

**Maria Eagle:** I have been asked to reply.

In 2000–01 the administration costs of the Disability Rights Commission were £8.063 million. In 2001–2 they are expected to be £7.508 million. These figures includes staff salaries and other related expenditure such as premises and equipment.

### Trailblazer Sector Skills Council

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which sectors are to be covered by a Trailblazer Sector Skills Council. [24365]

**Estelle Morris:** From the 31 expressions of interest received, I am pleased to announce that the following five sectors will be invited to form a Trailblazer Sector Skills Council:

apparel, footwear and textile

audio visual industries

land based industries

oil and gas extraction; petroleum refining and distribution; and chemical manufacture

retail.

All sectors who expressed an interest, but were unsuccessful in being awarded Trailblazer SSC status, have been offered one-to-one feedback meetings to explain reasons for the decision and to initiate a dialogue on the way forward for their sectors.

### Employment and Social Policy Council

**Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the outcome was of the Employment and Social Policy Council held in Brussels on 3 December; what the Government position was on each issue discussed, including their voting record; and if she will make a statement. [21219]

**Malcolm Wicks:** I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions represented the UK at the Employment and Social Policy Council in Brussels on 3 December, together with the Minister for Employment and the Regions.

The Council agreed parameters for the simplification of the co-ordination of social security schemes under Regulation 1408–71. The UK was able to accept the parameters, subject to detailed scrutiny, further negotiations and correction of linguistic points. The parameters will be forwarded to the Laeken European Council. The UK was also able to endorse the Council's Conclusions identifying the appropriate legal base for extending co-ordination of social security schemes to nationals of third countries.

The Council reached political agreement on the 'Autumn Package' of Employment measures, comprising the Employment Guidelines for 2002; Recommendations on the implementation of member states' employment policies and the adoption of the Joint Employment Report for 2001: the 'package' will go to the Laeken European Council for endorsement.

The Council adopted Conclusions on indicators on 'Quality in Work' which will be presented to the Laeken European Council, thus fulfilling the remit from the Stockholm European Council.

The Council adopted a report on indicators of poverty and social exclusion for Laeken; a Joint Commission and Council Report on social inclusion and a joint report from the Social Protection Committee and the Economic Policy Committee on objectives and working methods in the area of pensions. All three documents will go to the Laeken European Council for adoption.

The Council agreed a common position on amending the Insolvency (worker protection) Directive, to bring it in line with recent jurisprudence.

The Council also agreed to adopt 2003 as the European Year of People with Disabilities.

The Council adopted Conclusions on Structural Indicators, which will be forwarded to the General Affairs Council; indicators on the Gender pay gap, and on an EU-level mechanism to help resolve transnational employment disputes.

The Belgian Presidency presented a progress report on a Directive on Employee Involvement in the European Co-operative. The Presidency reported progress on the Asbestos (worker protection) Directive. A common position is expected to be finalised under the forthcoming Spanish Presidency. The Council noted two Presidency reports on gender mainstreaming in Council formations and agreed a contribution to work on the Broad Economic Guidelines for 2002, to be forwarded to ECOFIN.

The Council adopted a Resolution on the Commission's Green Paper on Corporate Social Responsibility and requested that the outcomes of the current debates at national level be incorporated in the Commission's next Communication on this subject.

The Commission gave an overview of its Communication on increased Labour Force Participation and Active Ageing. The Commission presented its Communication on Lifelong Learning.

No votes were taken at this Council.

### New Deal (Disabled People)

**Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the new deal for Disabled People pilot studies. [18410]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** I have been asked to reply.

Evaluation has shown that the New Deal for Disabled People Personal Adviser Service and Innovative Schemes produced encouraging results.

Pilot evaluation reports are available in the Library and on the new deal website.

The national extension of the new deal for disabled people from 2 July 2001 was informed by the pilot evaluation reports. It too will be evaluated to find the best ways of helping disabled people find work.

### Equal Opportunities Commission

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administration costs of the Equal Opportunities Commission were in 2000–01; and what she expects them to be in 2001–02. [21294]

**Ms Hewitt:** I have been asked to reply.

I am replying as I am responsible for the financial arrangements of the Equal Opportunities Commission. The Commission's administration costs in 2000–01 were £6.929 million. The Commission expects their administration costs to be £6.333 million during the current financial year. Details of the Commission's expenditure are published in their combined annual report and accounts, which is available to the public.

### Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, 'Winning the Generation Game', *(a)* what progress her Department has made and *(b)* what future plans her Department has for acting on them; and if she will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24196]

**John Healey:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, at column 335W.

### Teachers' Qualifications

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 44W, for what reason figures have not been collected since 1996–97 on the percentage of secondary school teachers holding an appropriate subject qualification. [10407]

**Mr. Timms:** Surveys to collect these figures have been undertaken every four to five years. We plan to conduct another survey shortly.

### Departmental Expenditure Limits

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the reasons for the difference between the final voted departmental expenditure limit and provisional outturn for financial year 2000–01, as listed in the Treasury document, Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn, for Vote I, Department for Education and Employment, subcategories *(a)* 1 Department of Employment: programmes and central services and *(b)* 5 Sure Start; and if she will make a statement. [24111]

**Estelle Morris:** Full details of outturn against 2000–01 voted provision will be published in the appropriation accounts to be presented to the House of Commons by 31 January 2002. The departmental resource account on an accruals basis will also be presented to the House of Commons before 31 January. Updated estimates of the outturn for Departmental Expenditure Limits in 2000–01 on an accruals basis were published in the 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318), Table B16.

### New Deal (Over-25s)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people were employed by her Department under the new deal for the over-25s; and at what cost to the public funds in 2001–02. [21688]

**Estelle Morris:** Information follows on the number of people currently employed by my Department under the new deal for over-25s. New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy paid under the programme, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. the cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

I confirm for the period 2001–02 there are currently four new deal participants aged 25 plus employed in the Department for Education and Skills. The total cost to the public purse for this period in employer subsidies is approximately £1,440.00.

### New Deal (Young People)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people are employed by the Department under the New Deal for Young People; and at what cost to public funds. [21325]

**Estelle Morris:** Information follows on the number of people currently employed by my Department under the new deal for young people. New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy paid under the programme, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

I confirm there are 14 people currently employed by the Department for Education and Skills under the new deal for young people. The cost to the public purse in employer and training subsidies is approximately £30,660.

## Departmental Sickness Absence

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) when she expects to reply to the Question of 5 December, ref. 21335, from the hon. Member for Buckingham on sickness absence; [24754]

(2) how many days were lost owing to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21335]

**Estelle Morris:** The overall sickness absence rate in the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in each of the last four calendar years for which official figures are available was:

| | *Days per staff year* |
|---|---|
| 1999 | 11.0 |
| 1998 | 11.6 |
| 1997 | 12.6 |
| 1996 | 11.8 |

The DfES is committed to reducing sickness absence in line with the targets agreed across Whitehall.

## Civil Servants

**Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what proportion of each civil service grade in her Department is located in each region and nation of the UK; what the average salary is for each grade; and if she will make a statement. [6862]

**Estelle Morris:** The total numbers and proportions of each civil service grade within the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in each region and nation of the UK are shown in table A. The average salary for each grade in DfEs by region of the UK is shown in table B.

*Table A: The total numbers and proportions of each civil service grade within the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in each region and nation of the UK*

| | *Number of staff by grade level and region (full-time equivalent)* | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Government office region* | *All grades* | *SCS* | *Level 6/7* | *SEO/HEO level* | *EO level* | *AO/AA level* |
| *Permanent staff* | | | | | | |
| London | 1,963 | 86 | 298 | 699 | 466 | 414 |
| North West | 501 | 2 | 10 | 108 | 111 | 270 |
| North East | 508 | 2 | 28 | 124 | 147 | 207 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 1,084 | 22 | 126 | 435 | 228 | 273 |
| Total permanent staff | 4,056 | 112 | 462 | 1,366 | 952 | 1,164 |
| *Casual staff* | | | | | | |
| London | 53 | — | 2 | 2 | 11 | 38 |
| North West | 29 | — | — | 2 | — | 27 |
| North East | 32 | — | — | — | — | 32 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 54 | — | — | — | 4 | 50 |
| Total casual staff | 168 | — | 2 | 4 | 15 | 147 |
| Total all staff | 4,224 | 112 | 464 | 1,370 | 967 | 1,311 |

| | *Percentage of staff by grade level and region* | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Government office region* | *All grades* | *SCS* | *Level 6/7* | *SEO/HEO level* | *EO level* | *AO/AA level* |
| *Permanent staff* | | | | | | |
| London | 48 | 77 | 65 | 51 | 49 | 36 |
| North West | 12 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 12 | 23 |
| North East | 13 | 2 | 6 | 9 | 15 | 18 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 27 | 19 | 27 | 32 | 24 | 23 |
| Total permanent staff | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| *Casual staff* | | | | | | |
| London | 32 | — | 100 | 50 | 73 | 26 |
| North West | 17 | — | — | 50 | — | 18 |
| North East | 19 | — | — | — | — | 22 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 32 | — | — | — | 27 | 34 |
| Total casual staff | 100 | — | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total all staff | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

*Notes:*

1. No staff are located in other regions or nations of the UK.
2. DfES has no industrial staff

*Table B: Average salary for each grade in DfES by region of the UK*

£

| *Government office region* | *All grades* | *SCS level* | *G6/7 level* | *SEO/HEO level* | *EO level* | *AO/AA level* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Permanent* | | | | | | |
| London | 26,338 | 78,327 | 45,523 | 29,742 | 22,040 | 17,239 |
| North West | 17,493 | 72,250 | 37,928 | 28,031 | 18,379 | 15,403 |
| North East | 17,947 | 67,556 | 40,463 | 27,243 | 18,770 | 14,025 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 24,147 | 73,746 | 43,005 | 28,031 | 17,939 | 13,923 |
| All regions | 24,672 | 75,894 | 44,348 | 28,243 | 21,138 | 16,167 |
| *Casual* | | | | | | |
| London | 15,790 | — | 41,423 | 23,832 | 18,468 | 15,790 |
| North West | 12,720 | — | — | 27,435 | — | 12,720 |
| North East | 9,639 | — | — | — | — | 9,639 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 12,720 | — | — | — | 15,235 | 12,720 |
| All regions | 12,720 | — | 41,423 | 25,672 | 18,468 | 12,720 |

### Education Maintenance Allowance

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to extend the Education Maintenance Allowance pilot scheme to the constituency of Buckingham. [24839]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** We have no such plans at present. We will be taking decisions on any future extension of the scheme on the basis of the rigorous evaluation, which is currently being conducted.

### GCSE (Road User Studies)

**Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will introduce a GCSE in Road User Studies based on the GCSE run by the Northern Ireland Education Department. [24156]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** We are keen to ensure that all young people should have the opportunity to study subjects that interest them. However, we have no plans to introduce a GCSE in Road User Studies as there are other GCSE qualifications that cover elements of the subject area, for example, Design and Technology GCSE. Other vocationally related qualifications approved for use include the Motor Vehicle and Road User Studies Certificates offered by the City and Guilds of London Institute, the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) and the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC). There is also the Motor Vehicle Foundation Studies Certificate offered by the Awarding Body Consortium (ABC).

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Fuel Poverty

**Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for the provision of emergency heating for pensioners on the waiting list for heating insulation under fuel poverty schemes. [12519]

**Mr. Meacher:** The majority of new heating installations under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme are now being completed within 12 weeks of the date of home survey.

Where there is a risk of severe delay, and the householder has no form of alternative heating, the HEES scheme managers will provide portable heating appliances.

As fuel poverty is a devolved matter, it is the responsibility of the respective Parliament and Assemblies to comment on the situation in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made as to the number of people who would be in fuel poverty in *(a)* England and *(b)* the Isle of Wight if there were a 5 per cent. rise in fuel prices. [23678]

**Mr. Wilson:** I have been asked to reply.

The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, which was published in November 2001, states that for the purposes of estimating the effects of price changes on future numbers in fuel poverty, a reasonable range of price movements by 2010 to consider would appear to be: for domestic gas prices—an increase of 15 per cent. to a fall of 10 per cent. in real terms; and for domestic electricity prices—an increase of 5 per cent. to a fall of 2 per cent. in real terms

If electricity prices were to rise by 5 per cent. and gas prices by 15 per cent. then the number in fuel poverty in England could increase by around 0.8 million. If electricity prices fell by 2 per cent. and gas prices fell by 10 per cent. then the numbers in fuel poverty could fall by around 0.3 million. Future gas and electricity prices are uncertain and will be affected by a number of factors. It is difficult to estimate the precise impacts of price changes on the numbers in fuel poverty. The figures presented give a broad indication of the changes in fuel poverty which might be expected from the stated changes in energy prices.

It is broadly estimated that a 5 per cent. increase in fuel prices may increase the number of households in fuel poverty in England by around 0.4 million. Data are not available to produce estimates of fuel poverty on the Isle of Wight and it is therefore not possible to estimate the impact of changes in fuel prices on fuel poverty on the Isle of Wight.

### Sustainable Development Summit

**Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will include a representative of the Scottish Executive in the United Kingdom delegation to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. [13148]

**Mr. Meacher:** The devolved Administrations have been closely involved in the development of the UK's position on the World Summit on Sustainable Development. We will certainly want to ensure that they are represented at the Summit, but the precise composition of the UK's delegation will be a matter for the Prime Minister nearer the time.

### Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* is the predicted and *(b)* was the average period between initial application for a (i) HEES and (ii) HEES Plus grant and completion of the home improvements in (A) England, (B) each English region and (C) each local authority area in each month since June 2000; and what performance targets have been set regarding waiting times for HEES customers. [19349]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Eaga Partnership Ltd. and TXU Warm Front Ltd. manage the Home Efficiency Scheme, marketed as the Warm Front Team, under contract. The table shows the average timelines for each of the English regions since the launch of the scheme in June 2000. It is not possible to provide the further breakdown requested by the hon. Member.

The scheme managers have a target time for completion of work following application. This is set at 40 days for insulation measures, and 120 days for heating measures. The delays experienced by householders have been due to the national shortage of gas heating engineers.

*Time taken from date of application to payment of grant*[1]

| | *1 June 2000 to 31 December 2000* | *1 January 2001 to 30 June 2001* | *1 July 2001 to 30 November 2001* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *HEES:* | | | |
| East | 230 | 120 | 70 |
| East midlands | 220 | 110 | 70 |
| Yorkshire and Humber | 210 | 110 | 70 |
| North-east | 220 | 130 | 70 |
| North-west | 240 | 140 | 70 |
| London | 230 | 150 | 90 |
| South-east | 230 | 160 | 70 |
| West midlands | 220 | 130 | 70 |
| South-west | 230 | 140 | 60 |
| Average for England | 230 | 130 | 70 |
| *HEES plus:* | | | |
| East | 220 | 130 | 80 |
| East midlands | 230 | 120 | 70 |
| Yorkshire and Humber | 220 | 130 | 70 |
| North-east | 240 | 130 | 70 |
| North-west | 260 | 150 | 70 |
| London | 260 | 150 | 80 |
| South-east | 250 | 160 | 70 |
| West midlands | 250 | 140 | 70 |
| South-west | 260 | 140 | 60 |
| Average for England | 250 | 140 | 70 |

[1] There is usually a period of one to eight weeks between the date of actual installation and the receipt of the invoice from installers.

### Genetically Modified Organisms

**Joan Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice she has received from the Food Standards Agency regarding the labelling of GMOs. [21209]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Food Standards Agency Board considered their position on the labelling of foods containing GMOs and foods produced from GMOs in a public meeting on 19 September. The minutes of this meeting and a statement by the Agency are available on their website. A copy of the statement has been placed in the Library of the House. The Board's advice, in summary, was to maintain the current labelling rules supplemented with the introduction of a provision for "GM-free" labelling.

### Departmental Sickness Absence

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21336]

**Mr. Morley:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1078W, to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (David Maclean).

The Department is committed to the effective management of sickness absence, and has included targets for a reduction in days lost due to sickness in a Service Delivery Agreement (SDA).

Responsibility for attendance matters within the Central Science Laboratory, the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science Agency and the Rural Payments Agency—all former MAFF Agencies—has been delegated to the Agency Chief Executives and I have asked them to reply direct. The Pesticides Safety Directorate and Veterinary Medicines Directorate Agencies are covered by the Departmental response.

### Residential Gardens

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs under what powers local authorities can take action to deal with residential gardens which become dumping grounds for household and other rubbish; and if she will make a statement. [22715]

**Mr. Meacher:** The illegal disposal of waste without a waste management licence or registered exemption (commonly known as fly-tipping) is a criminal offence. In the event of a conviction, severe penalties are available to the courts, including an unlimited fine or imprisonment of up to five years.

Section 59 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, provides the local authority or the Environment Agency with the power to effect the removal of fly-tipped waste (including that which is fly-tipped in residential gardens) and to recover costs from those responsible.

### End-use Equipment

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with EU partners to reach agreement to the

European Commission's proposals for a Framework Directive for Minimum Efficiency Requirements for End-Use Equipment. [22600]

**Mr. Meacher:** The European Commission has yet to bring forward a formal proposal for a Framework Directive for Minimum Energy Efficiency Requirements for End-Use Equipment, but it has recently indicated that it should be in a position to do so early in 2002. To help ensure that work on this subject can then proceed as efficiently as possible, the Department has been working closely with other member states to identify the key issues which will need to be addressed. Such work has been advanced this year by the Market Transformation Programme Information Forum www.mtpif.com, a joint initiative between the Department and the Dutch Government, which is designed to promote the development and free exchange of policy information in this field.

### Household Appliances

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with EU partners to reach agreement to complete the Review of Council Directive 92/75/EEC on the indication by labelling and standard product information of the consumption of energy and other resources by household appliances. [22601]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Government have actively worked with other member states to encourage the European Commission to bring forward proposals for the revision of Council Directive 92/75/EEC as soon as possible. We have pursued this in collective discussions and directly with the commission.

To help ensure that a review can proceed as efficiently as possible, my Department has also been working closely with other members states to identify the key issues which will need to be addressed. Such work has been advanced this year by the Market Transformation Programme Information Forum www.mtpif.com, a joint initiative between the Department and the Dutch Government, which is designed to promote the development and free exchange of policy information in this field.

### North Sea Conference

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Scottish Executive will be represented as part of the United Kingdom delegation at the North Sea conference in March 2002. [23238]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Scottish Executive is contributing to preparations for the conference on issues where policy has been devolved. We are currently considering arrangements for attendance at the conference by Ministers and officials.

### Low Frequency Noise

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has funded in the last five years on the prevalence and impact of low frequency noise. [23284]

**Mr. Meacher:** We have funded the production of guidance for use by local authorities which will shortly be placed on DEFRA's website. This updates the advice provided to the Department by the Building Research Establishment in 1992.

### Game Licences

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when a Minister in her Department last met the organisations listed on the reverse of the game licence. [22396]

**Alun Michael** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* It is intended to revise the wording of the licence as it is out of date in a number of respects.

Currently the organisations listed on the reverse of the licence are the RSPCA, the British Field Sports Society and the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare. Ministers have many meetings which involve the RSPCA and the Countryside Alliance, which is the successor organisation to the British Field Sports Association. I have met both during the course of the last month. The Universities Federation for Animal welfare is a scientific and technical animal welfare organisation. It uses scientific knowledge and established expertise to improve the welfare of animals as pets, in zoos, laboratories, on farms and in the wild. There has not been a recent meeting with this organisation.

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the text of the game licence was written; and when it was last revised. [22393]

**Alun Michael** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* Game licences are issued under legislation which has roots in the 19th Century. We have tried to discover the date on which the text was written, or revised, and it has proved difficult. The last changes were made in the 1970s.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Alan Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many items of correspondence from hon. Members addressed to her, which were received by her Department between *(a)* 7 June and 31 July, *(b)* 1 August and 31 August and *(c)* 1 September and 30 September, remain unanswered. [16286]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 20 November 2001]:* Between *(a)* 7 June and 31 July, 1,311 were received and 607 remain unanswered.

Between *(b)* 1 August and 31 August 1,078 were received and 592 remain unanswered.

Between *(c)* 1 September and 30 September 941 were received and 449 remain unanswered.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to all Members of Parliament on 14 November explaining the scale of the current problems faced by the Correspondence Section and setting out the mechanisms put in place to overcome these problems.

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when the hon. Member for West Chelmsford will receive a substantive

reply to his question, tabled on 19 November, ref 16824, concerning Dr. Reza Hossam of St. John's Hospital, Chelmsford; [23663]

(2) when the hon. Member for West Chelmsford will be given a reply to his letter of 12 June to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office which was transferred to her Department on 18 June concerning Dr. Reza Hossam of St. John's Hospital, Chelmsford. [16824]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* Unfortunately, we have no record of your letter of 12 June concerning Dr. Reza Hossam on our correspondence database.

### Hunting

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list meetings held by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials with (i) pro-hunt organisations, (ii) anti-hunt organisations and (iii) other organisations as part of the consultation on the resumption of hunting after the end of the foot and mouth outbreak. [23185]

**Alun Michael** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* During the consultation period, I met the following:

(i) on the pro-hunt side:

the Countryside Alliance including representatives of the Master of Fox Hounds Association and The Campaign for Hunting; and

(ii) on the anti-hunt side:

the Campaign for the Protection of Hunted Animals which incorporated representatives from the RSPCA, League against Cruel Sports and International Fund for Animal Welfare.

In addition, officials met the English and Welsh Farmers Fox Control Associations; the National Coursing Club; Council of Hunting Associations; the Federation of Welsh Packs; and the Countryside Alliance.

### Nitrates Directive

**Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made in meeting the United Kingdom's legal obligations to implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive. [24996]

**Margaret Beckett:** Following the decision by the European Court of Justice that the United Kingdom has failed to comply with the Nitrates Directive, I will be issuing a consultation document to key organisations very shortly, setting out the proposals for implementing the Nitrates Directive in England. The consultation will get under way in earnest in the new year, when a summary version of the consultation document will be sent to all farmers in England seeking their views on implementation options. The consultation document includes an outline of the help available from DEFRA for farmers to meet the cost of compliance.

### Food Labelling

**Mr. Moore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to require *(a)* restaurants and *(b)* fast-food outlets to disclose the country of origin of the meat in the meals which they serve. [19248]

**Yvette Cooper:** I have been asked to reply.

We have no plans to require this information to be given either in restaurants or fast-food outlets.

However, the Food Standards Agency has recently reviewed the advice produced by the Government last year on the interpretation of existing rules on misleading labelling and country of origin. The review aims to ensure this advice addresses the issues that are of most concern to consumers and encourage increased voluntary declarations. The FSA's draft advice has been issued for public consultation and makes clear that, in catering establishments, care should be taken to ensure the wording of any origin information on menus etc. is clear and unambiguous.

### Biosecurity (Rights of Way)

**Mr. Gummer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice her Department has issued for footpath users when footpaths cross fields and farmyards covered by biosecurity recommendations. [23630]

**Alun Michael:** With the improving foot and mouth disease situation, the veterinary risk assessment on use of public rights of way has been revised, and concludes that it is now safe to re-open footpaths crossing remaining restricted premises—apart from those passing through farmyards or buildings—once final cleansing and disinfection is complete, or, if final cleansing and disinfection is not being undertaken, three months after completion of preliminary cleansing and disinfection.

The revised risk assessment was issued on 7 December, along with revised guidance to local authorities which encourages them to work closely with the Department's Divisional Veterinary Managers to establish exactly which rights of way may now be re-opened. Where paths pass through farmyards or buildings, authorities should try to arrange temporary permissive diversions with the farmers concerned, especially where heavily-used paths or national trails are affected. If this is not possible, those paths must remain closed until the veterinary restrictions are lifted. The revised risk assessment and guidance refer to footpaths as the most familiar rights of way, but apply equally to all types of public right of way.

The guidance includes a code of conduct which local authorities are asked to publicise to path users, to encourage them to behave so as to reduce still further the already minimal risk that their activities could transmit the disease. However, there is no conflict between the relaxation of restrictions on rights-of-way users and continuing tight biosecurity controls on some farming activity: the latter are designed to limit the risks arising from working directly with animals, which, though now small, are far more significant than those arising from footpath use.

97 per cent. of footpaths in England are now open. Local authorities may require a little time to establish which footpaths across restricted premises can be re-opened, but almost all should be open by early in the new year, provided that there are no further outbreaks of the disease.

## Common Land

**Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish *(a)* a report on the consultation responses and *(b)* the Government's proposals on greater protection and better management of common land. [23695]

**Alun Michael:** The Government are considering proposals for improving the legislation on common land and town and village greens, as set out last year in the consultation paper "Greater Protection and Better Management of Common Land in England and Wales". We expect to publish a detailed report on the responses to the paper and to announce our proposals for future action shortly.

## Sheep and Cattle Subsidies

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people claim *(a)* sheep and *(b)* cattle subsidy broken down by the geographical areas used by her Department for payment purposes. [20713]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The table shows the number of people claiming sheep subsidy, broken down into claims received at the nine (former) Regional Service Centres (RSCs) during the 2001 Scheme year application period.

| *Regional Service Centre (RSC)* | *Number of Claims* |
|---|---|
| Bristol | 2,248 |
| Cambridge | 998 |
| Carlisle | 5,824 |
| Crewe | 2,922 |
| Exeter | 4,588 |
| Northallerton | 5,073 |
| Nottingham | 2,813 |
| Reading | 2,906 |
| Worcester | 3,608 |
| Total | 30,980 |

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the figures for the numbers of people claiming *(a)* sheep subsidy and *(b)* cattle subsidy for (i) one animal, (ii) two to five animals, (iii) five to 10 animals, (iv) 10 to 20 animals, (v) 20 to 100 animals, (vi) 100 to 200 animals and (vii) more than 200 animals. [20712]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The table shows the number people claiming sheep subsidy on the above specified ranges of sheep numbers. This information reflects the 2001 Scheme year and therefore includes claims received at the nine (former) Regional Service Centres (RSCs).

Figures for one to five sheep are nil as the rules for Sheep Annual Premium claims state that the claim must be made on a minimum of 10 sheep.

| *Number of sheep* | *Number of claims* |
|---|---|
| 1 | 0 |
| 2–5 | 0 |
| 6–10 | 342 |
| 11–20 | 2,046 |
| 21–100 | 9,933 |
| 101–200 | 6,225 |
| More 200 | 12,434 |
| Total | 30,980 |

The tables set out similar figures for the bovine schemes.

*2000 scheme year bovine claims*

| | *Number of claims for:* | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *RPA* | *1 animal* | *2–5 animals* | *6–10 animals* | *11–20 animals* | *21–100 animals* | *101–200 animals* | *More than 200* | *Total* |
| *BSPS* | | | | | | | | |
| Bristol | 212 | 262 | 477 | 617 | 1,435 | 284 | 0 | 3,287 |
| Cambridge | 143 | 349 | 274 | 307 | 887 | 123 | 0 | 2,083 |
| Carlisle | 236 | 661 | 569 | 850 | 2,343 | 383 | 0 | 5,042 |
| Crewe | 264 | 702 | 540 | 675 | 1,406 | 221 | 0 | 3,808 |
| Exeter | 342 | 1,015 | 760 | 1,028 | 2,591 | 580 | 0 | 6,316 |
| Northallerton | 257 | 728 | 637 | 932 | 2,289 | 290 | 0 | 5,133 |
| Nottingham | 184 | 526 | 485 | 604 | 1,618 | 301 | 0 | 3,718 |
| Reading | 188 | 485 | 395 | 475 | 1,191 | 340 | 0 | 3,074 |
| Worcester | 183 | 472 | 403 | 521 | 1,237 | 277 | 0 | 3,093 |
| Total | 2,009 | 5,200 | 4,560 | 5,809 | 14,797 | 2,799 | 0 | 35,554 |

| | *Number of claims for:* | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *RPA* | *1 animal* | *2–5 animals* | *6–10 animals* | *11–20 animals* | *21–100 animals* | *101–200 animals* | *More than 200* | *Total* |
| *SCPS* | | | | | | | | |
| Bristol | 35 | 245 | 289 | 332 | 720 | 76 | 21 | 1,718 |
| Cambridge | 34 | 182 | 188 | 230 | 480 | 65 | 21 | 1,200 |
| Carlisle | 25 | 209 | 278 | 452 | 1,537 | 244 | 53 | 2,798 |
| Crewe | 39 | 297 | 328 | 421 | 766 | 55 | 15 | 1,921 |
| Exeter | 59 | 460 | 457 | 694 | 1,441 | 138 | 54 | 3,303 |

| | Number of claims for: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *RPA* | *1 animal* | *2–5 animals* | *6–10 animals* | *11–20 animals* | *21–100 animals* | *101–200 animals* | *More than 200* | *Total* |
| Northallerton | 44 | 349 | 388 | 647 | 1,483 | 145 | 24 | 3,036 |
| Nottingham | 39 | 278 | 309 | 444 | 880 | 110 | 18 | 2,078 |
| Reading | 46 | 276 | 288 | 414 | 876 | 112 | 23 | 2,035 |
| Worcester | 49 | 298 | 282 | 369 | 707 | 74 | 11 | 1,790 |
| Total | 370 | 2,594 | 2,807 | 4,003 | 8,890 | 1,019 | 240 | 19,879 |

| | Number of claims for: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *RPA* | *1 animal* | *2–5 animals* | *6–10 animals* | *11–20 animals* | *21–100 animals* | *101–200 animals* | *More than 200* | *Total* |
| *SPS* | | | | | | | | |
| Bristol | 396 | 852 | 708 | 1,094 | 1,589 | 131 | 46 | 4,816 |
| Cambridge | 163 | 397 | 325 | 351 | 634 | 102 | 65 | 2,037 |
| Carlisle | 433 | 1,075 | 981 | 1,429 | 2,294 | 222 | 89 | 6,523 |
| Crewe | 481 | 1,122 | 881 | 1,237 | 2,109 | 165 | 100 | 6,095 |
| Exeter | 548 | 1,392 | 1,162 | 1,586 | 2,101 | 229 | 57 | 7,075 |
| Northallerton | 420 | 1,119 | 942 | 1,097 | 2,087 | 329 | 161 | 6,155 |
| Nottingham | 289 | 803 | 851 | 1,022 | 1,675 | 242 | 104 | 4,986 |
| Reading | 241 | 560 | 415 | 549 | 1,216 | 156 | 53 | 3,190 |
| Worcester | 256 | 591 | 473 | 500 | 1,217 | 156 | 68 | 3,361 |
| Total | 3,227 | 7,911 | 6,738 | 8,965 | 14,922 | 1,612 | 743 | 44,238 |

*2001 scheme year bovine claims*

| | Number of claims for: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *RPA* | *1 animal* | *2–5 animals* | *6–10 animals* | *11–20 animals* | *21–100 animals* | *101–200 animals* | *More than 200* | *Total* |
| *BSPS* | | | | | | | | |
| Bristol | 208 | 662 | 535 | 646 | 1,296 | 151 | 49 | 3,547 |
| Cambridge | 131 | 327 | 272 | 292 | 532 | 70 | 38 | 1,662 |
| Carlisle | 197 | 776 | 667 | 953 | 1,773 | 169 | 35 | 4,570 |
| Crewe | 232 | 758 | 626 | 664 | 1,157 | 156 | 38 | 3,631 |
| Exeter | 324 | 1,178 | 961 | 1,282 | 2,465 | 296 | 81 | 6,587 |
| Newcastle | 73 | 245 | 228 | 297 | 540 | 62 | 11 | 1,456 |
| Northallerton | 379 | 1,159 | 1,018 | 1,226 | 2,010 | 269 | 64 | 6,125 |
| Nottingham | 177 | 627 | 505 | 613 | 1,296 | 173 | 60 | 3,451 |
| Reading | 113 | 350 | 274 | 311 | 726 | 126 | 48 | 1,948 |
| Total | 1,834 | 6,082 | 5,086 | 6,284 | 11,795 | 1,472 | 424 | 32,977 |

| | Number of claims for: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *RPA* | *1 animal* | *2–5 animals* | *6–10 animals* | *11–20 animals* | *21–100 animals* | *101–200 animals* | *More than 200* | *Total* |
| *SCPS* | | | | | | | | |
| Bristol | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Cambridge | 22 | 119 | 122 | 134 | 318 | 36 | 14 | 765 |
| Carlisle | 29 | 182 | 247 | 375 | 1,150 | 149 | 30 | 2,162 |
| Crewe | 30 | 185 | 204 | 264 | 465 | 32 | 13 | 1,193 |
| Exeter | 61 | 421 | 458 | 579 | 1,323 | 127 | 38 | 3,007 |
| Newcastle | 11 | 83 | 99 | 110 | 201 | 16 | 4 | 524 |
| Northallerton | 41 | 336 | 364 | 539 | 1,211 | 120 | 30 | 2,641 |
| Nottingham | 30 | 163 | 199 | 262 | 554 | 62 | 13 | 1,273 |
| Reading | 5 | 46 | 57 | 62 | 183 | 21 | 7 | 381 |
| Total | 229 | 1,535 | 1,750 | 2,325 | 5,405 | 563 | 149 | 11,946 |

| RPA | 1 animal | 2–5 animals | 6–10 animals | 11–20 animals | 21–100 animals | 101–200 animals | More than 200 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number of claims for: | | | | | | | |
| *SPS* | | | | | | | | |
| Bristol | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Cambridge | 98 | 280 | 177 | 287 | 532 | 85 | 53 | 1,512 |
| Carlisle | 276 | 1,000 | 723 | 858 | 1,383 | 137 | 43 | 4,420 |
| Crewe | 145 | 486 | 388 | 458 | 926 | 106 | 30 | 2,539 |
| Exeter | 468 | 1,586 | 1,230 | 1,376 | 2,493 | 239 | 72 | 7,464 |
| Newcastle | 47 | 183 | 158 | 206 | 497 | 45 | 20 | 1,156 |
| Northallerton | 304 | 991 | 693 | 941 | 2,026 | 280 | 115 | 5,350 |
| Nottingham | 125 | 439 | 399 | 589 | 1,289 | 183 | 73 | 3,097 |
| Reading | 76 | 235 | 208 | 259 | 577 | 89 | 27 | 1,471 |
| Total | 1,539 | 5,200 | 3,976 | 4,974 | 9,723 | 1,164 | 433 | 27,009 |

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if pet owners may apply for *(a)* sheep and *(b)* cattle subsidies. [21447]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* To qualify for subsidy on sheep or cattle an individual must be a producer as specified within European Community legislation.

In some circumstances "pets" may qualify but this is subject to detailed regulations. The definition of a producer, with regard to the grant of premiums for sheepmeat and goatmeat, is laid down within Council Regulation 3493/1990. For beef and veal subsidies this definition is in Council Regulation 1254/1999. Copies of these Regulations are available in the House of Commons Library.

Claimants must also meet the specific eligibility requirements of each subsidy scheme. These are also set out in Community legislation.

An overview of how livestock schemes operate within England, and which animals may be eligible for subsidy, is provided on-line at www.defra.gov.uk, under the headings of 'Farming' and 'Cattle and sheep schemes'.

Administration of the livestock subsidy regimes within England is carried out by the Rural Payment Agency (RPA). Local offices of the RPA are able to provide, free of charge, notes for guidance to claimants, which detail the specific rules of the individual schemes.

## Parliamentary Questions

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the written questions of the hon. Member for Vale of York tabled on 27 November, Refs. 20822, 20823, 20825 and 20826. [22056]

**Mr. Morley:** I refer the hon. Lady to the answers provided on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 845–51W, and the answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 145W.

## Sugar Beet

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the sugar beet industry; and what steps her Department has taken to ensure that the UK's rhizomania-free status remains. [23061]

**Mr. Morley:** The United Kingdom has not been rhizomania-free since 1987, when the first outbreak was found. Since then, the disease has been found in an increasing number of farms, so that 211 are now known to be infected with the disease. The UK was granted Protected Zone status for rhizomania when the Single Market Plant Health legislation was adopted in 1993, at which time only 19 outbreaks had been detected and there was still hope that the disease would not become widely established. Through the containment policy associated with Protected Zone status DEFRA has prohibited the use of outbreak fields for beet production and imposed hygiene requirements, to try to prevent further spread of the disease from those fields. Despite these measures the number of outbreaks has continued to rise. It is likely that the causative organisms for the disease were present in many locations before symptoms of the disease were detected.

## Set-aside Land

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the largest single payment to an individual for having land in set-aside in this financial year. [23708]

**Mr. Morley:** The payment period for land put into set-aside under the Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS) during 2001 began on 16 November and will end on 31 January 2002 (or 31 March 2002 where the set-aside has been used for growing non-food crops).

The largest payment for set-aside recorded so far is £110,492.14. The DEFRA financial database does not distinguish between payments to private individuals and those to other legal entities.

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was paid from 1 January to the latest available date in respect of set-aside land. [23709]

**Mr. Morley:** DEFRA has so far issued payments totalling £56,168,779.92 during 2001 in respect of set-aside under the Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS). This total includes payments for scheme years before 2001, and agrimonetary compensation.

## Environmental Impact Assessments

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list the reasons why her Department has chosen not to

utilise an indicative minimum area threshold for the implementation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive; [23068]

(2) if she will make a statement on her Department's definition of *(a)* uncultivated land and *(b)* unimproved land for the purposes of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive; [23069]

(3) if she will make a statement on her Department's decision to implement the uncultivated and semi-natural areas provisions of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive. [23067]

**Mr. Morley:** The Government gave a commitment in the Rural White Paper in November 2000 and to Parliament to consult on implementing the uncultivated land provisions of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive. The Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-natural Areas) (England) Regulations 2001, S.I. No. 3966, will come into force on 1 February 2002.

In our consultations on the regulations it was agreed that to be as helpful as possible to farmers the Government should provide a working guide to key but undefined terms in the Directive. The resulting guidelines, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House, will set out the categories of land concerned, including to unimproved grassland, heath, moorland, scrubland and wetlands. Unimproved grassland would typically include meadows and grazing pasture, downland or other open or enclosed upland grassland with some tree cover.

The European Court of Justice has established that, even with indicative thresholds, an assessment would still be needed on whether a project was likely to give rise to significant environmental effects. To provide some degree of certainty, the Government decided that each case should be screened, but only those which give rise to significant environmental effects would be considered further under the Regulations.

### National Park Authorities

**Mr. Collins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent assessment she has made of the work of *(a)* the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, *(b)* the Lake District NPA and *(c)* National Parks Authorities in general; [24039]

(2) what plans her Department has to publish lists of applicants for appointment by the Secretary of State to National Parks Authorities; [24051]

(3) what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the system of appointments to National Parks Authorities; [24050]

(4) what recent projects have been undertaken by *(a)* the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and *(b)* the Lake District National Park Authority; and what role members appointed by her Department have had in supporting such projects; [24054]

(5) what the political affiliations were of those who have been appointed to *(a)* the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and *(b)* the Lake District National Park Authority (i) between May 1997 and May 2001 and (ii) since June 2001; [24048]

(6) what guidance is given to applicants for positions with National Parks Authorities; and what feedback is provided to those whose applications are unsuccessful; [24052]

(7) what criteria are employed when selecting applicants for interview for positions with National Park Authorities; and what plans her Department has to review such procedures; [24049]

(8) which members have been appointed to *(a)* the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and *(b)* the Lake District National Park Authority since June; and how many of these members were known to (i) herself and (ii) her ministerial colleagues prior to their appointment. [24053]

**Alun Michael:** We have looked recently at the work of all the National Park Authorities in order to determine the distribution of National Park Grant for 2002–03. A wider National Park Authorities review started in August and this will be completed next spring.

We have no plans to publish lists of applicants for appointment by the Secretary of State to National Park Authorities; the effectiveness of the system of appointments is being considered as part of the review.

Applicants for Secretary of State appointments to National Park Authorities are not required to state their political affiliation. They are asked for detail on any political activities, which may be used in the announcement of their post. Neither political activities nor political affiliation is a criterion for or against appointment.

I will write to the hon. Member with the answers to the remaining questions.

### Dangerous Substances

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how often since 1988 *(a)* the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* other authorities to whom responsibility for enforcement of health and safety regulations has been transferred, have instigated formal enforcement actions where exposures to substances assigned control limits and maximum exposure limits have not exceeded the relevant limit but where exposures have not been further reduced to as low as was reasonably practicable; and if he will make a statement. [23880]

**Dr. Whitehead:** I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive does not record information in this way. When it instigates enforcement action it does not differentiate between exposures that are within the relevant limits and those which have not been not further reduced to as low as reasonably practicable.

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how often since 1998 notifications with respect to work with asbestos have been lodged with the Health and Safety Executive where such work related to *(a)* materials containing crocidolite asbestos, *(b)* materials containing amosite asbestos and *(c)* materials containing chrysotile asbestos, but not crocidolite or amosite asbestos; and if he will make a statement. [23892]

**Dr. Whitehead:** I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) does not have this information as there is no legal requirement for notifications to differentiate between the various types of asbestos. The total number of notifications to work with asbestos received by HSE since 1998 is as follows:

| *Year* | *Notifications* |
|---|---|
| 1998–99 | 9,619 |
| 1999–2000 | 20,240 |
| 2000–01 | 27,806 |

### Turner and Newall

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evidence the HSE has collected that Turner and Newall had adequate insurance coverage which complied with Government legislation; who were the insurers; what were the policy numbers; and what were the dates of the policies. [23889]

**Dr. Whitehead:** I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive has not collected evidence about Turner and Newall's insurance coverage.

## HEALTH

### Surgical Instruments (Decontamination)

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the letter from the Chairman of the CJD Incidents Panel to the Chief Medical Officer. [15298]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The Deputy Chief Medical Officer replied to Professor Banner on 23 November.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been conducted into the adequacy of cleaning and sterilisation of dental surgical instruments *(a)* before and *(b)* after the meeting of SEAC on 17 July which analysed the risk of person-to-person transmission of CJD arising from dental surgery. [15293]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* As part of a snapshot survey of decontamination practices at some national health service hospitals and other health premises, a small number of general dental practices were visited prior to the meeting of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee on 17 July 2000.

Visits have been made to dental hospitals and dental departments of NHS trusts as part of the comprehensive review of current decontamination practices in NHS hospitals which began in October 2000.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the report by Dr. David Hurrell on hospital sterilisation procedures was made available to *(a)* the Economics and Operational Research Division when they compiled their report, Risk Assessment for Transmission of Variant CJD via Surgical Instruments: a modelling approach and numerical scenarios, in December 2000 and *(b)* the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. [15300]

**Jacqui Smith** [holding answer 15 November 2001]: A snapshot survey of some hospitals and other health premises was undertaken last year by the NHS Estates Agency of the Department. An advisory panel, which included members of professional organisations as well as Departmental officials, was established to oversee it. Mr. David Hurrell acted as technical co-ordinator. As a result of that limited survey, a more comprehensive one was announced in October 2000.

The findings of the snapshot survey were readily available to the Department's Economic and Operation Research Division, as they were part of the overseeing advisory panel.

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee was not provided with results from the initial survey. But the Committee was informed at its meeting of 28 November 2000 that a major initiative had been launched to improve standards of washing, decontamination and general hygiene, earlier identified by the committee to be key steps in reducing the risk of transmission of variant CJD.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the major research programme into instrument decontamination referred to in paragraph 2.52 of the CJD incidents panel consultation paper 'Management of Hospital Exposure to CJD through Medical Procedures'. [15291]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* In 1999, the Department inaugurated a programme of research to develop and evaluate novel decontamination reagents and processes. Ten research contracts have been issued so far and a further four will be initiated in the near future. Progress on these contracts is overseen by a co-ordinating group which meets every six months, includes advisers from the Public Health Laboratory Service, the Medical Devices Agency and the National Health Service Estates Agency.

Over £565,000 was spent on this subject in the year April 2000/March 2001 and expenditure is expected to rise to nearly a £1 million in the current year. Details of the current research programmes can be found on the Medical Research Centre website at http://www.mrc.ac.uk/tse_tb2c.htm.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details of the *(a)* composition, *(b)* work and *(c)* number of meetings held by the project team set up by Department and to oversee the implementation of the programme of action set out in HSC 200–032. [15292]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The decontamination project is managed by a steering group that varies in composition depending on the aspect of the project it is considering. In its original form, it met four times. It is now led by Roger Evans, a former national health service trust chief executive, and its "core" membership contains representatives from the NHS Estates Agency, the Medical Devices Agency, the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, the Department's Operations Directorate and the Department's Public Health Division. It is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the project, including recommending the allocation of

resources and co-ordinating communications with the NHS and with the providers of sterile supply equipment and services. It has met three times and meets monthly.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he issued to press offices and Department of Health appointees on dealing with BBC inquiries on surgical instrument decontamination. [15419]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* The Department's communications directorate has standing instructions on how to deal with requests from the media. The media centre worked with Panorama over several months, answering a number of inquiries, arranging a briefing meeting with the Department's policy leads on CJD, blood and decontamination and ensuring Panorama was invited to a key media briefing. The press officer dealing with Panorama was provided with answers to their questions and gave Panorama a statement on behalf of Ministers, which they chose not to use.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he received the *(a)* interim report and *(b)* final report by Dr. Hurrell into the adequacy of hospital decontamination of surgical instruments. [15421]

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when a Minister saw a draft report from Dr. David Hurrell on Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in hospitals; and if he will make a statement; [15381]

(2) what action he is taking on Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in hospitals following reports by Dr. David Hurrell; [15380]

(3) when Dr. David Hurrell was commissioned to investigate the risk of hospital patients developing Creutzfeld-Jakob disease; what his terms of reference were; when a draft of his report was communicated to his Department; and what was his Department's response. [15378]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 16 December 2001]:* The survey, which began in September 1999, was a snapshot of decontamination practice at the time in a small number of hospitals and other health premises in England. It was commissioned by the Chief Medical Officer:

"To investigate the provision and use of equipment, facilities, trained personnel, management arrangements and technical support for decontamination of re-usable medical devices within NHS hospitals, private and voluntary organisations and primary medical and dental facilities;

To establish the extent to which these complied with current legal requirements, published standards (both European and UK) and Department of Health best practice guidance;

To obtain information on the usefulness of existing advice and guidance."

A presentation on the progress to date was given to regional directors of public health (RDsPH) in March 2000 and the completed report was sent to the Department in September 2000. Mr. Hurrell was employed as technical co-ordinator for the survey, acted as lead assessor for some of the visits, helped to analyse the information collected, contributed to the production of the reports and helped to give the presentation to the RDsPH. He was not responsible for writing either report. The survey was carried out for specific purposes, one of which was to set in train further work—including deciding whether a more comprehensive survey was needed.

The results of this preliminary survey showed that there were variations in decontamination practice, including instances that fell below acceptable standards. A comprehensive survey of national health service trust decontamination facilities began when Health Service Circular 2000/032 was issued on 18 October 2000. This circular clearly stated that

"a snapshot survey of current decontamination practices in a small number of healthcare premises in England has now been carried out. A more comprehensive review of decontamination provision across the health service now needs to take place so that plans for the future can be based on national findings."

In tandem with the surveys of decontamination, the Department developed a risk assessment on surgical instruments, which was first considered by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee in May 2000 and endorsed at its meeting in September 2000. It was published in March 2001. The Department presented its risk reduction strategy to the Committee's November 2000 meeting. The key components of this strategy were announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), the then Minister of State, Department of Health on 4 January 2001 with £200 million to be invested in the modernisation of NHS decontamination facilities and with the introduction of single-use instruments for tonsillectomies. Since then, we have:

Devised a self-assessment tool and collected data from every NHS trust;

Run a series of development workshops to raise awareness of the importance of decontamination among NHS managers and technical staff;

Visited and assessed all NHS acute hospital sites carrying out decontamination;

Implemented a programme of work to improve standards where necessary.

As a result of this, all NHS acute hospitals have access to a satisfactory standard of decontamination.

The modernisation of NHS decontamination services is a long-term process, not a one-off event and we will continue to ensure that appropriate precautions, based on evidence and scientific advice, are taken to ensure patient safety.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the views of the Chairman of the CJD Incidents Committee relating to the report of Dr. Hurrell. [15422]

**Jacqui Smith:** We gave careful consideration to the views of the chairman of the CJD incidents panel but decided there was nothing to be gained from letting the panel have sight of an out-of-date and partial survey that had been overtaken by more recent work.

The preliminary survey was a "snapshot" of decontamination practices at some national health service hospitals and other health premises. It was prepared for specific purposes, one of which was to set in train further work—including deciding whether a full survey was needed. The Department has since announced:

i. in October 2000, that a full survey would be undertaken; and

ii. in January 2001, that a £200 million investment programme over the next two years to address decontamination standards would be set in train.

The Department has published the results of the full survey, including the snapshot. A copy will be placed in the Library.

### Personal Medical Services

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the cost of the pilot Personal Medical Service scheme in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000. [16959]

**Mr. Hutton:** The costs of running personal medical services pilots were £38.2 million in 1998, £70.8 million in 1999, and £153.4 million in 2000.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of general practitioners work under Personal Medical Services; and what the intended proportion is by April 2002. [20865]

**Mr. Hutton:** With the implementation of the third wave of personal medical services pilots in October 2001, some 18 per cent. of general practitioners are now working under PMS arrangements nationally. Applications for the fourth wave of pilots (starting in April 2002) are still being submitted.

### Birth Certificates

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the fraudulent use of birth certificates in each of the last four years. [17323]

**Mr. Hutton:** Birth certificates are the responsibility of the Office for National Statistics.

There are no figures currently available to indicate the level of losses to the national health service as a result of the fraudulent use of birth certificates.

### Hospital Waiting Times

**Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the South Cheshire health authority waited *(a)* more than three months for an in-patient operation, *(b)* more than six months for an in-patient operation, *(c)* more than one year for an in-patient operation, *(d)* more than three months for an out-patient appointment, *(e)* more than six months for an out-patient appointment and *(f)* more than one year for an out-patient appointment in each of the last 10 years. [18437]

**Mr. Hutton:** The figures for in-patient and out-patient waiting times in south Cheshire health authority for the past six years (since the creation of the health authority) are shown in the tables.

*South Cheshire health authority in-patient waiting times*

| *Waiting time* | *1997*[1] | *1998*[1] | *1999*[1] | *2000*[1] | *2001*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3–6 months | 3,577 | 3,919 | 3,271 | 3,501 | 3,339 |
| 6–12 months | 3,655 | 4,909 | 3,396 | 3,187 | 2,899 |
| Over 12 months | 336 | 239 | 270 | 459 | 602 |
| Total | 7,568 | 9,067 | 6,937 | 7,147 | 6,840 |

[1] As at March each year

*South Cheshire health authority out-patient waiting times*

| *Waiting times* | *1998*[1] | *1999*[1] | *2000*[1] | *2001*[1] | *2001*[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13–25 weeks | 3,309 | 3,874 | 3,316 | 2,632 | 4,437 |
| 26+ weeks | 351 | 2,056 | 1,147 | 1,007 | 1,470 |
| Total 13+ weeks waiters | 3,660 | 5,930 | 4,463 | 3,639 | 5,907 |
| Full year GP referrals | 108,802 | 112,308 | 114,966 | 119,443 | 62,289 |
| Percentage year on year increase | — | 3.2 | 2.4 | 3.9 | 4.3 |

[1] As at March each year
[2] As at September—only five months' data
*Source:*
Based on FOT of 124578

### Illegal Meat Imports

**Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussion he has had with colleagues in other Government Departments on *(a)* the level of illegal meat imports into the UK and *(b)* the effectiveness of controls and enforcement measures at (i) ports, (ii) airports and (iii) elsewhere to tackle illegal meat imports; and what assessment he has made of the need for further action. [19305]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The Food Standards Agency, which is responsible for public health issues relating to food safety, is taking an active role in an interdepartmental review led by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs aimed at co-ordinating action across Government to ensure that rules governing imports of products of animal origin are enforced effectively.

The board of the Food Standards Agency discussed the issue of food import controls on 22 October 2001. The board approved a report containing a set of proposals aimed at improving the co-ordination of controls and the effectiveness of inspection of food imports. FSA officials are exploring these proposals further and will report back to the board.

### Adoption and Children Bill

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is the intention of clause 2 of the Adoption and Children Bill for the review panel to have power to recover the *(a)* whole or *(b)* part of the costs of the review panel from the relevant adoption agency. [19762]

**Jacqui Smith:** The White Paper "Adoption—a new approach" committed the Government to provide an independent review where an adoption agency intends to turn down a prospective adopter's application. A copy of

the White Paper has been placed in the Library. The Bill includes powers enabling the appropriate Minister to establish a mechanism, which may be run by an independent body, to review qualifying adoption agency determinations. The cost of establishing the independent review mechanism will be met centrally from the extra £66 million for adoption announced in the Adoption White Paper. We have promised to consult on the detail of how the independent review mechanism will operate, including any charges to be imposed on adoption agencies.

### Competitive Bidding

**Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the schemes administered by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies where funds are allocated by a competitive bidding process; and what was the amount of money allocated to each scheme. [19733]

**Mr. Hutton** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Department does not keep central records of budgets or schemes where, specifically, competitive bidding processes are used. Officials estimate that there might be hundreds of such budgets across the Department covering administration, executive agencies and programme funding.

### Primary Care Trusts

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many primary care trusts he expects to create under the NHS Reform Bill. [20896]

**Mr. Hutton:** None. The National Health Service Reform Bill will not create any further primary care trusts but will enable increased functions to be devolved from health authorities in line with the principles of Shifting the Balance of Power.

The power to create PCTs is contained in the National Health Service (Primary Care) Act, 1997. There are currently 164 PCTs in operation with a further 23 having been approved in October 2001 to become operational in April 2002. Approximately 130 further PCTs are hoping to become operational from 1 April 2002. The estimated total of PCTs operating from 1 April 2002 is expected to be over 300.

### NHS Patients (Private Health Care)

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of surgical procedures on NHS patients in Worcestershire were carried out in private sector hospitals, in the most recent period of which figures are available; what plans he has to increase the use of the private sector in the county; and if he will make a statement. [23087]

**Yvette Cooper:** Information relating to surgical procedures carried out in private sector hospitals on national health service patients is not currently available. However, we have commissioned a report to assess the scale of independent sector usage at national and regional level which is due out next year. This survey does not allow analysis at a local level and consequently data specifically on Worcestershire will not be available. However, Worcestershire health authority advises that they are investing £1.2 million on transferring 200 orthopaedic patients to the private sector.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently announced a patient choice package which includes increasing use of the private sector. From July 2002, if a patient with coronary heart disease has been on an in-patient waiting list for over six months, they will be able to seek swifter treatment in either the private sector, in another European Union country or in a different NHS hospital.

From October 2002, the same option of seeking treatment elsewhere at the six month in-patient waiting list stage, will also apply to anyone living in the London area. The option will be further extended to all patients across England throughout 2002–03 and beyond in the form of pilot sites. By the end of 2005, all patients in any part of the country will be able to choose where their treatment takes place, and book their appointment at a convenient time through an electronic booking system.

Any decision to use private sector providers will be made on the basis of value for money, clinical need and all appropriate clinical standards must be maintained.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were treated in the private sector for each quarter of the last two years. [20861]

**Mr. Hutton:** Activity information collected from health authorities in the common information core includes in-patient, out-patient and residential care activity commissioned in the commercial, voluntary and non-national health service statutory sectors. This total cannot be separated into totals for the private sector only.

### London Heart Hospital

**Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds are available in the London Heart hospital; and what have been the bed occupancy levels since 3 September. [21985]

**Mr. Hutton:** There are currently 65 beds available in the London Heart hospital. The acquisition of the hospital was 6 September 2001 and cardiac in-patient services were transferred from University College Hospitals NHS Trust (Middlesex hospital site) to the new facility on 1 October 2001. Occupancy for the month of November 2001 was 85.2 per cent.

### Food Supplements Directive

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the European Commission regarding the time period for submission of safety dossiers on nutrients to the EU scientific committee on foods; and if he will make a statement. [22350]

**Yvette Cooper:** The proposed European Union Directive on food supplements would require submission of dossiers supporting inclusion of additional nutrients and nutrient sources in the annexes to the Directive within 18 months of adoption.

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the European Commission on how it intends to interpret Article 5 of the food supplements Directive; and if he will make a statement. [22352]

**Yvette Cooper:** Article 5 of the proposed food supplements Directive would establish the approach to setting maximum limits for vitamins and minerals. The Food Standards Agency, which is negotiating this Directive on the Government's behalf, has discussed the interpretation of this Article with the European Commission on a number of occasions. The FSA is pressing for limits to be based on thorough scientific risk assessments.

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the European Commission on the nutrients included in the annexes to the food supplements Directive; and if he will make a statement. [22351]

**Yvette Cooper:** The annexes of the proposed European Union Directive on food supplements list nutrients and nutrient sources which can be used in these products; many substances used in food supplements on the United Kingdom market are not, however, included in the current lists. The Food Standards Agency, which is responsible for negotiating this Directive on the Government's behalf, has secured an amendment to the proposal which would allow individual member states, during a seven year transitional period, to allow sale of products containing substances which are not on the lists. The annexes would then be amended to include additional substances cleared by the EU scientific committee on foods.

## Cancer Drugs

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the oral answer to the Prime Minister of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 961, which new anti-cancer drugs are to be made available to the NHS by the end of the year. [22200]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* New cancer drugs come on stream continuously. Following appraisal by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, new drugs for 13 specific indications could be available by the end of 2001 (timings are of course subject to the appeals process). The national health service will be obliged to fund the implementation of any such guidance, and the extra resources that we announced recently will ensure that the NHS is well placed to do so.

## NHS Employees

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were employed in the national health service in each of the last four years; and how many were *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses. [22521]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*Headcount*

| | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total NHS staff[1] | 1,058,690 | 1,071,560 | 1,098,350 | 1,118,960 |
| *of which:* | | | | |
| Total NHS doctors | 89,620 | 91,840 | 93,980 | 96,320 |
| GMPs (excluding GP retainers)[2,3] | 29,390 | 29,700 | 29,990 | 30,250 |
| All HCHS medical and dental staff[4] | 60,230 | 62,140 | 63,990 | 66,070 |
| *of which:* | | | | |
| Total NHS nurses[5] | 435,960 | 440,640 | 450,600 | 460,010 |
| HCHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff | 417,570 | 421,750 | 431,100 | 440,810 |
| *of which:* | | | | |
| Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff | 300,470 | 304,560 | 310,140 | 316,750 |
| Unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff | 116,430 | 116,580 | 119,680 | 123,850 |
| GMS practice nurses | 18,390 | 18,890 | 19,500 | 19,200 |

[1] This figure includes GP retainers

[2] GP retainers were collected for the first time in the 1999 census, for comparability these have been excluded from GMPs

[3] The 1999 figure excludes 972 GP retainers and the 2000 figure excludes 1,117 GP retainers

[4] Excludes medical hospital practitioners and medical clinical assistants, most of whom are also GPs working part-time in hospitals

[5] Total includes unclassifiable nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff

*Notes:*

1. National health service hospital and community health services and general medical and personal medical services: All NHS staff, including all doctors and nurses, as at 30 September each year
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10
3. Figures exclude learners and agency staff
4. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts
5. General and Personal Medical Services data collected at 1 October 1997–99

*Sources:*

Department of Health medical and dental work force census
Department of Health non-medical work force census
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

### Mayday Hospital, Croydon

**Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated at the accident and emergency department at Mayday hospital, Croydon in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what the capacity is for that period. [22680]

**Mr. Hutton:** In the financial year 2000–01, Mayday health care national health service trust had a total of 95,259 accident and emergency attendances, 86,681 being first attendances. Accident and emergency capacity figures are not collected.

### Digital Hearing Aids

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a full copy of the interim evaluation results from the First Wave digital hearing aid sites. [23236]

**Jacqui Smith:** The modernisation of hearing aid services project is being evaluated by the Institute for Hearing Research on an on-going basis. The Department has been, and will continue to be, looking at the information coming out of that work with the Institute, but no formal interim reports are being published. The evaluation will be completed by the end of 2002, and a full report will be published at that time.

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 486W, on digital hearing aids, by what date his Department will pass on the interim evaluation results of the first 20 first wave NHS trusts that are providing digital hearing aids to *(a)* the Scottish Executive, *(b)* the National Assembly for Wales and *(c)* the Northern Ireland Assembly. [23554]

**Jacqui Smith:** The modernisation of hearing aid services project is being evaluated by the Institute for Hearing Research on an on-going basis. While no formal interim reports are being published, officials of the Department are in contact with officials of the devolved Administrations and are sharing information with them as the project progresses.

We will make the full results available to the devolved Administrations when they are available.

### Nursing

**Gillian Merron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurse cadet schemes are in operation across the UK; and what plans he has to *(a)* continue to fund and *(b)* extend funding for such schemes. [23075]

**Mr. Hutton:** As at 31 March 2001 there were 64 cadet schemes in operation in England.

The operation and funding of cadet schemes is determined locally, in accordance with local needs and priorities.

**Gillian Merron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further plans he has to promote careers in nursing to young people; and if he will make a statement. [23076]

**Mr. Hutton:** In 2002–03 the Department will be running a national publicity campaign, a schools competition to promote careers to young people and 'nurses day'. National Health Service Careers will continue to offer information on nursing careers via revised literature, telephone and website. The Workforce Development Confederation will be co-ordinating liaison with schools in their local areas. Loughborough University have been commissioned to research the attractiveness of the NHS as an employer to potential nursing staff.

### Overseas Treatment

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to allow the Isle of Wight *(a)* hospital trust, *(b)* health authority and *(c)* primary care group (i) to purchase operations abroad, (ii) to offer assistance with travel costs to patients being operated on abroad and (iii) to offer assistance with travel costs for relatives of patients being operated on abroad; and what financial resources he is making available for those purposes and to meet additional administrative costs. [22792]

**Mr. Hutton** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* In the light of rulings of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in July this year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 27 August that national health service bodies could commission treatment for NHS patients from other member states of the European Economic Area (EEA), as part of their wider efforts to reduce waiting times. My right hon. Friend made it clear that NHS bodies would need to meet the costs of treating NHS patients elsewhere in the EEA out of their existing budgets.

The regulations governing reimbursement of travel costs are being amended to enable NHS bodies to pay the travel costs of patients from the point of departure for their international journey (an airport, international train station or ferry port). Travel costs incurred by relatives of those being treated abroad will only be reimbursed if it is necessary on medical grounds that the patient be accompanied.

On 15 October my right hon. Friend announced that the Department would be working with three test-bed sites in the south-east of England, East Kent, Portsmouth and West Sussex/East Surrey, on a pilot to send NHS patients to mainland Europe. The Department will produce guidance for the NHS based on the scheme. The first patients should travel in January 2002, subject to contractual discussions.

**Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on commissioning treatment for NHS patients overseas by the NHS. [25099]

**Mr. Hutton:** In the light of recent rulings of the European Court of Justice, we announced that we would amend the National Health Service Act 1977 to enable the NHS to commission treatment within the European Economic Area (EEA). We will make regulations shortly. We will also take this opportunity to permit NHS bodies to commission care from outside the EEA, where it is in the patient's best interest to do so. We none the less expect that the overwhelming majority of referrals, where they occur, will be to countries of the EEA.

Regulations will also be made shortly to amend the National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) Regulations 1988 to permit NHS

bodies to pay for the travel of NHS patients going overseas for treatment funded by the NHS. The NHS will meet the cost of the patient's travel from the point at which they begin their international journey (the airport, ferry port or international train station) to the foreign provider. Reimbursement of travel expenses between the patient's home to the airport, ferry port of international train station will be governed by the same rules that currently apply to payment of travelling expenses to hospitals in England. This change will ensure that patients treated overseas under the auspices of the NHS will not be disadvantaged by having to travel further for that treatment.

### Health Spending Statistics

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has collated on the proportion of total expenditure on health which is met by *(a)* private funding and *(b)* public funding in (i) each EU country, (ii) the USA, (iii) Australia and (iv) New Zealand in 1998. [22791]

**Mr. Hutton** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The latest figures for the proportion of total health expenditure that is met by *(a)* private funding and *(b)* public funding in (i) each European Union country, (ii) the USA, (iii) Australia and (iv) New Zealand are set out in the table.

*Percentage*

| | *Private* | | *Public* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1998* | *1999* | *1998* | *1999* |
| Austria | 28 | 28 | 72 | 72 |
| Belgium | 29 | 28 | 71 | 72 |
| Denmark | 18 | 18 | 82 | 82 |
| Finland | 23 | 25 | 77 | 75 |
| France | 24 | 24 | 76 | 76 |
| Germany | 24 | — | 76 | — |
| Greece | 43 | — | 57 | — |
| Ireland | 24 | — | 76 | — |
| Italy | 29 | 28 | 71 | 72 |
| Luxembourg | 8 | 7 | 92 | 93 |
| Netherlands | 31 | 32 | 69 | 68 |
| Portugal | 33 | — | 67 | — |
| Spain | 23 | — | 77 | — |
| Sweden | 16 | — | 84 | — |
| United Kingdom | 16 | 17 | 84 | 83 |
| Australia | 30 | — | 70 | — |
| New Zealand | 23 | 22 | 77 | 78 |
| United States | 55 | 55 | 45 | 45 |

*Source:*
OECD Health Data 2001

### Care Leavers

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been commissioned in the last five years into the experiences of young people who have left the care system. [23247]

**Jacqui Smith:** There is a growing body of research into the experiences of care leavers. There is a useful summary of most recent material in "Helping Care Leavers: Problems and Strategic Responses" by Professor Mike Stein and Dr. Jim Wade of the University of York, published in 2000 as part of the Department of Health's resource pack "Getting it Right: Good Practice in Leaving Care."

The social services inspectorate produced a detailed inspection report in this area in 1997, "When Leaving Home is Also Leaving Care". The Department commissioned "Moving On" by Biehal et al, published in 1995. This research was built on by Professor Peter Marsh and Mark Peel at the University of Sheffield, in their Department of Health funded study "Leaving Care in Partnership: Family Involvement with Care Leavers" published in 1999. Other research commissioned recently by the Department includes the "Audit and Assessment of Leaving Care Services in London" by Jenni Vernon of the National Children's Bureau (September 2000).

The Department also has research in progress. In April this year it commissioned Dr. Jim Wade to investigate the costs and outcomes of transitional support for care leavers. The study will consider a range of outcomes achieved by young people and evaluate the costs of different packages of support in different local authorities. Earlier this year the Department also called for proposals for a study of barriers to further education and training for care leavers under its Quality Protects Research Initiative.

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young people who left the care system went into *(a)* full-time education, *(b)* further education, *(c)* higher education and *(d)* Government training schemes in the last five years broken down by regions and nations; and what support is given to young people with multiple disadvantages to access job opportunities. [23200]

**Jacqui Smith:** Statistical information concerning the educational or employment status of care leavers in England over the last five years is not available. A new statistical collection which will provide this information for care leavers aged 19 has recently been introduced by the Department, and the first year of data will cover 12 months ending 31 March 2002. The Department plans to publish this information in autumn 2002.

Matters relating to Wales and Scotland are for the devolved Administrations.

The Department for Education and Skills is currently rolling out the Connexions service across England. This will offer all young people aged 13 to 19 support and advice to help them fulfil their potential by giving them access to a personal adviser. For those with multiple issues to address, the role of the personal adviser will be to help the young person identify their needs and aspirations, supporting them in overcoming difficulties. This will include working with and supporting education and training institutions, and employers, in meeting these needs.

### NHS Staff Shortages

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the shortages in the NHS of *(a)* nurses, *(b)* GPs, *(c)* consultants and *(d)* therapists and other specialist staff. [23253]

**Mr. Hutton:** The NHS Plan acknowledges that a shortage of human resources is the biggest constraint faced by the National Health Service today. Targets for increasing the number of doctors and nurses were set in the NHS Plan and rolled forward in the manifesto before the last election.

The NHS Plan targets are for 7,500 more consultants, 2,000 more general practitioners, 6,500 more therapists and other health professionals and 20,000 more nurses by 2004. In September 2000 there were 1,100 more consultants, 126 more GPs, 1,400 more therapists and other health professionals and 6,300 more nurses than in September 1999, the NHS Plan baseline. Provisional data from the 2001 census indicate that 10,000 more nurses were employed in the NHS in 2001 than in 2000.

The manifesto targets are for 10,000 more doctors and 20,000 more nurses by 2005 over the 2000 baseline.

The September 2001 census, giving the latest position against these targets, will be available in January 2002.

## NHS Spending

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by health authority area NHS spending per head of population. [23403]

**Mr. Hutton:** The expenditure by weighted head of population for each English health authority area for 2000–01 is shown in the table.

*Expenditure by health authorities and primary care trusts*

£

| *Health authority* | *Expenditure by weighted head* |
|---|---|
| Avon | 856.75 |
| Barking and Havering | 773.42 |
| Barnet | 959.87 |
| Barnsley | 766.50 |
| Bedfordshire | 779.74 |
| Berkshire | 804.46 |
| Bexley and Greenwich | 886.09 |
| Birmingham | 823.71 |
| Bradford | 769.58 |
| Brent and Harrow | 823.29 |
| Bromley | 971.74 |
| Buckinghamshire | 755.09 |
| Bury and Rochdale | 771.15 |
| Calderdale and Kirklees | 763.88 |
| Cambridgeshire | 786.94 |
| Camden and Islington | 1,067.88 |
| Cornwall and Isles of Scilly | 796.09 |
| County Durham and Darlington | 738.32 |
| Coventry | 802.56 |
| Croydon | 925.44 |
| Doncaster | 861.88 |
| Dorset | 1,023.69 |
| Dudley | 828.09 |
| Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow | 826.21 |
| East and North Hertfordshire | 803.66 |
| East Kent | 810.16 |
| East Lancashire | 740.66 |
| East London and The City | 869.91 |
| East Riding and Hull | 787.13 |
| East Surrey | 958.66 |
| East Sussex, Brighton and Hove | 827.74 |
| Enfield and Haringey | 817.53 |
| Gateshead and South Tyneside | 784.29 |
| Gloucestershire | 799.79 |
| Herefordshire | 761.71 |
| Hillingdon | 753.76 |
| Isle of Wight | 867.61 |
| Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster | 1,011.24 |
| Kingston and Richmond | 829.50 |
| Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham | 886.88 |
| Leeds | 869.94 |
| Leicestershire | 779.71 |
| Lincolnshire | 808.95 |
| Liverpool | 887.35 |

*Expenditure by health authorities and primary care trusts*

£

| *Health authority* | *Expenditure by weighted head* |
|---|---|
| Manchester | 869.02 |
| Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth | 882.91 |
| Morecambe Bay | 1,346.04 |
| Newcastle and North Tyneside | 811.10 |
| Norfolk | 815.11 |
| North and East Devon | 800.95 |
| North and Mid Hampshire | 835.93 |
| North Cheshire | 811.75 |
| North Cumbria | 793.52 |
| North Derbyshire | 744.33 |
| North Essex | 839.97 |
| North Nottinghamshire | 761.33 |
| North Staffordshire | 760.11 |
| North West Lancashire | 770.48 |
| North Yorkshire | 814.07 |
| Northamptonshire | 830.95 |
| Northumberland | 871.50 |
| Nottingham | 842.50 |
| Oxfordshire | 823.14 |
| Portsmouth and South East Hampshire | 762.50 |
| Redbridge and Waltham Forest | 901.60 |
| Rotherham | 773.29 |
| Salford and Trafford | 839.62 |
| Sandwell | 777.76 |
| Sefton | 1,040.25 |
| Sheffield | 956.59 |
| Shropshire | 763.29 |
| Solihull | 756.17 |
| Somerset | 825.30 |
| South and West Devon | 800.84 |
| South Cheshire | 801.87 |
| South Essex | 806.50 |
| South Humber | 802.29 |
| South Lancashire | 779.41 |
| South Staffordshire | 792.06 |
| Southampton and South West Hampshire | 781.00 |
| Southern Derbyshire | 759.33 |
| St. Helens and Knowsley | 749.06 |
| Stockport | 759.28 |
| Suffolk | 778.56 |
| Sunderland | 781.94 |
| Tees | 824.19 |
| Wakefield | 854.72 |
| Walsall | 776.48 |
| Warwickshire | 798.29 |
| West Hertfordshire | 800.40 |
| West Kent | 786.21 |
| West Pennine | 746.22 |
| West Surrey | 840.34 |
| West Sussex | 784.64 |
| Wigan and Bolton | 732.65 |
| Wiltshire | 828.57 |
| Wirral | 798.81 |
| Wolverhampton | 763.81 |
| Worcestershire | 827.41 |

*Note:*

1. Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in the year. The expenditure is the total spent by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board.

2. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be identified.

3. Some health authorities act as lead commissioners for particular specialties which inflates their figures when compared with others and also causes differences between years. Other factors may also distort the figures so the results are therefore not all directly comparable with each other and with answers to similar questions for previous years.

*Source:*

Health authority audited summarisation forms 2000–01.
Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01.
Weighted population estimates for 2000–01.

### GP Waiting Times

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given to GPs about reducing notified waiting times for appointments. [23433]

**Mr. Hutton:** Primary care trusts have been working with practices to implement plans to achieve by March 2002 the 60 per cent. milestone for patients being able routinely to see a GP within two working days. These plans were informed by advice issued to primary care trusts and groups in June 2000.

Further comprehensive guidance is being developed with key stakeholders for issue in the new year.

### Cancer Screening

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a prostate cancer screening programme; and if he will make a statement. [23381]

**Yvette Cooper:** We are committed to introducing a screening programme for prostate cancer if and when screening and treatment techniques are sufficiently well developed. Trials for prostate cancer screening have shown that there are a number of complex issues involved. There is no conclusive evidence from any country that screening for prostate cancer would reduce the death rate from prostate cancer.

The national health Service prostate cancer programme was launched on 6 September 2000, covering research, treatment and a risk management programme specifically around improving early detection and diagnosis.

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will give a breakdown of how the money for the NHS *(a)* breast cancer screening programme and *(b)* cervical cancer screening programme is allocated; [23380]

(2) how much money has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent in the national health service on (i) breast cancer screening programmes and (ii) cervical cancer screening programmes in (A) each of the financial years since 1990 and (B) future years for which budgets have been set, broken down by regional health authority. [23379]

**Yvette Cooper:** The information is not available in the format requested. Funding for the national health service breast and cervical screening programmes is allocated directly to health authorities as part of their main allocations each year. It is estimated that the breast screening programme in England costs £52 million per year[1] and the cervical screening programme in England costs £132 million per year[2].

As set out in the NHS Cancer Plan, the breast screening programme in England will be expanded by 2004 to include routine invitations for women aged 65 to 70. £1.5 million revenue and £2 million capital has been allocated in 2001–02 to begin the national roll-out of the expansion. Allocations for 2002–03 will be announced in due course.

[1] Department of Health Economics and Operational Research Division 2001

[2] National Audit Office, The Performance of the NHS Cervical Screening Programme in England (22 April 1998)

### Older Homeless People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what standards and milestones have been set to ensure that the health and social care needs of older homeless people are specifically addressed in the implementation of the National Service Frameworks for Older People and Mental Health. [24190]

**Jacqui Smith:** The standards and milestones for improvements in access and delivery of health and social care services set within the National Service Framework for Older People apply equally to all older people, and where appropriate younger people, whatever their housing status. The National Service Framework for Mental Health focuses on adults of working age. Like the NSF for Older People, the standards and milestones apply to all including the homeless.

### Chief Medical Officer (Annual Report)

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates in each of the past 10 years the Chief Medical Officer published his annual report. [24093]

**Mr. Hutton:** The Chief Medical Officer's annual report was published in September during the years 1991–98, and specifically in recent years, on 25 September 1996, 30 September 1997 and 9 September 1998. Since then Professor Liam Donaldson, the current Chief Medical Officer, reviewed the format of the annual report and published the first one during his term of office on 10 December 2001. No report was published in the intervening years of 1999–2000 although the Chief Medical Officer has produced five major reports on specific topics during this period.

### Cancer Networks

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) to which individual or organisation cancer networks are answerable; and what the accountability arrangements are for cancer networks; [23820]

(2) if cancer networks will be given a budget to commission services; and if commissioning and providing functions will be separated; [23827]

(3) what the relationship will be between strategic health authorities and cancer networks; and if he will make a statement. [23828]

**Yvette Cooper:** The NHS Cancer Plan said that cancer networks would be the organisational model for cancer services to implement the Cancer Plan, bringing together commissioners, providers, the voluntary sector and local authorities. Cancer networks have been working together to develop strategic service delivery plans to develop all aspects of cancer services. The National Health Service Planning and Performance Framework published on 6 December set out the requirement that NHS organisations should work together through cancer

networks to deliver the cancer programme in line with network's strategic plans. The role of cancer networks and their relationships with other NHS bodies will be clarified shortly in our response to the consultation on Shifting the Balance of Power in the NHS.

### Technology Appraisal Guidance

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how his Department will ensure that health authorities and primary care trusts fulfil their statutory obligation after January 2002 to implement technology appraisal guidance issued by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence; [23825]

(2) if health authorities and primary care trusts will have a statutory obligation to implement technology appraisal guidance issued by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence before January 2002. [23826]

**Mr. Hutton:** The statutory obligations on health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for treatments recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence applies to guidance issued before and after 1 January 2002.

We expect all national health service bodies to fulfil their statutory obligations and the Department will use appropriate performance management arrangements to ensure that they do so.

### Cancer Nurses

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the number of specialist nurses for *(a)* lung cancer, *(b)* stomach cancer and *(c)* urological cancers. [23819]

**Yvette Cooper:** The NHS Cancer Plan sets out our commitment to investment in the cancer nursing work force. We expect to see an increase in all specialist cancer nurses in line with needs identified in local cancer service delivery plans.

### Long-term Care Homes

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned into the reasons for the closure of nursing and residential homes. [23422]

**Jacqui Smith:** We have commissioned a study from the Personal Social Services Research Unit at the University of Kent.

### Pesticide Residues

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review safety levels of pesticide residues in food. [24014]

**Mr. Morley:** I have been asked to reply.

DEFRA works closely with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) on all matters concerning pesticide residues in food.

The safety of pesticide residues in foodstuffs is kept under continuous review by DEFRA's Pesticide Safety Directorate with advice from the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP). Additionally checks are made that residues in food are within statutory limits through a wide-ranging surveillance programme overseen by the independent Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC). The results from the PRC's surveillance programme are published quarterly on the Committee's website at www.pesticides.gov.uk.

There has been some specific concern over the potential combined effects of pesticide residues and at the request of the FSA, the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT), a group of independent experts, established a Working Group for the Risk Assessment of Mixtures of Pesticides/Veterinary Medicines (WIGRAMP).

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Pilot Schemes (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if her Department plans to extend the *(a)* Government General Practitioner and *(b)* Internet Learning and Access Point trials to the constituency of Buckingham. [22531]

**Mr. Alexander:** We have no plans to extend the pilots, which will finish as planned on 1 March and the results will be fully evaluated.

We have begun the process of evaluation and are working in parallel with other Departments in order to proceed to national roll-out if the pilot proves a success and provides value for money.

### Postal Service (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many working days were lost through *(a)* unofficial and *(b)* official industrial action by the Post Office in the constituency of Buckingham in each year since 1997. [22533]

**Mr. Alexander:** Industrial relations and the resolution of disputes are matters for the management of the company and the unions. I am advised by the company that the information sought is not available on a constituency basis.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of *(a)* first and *(b)* second class mail was delivered within the target time in the constituency of Buckingham in each year since 1997. [22520]

**Mr. Alexander:** Service delivery targets are operational issues for Consignia provided that it remains within the terms of the licence issued to it by the Postal Services Commission.

I am advised by the company that figures on service delivery targets are not held by parliamentary constituency.

### Consignia

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department was informed about the proposed abolition of the second delivery of post. [21232]

**Mr. Alexander** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* There is no formal requirement for Consignia to inform the Department about its proposals in relation to second delivery as they are operational issues for the company provided that it remains within the terms of the licence issued to it by the Postal Services Commission. However, the Department has regular discussions with Consignia about a range of strategic issues facing the company.

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met Consignia to discuss the franchise arrangements for Parcelforce. [23267]

**Mr. Alexander** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The Department has regular discussions with Consignia about a range of strategic issues facing the company. However, franchise arrangements for Parcelforce are operational issues for the management of the company which I understand is consulting with the unions on the matter.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department was informed by Consignia of the proposal to charge for post delivered before 9.30 am. [21233]

**Mr. Alexander** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* There is no formal requirement for Consignia to inform the Department about its proposals to charge for post delivered before 9.30 am as they are operational issues for the company provided that it remains within the terms of the licence issued to it by for the Postal Services Commission. However the Department has regular discussions with Consignia about a range of strategic issues facing the company.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations have taken place between the Government and Consignia regarding the announcement of job cuts; when her Department was informed by Consignia that it was to make job cuts; what discussions have taken place to mitigate the effects of these job losses; what action the Government intend to take to save as many jobs as possible; whether the various post services where these cuts may take place have been identified; how many job losses there will be in Coventry; what discussions took place between Consignia and the postal unions prior to the announcement of job cuts; and whether there are any meetings planned with the postal unions regarding the announcement of job cuts. [23656]

**Mr. Alexander** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The Department has regular discussions with Consignia about a range of strategic issues facing the company. How this company intends to make the £1.2 billion cost savings it has announced is an operational issue for the company in consultation with the unions. The company does not yet have a proposal on what impact the £1.2 billion cost savings will have on employment levels and has not informed the Government of specific plans of how it intends to achieve these savings.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the cost of the name change to Consignia. [23654]

**Mr. Alexander:** The choice of name of the Post Office company and the cost of its implementation were essentially commercial matters for the company and are not areas in which Government would have sought to intervene.

I am informed by the company that, by the time the name effectively came into use on the day on which the property, rights and liabilities of the Post Office were transferred to the new company, the total costs were less than £2 million, much of which I am informed would have been incurred in any event in respect of signage, stationery and financial documentation because of the transformation to a plc.

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she intends to waive dividend payments from Consignia for the current financial year. [22762]

**Mr. Alexander:** No decision has been taken.

### Post Offices (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much funding has been granted to help sustain and improve post offices in the constituency of Buckingham in the last 12 months. [22519]

**Mr. Alexander:** Since 1999, £480 million has been invested by the Government in the Horizon programme to automate the post office network. It is not possible to give a figure for the benefit of this initiative specifically for the Buckingham constituency. Development work is continuing on the other funding proposals to implement the recommendations of the Performance and Innovation Unit's report to help sustain and improve the post office network.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much funding has been granted to assist with one-off capital costs associated with the refurbishment or relocation of rural post offices in the constituency of Buckingham in the last 12 months. [22507]

**Mr. Alexander:** The Sub-Post Office Start-up Capital Subsidy Scheme came into operation in September and is being administered by Post Office Ltd. on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I understand that no applications have yet been received in respect of rural sub-post offices in the Buckingham constituency.

### Fireworks

**Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made regarding the effectiveness of legislation controlling the *(a)* sale and *(b)* use of fireworks. [23239]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 13 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 943W.

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of persons injured by fireworks in each of the last five years were injured by fireworks in (1) *(a)* category 3 and *(b)* category 4 of BS 7114; [23655]

(2) *(a)* Category 1 and *(b)* Category 2 of BS 7114. [23673]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** We do not collect information on the BS7114 technical category of fireworks involved in injuries. Our annual data collection exercise provides details of the place of accident, such as public display or private party, and the type of firework involved, based on the patient's description. Category 4 fireworks are

prohibited from general sale by the Fireworks (Safety) regulations 1997. We also know that the majority of injuries are caused in some way by misuse. We have no evidence of any correlation between the technical category of fireworks and the levels of injury.

**Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many representations she has received since 1 October from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public concerning the use, misuse and sale of fireworks. [24140]

**Ms Hewitt:** My Department has received 348 representations from hon. Members and 653 directly from members of the public, concerning a wide range of issues relating to fireworks.

### Internet Shopping

**Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to protect consumers from unscrupulous traders on the internet. [22297]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** We are providing protection through codes of practice, dispute resolution and clear information for on-line shoppers.

In November I launched a Safe Internet Shopping Campaign together with the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness. The campaign aimed to raise awareness about e-shopping and demonstrate that it is safe as long as shoppers follow basic, common-sense guidelines.

Existing consumer protection legislation (the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and distance selling regulations) do protect consumers from credit card fraud and give them a cooling-off period in respect of most contracts.

DTI is working with business and consumer organisations to deliver straightforward guidance, and to provide access to more comprehensive information about the full range of concerns through DTI's Consumer Gateway website.

### Postal Delivery

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in which areas the Royal Mail has withdrawn the second daily postal delivery in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [17141]

**Mr. Alexander:** Proposals in relation to second delivery are operational issues for the company, provided that it remains within the terms of the licence issued to it by the Postal Services Commission.

### 'Your Guide' Pilot Project

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the 'Your Guide' pilot project in Leicestershire; and if she will make a statement. [22763]

**Mr. Alexander:** The 'Your Guide' pilot of post offices as "Government General Practitioners" was launched in September and will finish as planned on 1 March.

We have began the process of evaluation and are working in parallel with other Departments in order to proceed to national roll-out if the pilot proves a success and provides value for money.

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she has taken to promote the 'Your Guide', initiative; and if she will make a statement. [23592]

**Mr. Alexander** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The Department has provided £25 million funding for the Leicestershire and Rutland pilot and is engaging other central and local government departments and the devolved Administrations in the project. Consignia, which is running the pilot in Leicestershire and Rutland, is actively promoting the service locally within the pilot area. The future of 'Your Guide' nationally depends on a full evaluation of the pilot which ends on 1 March.

### Fair Trade

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what fairly traded products, other than tea and coffee, have been purchased by her Department in each of the last five years; and what was their value. [17547]

**Mr. Alexander:** The Department's contracted caterer supplies fairly traded coffee. Directorates are free to purchase catering supplies from other sources and reliable information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Broadband Services

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the population of *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the UK have access to broadband servers by means of (i) ADSL, (ii) cable, (iii) wireless and (iv) satellite. [23949]

**Mr. Alexander:** A map showing availability of technologies is contained in the second annual UK Online report (http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/progress/anrep2001/default.htm).

**Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the population of *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom have access to broadband services by means of (i) ADSL, (ii) cable, (iii) wireless and (iv) satellite. [20650]

**Mr. Alexander:** A map showing geographical availability of technologies is contained in the second annual UK Online report (http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/progress/anrep2001/default.htm). This report also contains links to the report "Connecting Scotland: Our Broadband Future", which sets out the availability of broadband in Scotland.

### Regional Selective Assistance (Cornwall)

**Ms Atherton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much regional selective assistance funding has been granted to Cornwall since 1997. [24158]

**Alan Johnson:** This Department has made 56 offers of regional selective assistance to businesses in Cornwall since May 1997, totalling £15.2 million in grant, to support projects with a total capital expenditure of £99.9 million, and to create and safeguard a total of 2,852 jobs.

## Non-departmental Public Bodies

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the reviews that commenced in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01 of non-departmental public bodies. [22567]

**Ms Hewitt:** Following is the information requested relating to quinquennial reviews of the Department's executive NDPBs:

*1999–2000*

The Design Council—completed

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service—completed

National Consumer Council—completed.

*2000–01*

The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority—completed

The six grant awarding Research Councils—completed

The Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils—Stage 1 completed.

The Coal Authority—Stage 1 completed.

Following is the information requested relating to quinquennial reviews of the Department's advisory and tribunal NDPBs:

*1999–2000*

Central Arbitration Committee—completed

International Oil and Gas Business Advisory Board (previously the OSO Industry Board)—completed

Measurement Advisory Committee—completed.

*2000–01*

Renewable Energy Advisory Committee—completed

Standing Advisory Committee on Industrial Property—completed

Insolvency Practitioners' Tribunal—completed.

## Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, 'Winning the Generation Game', *(a)* what progress her Department has made and *(b)* what future plans her Department has for acting on them; and if she will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24206]

**Ms Hewitt:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, at column 335W.

## South West of England Regional Development Agency

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the projects *(a)* being undertaken and *(b)* completed by the South West of England Regional Development Agency. [23752]

**Alan Johnson:** In most cases the projects supported by the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) are undertaken on a partnership basis. Projects for which the SWRDA provided more than £25,000 in 2000–01 are listed in the RDA Annual Report 2000–01 which is available in the Libraries of the House or can be obtained direct from the SWRDA.

Sub-regional projects the RDA supported in 2000–01 by providing more than £25,000:

*Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole:*

A Model for a 'Virtual' Centre of Excellence in Coastal Zone Management Training

Agri-connexion, Kingston Maurward

Allendale Heritage and Community Centre, Wimborne

Awareness, Advice and Action for Skills Development, Bournemouth

Bournemouth and Poole Learning Network

Bournemouth Incubator Centre

Developing Fast-Track Training for ICT Technicians

Development Manager for Lyme Regis Development Trust

Higher Barn, Melbury Osmond, Dorchester

Higher Education South West Business Net (HESWBusNet), Bournemouth

Honeybrook Farm Visitors Centre, Wimborne

Kimmeridge Marine Education Centre

Norden Park and Ride, Corfe, Wareham

Poole Arts Centre

Shaftesbury Advice Centre Weymouth Skate Park

*Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly:*

Business Information Service (Enterprise Edge)

Celtic Film and Television Festival

Chacewater Village Hall

Cornwall Objective One Technical Assistance

Combined Universities in Cornwall

Coverack Space 2000

Developing Fast-Track Training for ICT Technicians

Digital Peninsula Network

Eden Institute Centre

Eden Public Realm Works, St. Austell

Gaia Centre, Delabole

Geevor Tin Mine Emergency Works, St. Just

Great Onslow, Bodmin Moor
Green Park Feasibility
Helston Business Park
Ladock Parish Hall
Let's do IT
Long Rock, Penzance
Lower Pengegon
Mylor Yacht Harbour
Plot F, Saltash Parkway (Habit Diamond)
Spanning the Century, Camel Trail, Padstow
St. Austell Town Centre
Tolvaddon Energy Park
Towednack and Nancledra Community Hall
Train Net
UFP Camborne, Pool, Redruth
Youth Link—Penwith and Kerrier

*Devon, Plymouth and Torbay:*

181 Rendell Street, Plymouth
Achievement Plus, Plymouth
Agri-BIP Rural Business Support
Basic Employability Skills
Bovey Tracey Youth Café
Derriton Viaduct, Holsworthy
Devon and West Somerset Key Fund
East Devon Business Centre, Honiton
Exeter Advanced Technologies
Exeter Innovation Centre
High Street and Peel Street Redevelopment, Plymouth
Honicknowle Employment Project, Plymouth
Infrastructure Improvements, Sowton, Exeter
Jersey Farm, Sampford Peverell
Kingsbridge Age Concern and Rest Centre
Marine Projects, Plymouth
Millbay Laundry, Plymouth
ORBIT, Ottery St. Mary
Pall Cycleway, Ilfracombe
Pitts Cleave, Tavistock
Plymouth Job to Job Subsidy
Rural Counselling Programme
Sourton—Lake Cycleway
Springboard to Learning, Plymouth
St. Sidwells Centre, Exeter
Stonehouse Creek Community Centre, Plymouth
Tamar Science Park, Plymouth
The Soundhouse, Plymouth
Theatre Royal Production and Education Centre, Plymouth
Wallabrook Viaduct
Yeo Bridge, Barnstaple

*Gloucestershire:*

Bream Community Centre Refurbishment Scheme
Coney Hill Neighbourhood College Centre
Cranfield Medical Research Centre
CREATE Training, Lydney
Developing Fast-Track Training for ICT Technicians
Fixing the Future—Solution for IT Services Skills
Forest of Dean Radio Project
Gloucestershire Development Agency—Support for SRP
Gloucestershire Innovation Centre
Gloucestershire Network Neighbourhoods Projects Network on behalf of the Gloucestershire Training Group Centre for Engineering Excellence
Hesters Way Community Resource Centre
Lister Petter mixed-use regeneration site, Dursley
Matson Lane Community College Health and ICT Resource Centre
Skill Joy
The Link Group

*Somerset:*

Baird Clothing
Bowdens Farm, Langport
Bussman Cooper
Computer-based, Internet-linked Heavy Goods Vehicle Provision in the South West Peninsula
E-Business Skills Development Programme
Filton Econet Partnership for Sustainable Business Development in the South West region
Morlands Factory Site, Glastonbury
Somerset Skills Support Project
South West Marine Sector Training and Development
The Western Colleges Consortium for On-Line Learning
Tourism Task Force—Bristol, Bath, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset
Watchet Youth Centre
Watchet Marina

*Wiltshire and Swindon:*

Berwick St. John Community Resource Centre
Charlton Park Farms, Office Development, Malmesbury
Easton Farm, Tourist Facility, Berwick St. John
Hoechst Trespaphan
Little Durnford Farms, Business and Workspace, Salisbury
Multimedia in Wiltshire
Oakley Business Park, Workspace Units, Dinton
Purton Down Biotech Incubator Centre
R&K Wise
Skills at Work in Wiltshire and Swindon
St. Martins Farm, Tourist Facility, Warminster
Swindon Pressings Ltd.
The Beeches Court Farm, Tourist Facility, Calne
The Western Colleges Consortium for On-Line Learning
Ushers

*Bristol and West of England:*

Cabot Community Sports Centre, Bristol

E-Business Skills Development Programme

Emersons Innovation

Engineering for Avon

Harbourside Project, Bristol

Nailey Farm, St. Catherine's, Bath

Old Town Quarry, Weston-super-Mare

Safe and Warm Phase 2, Bristol

Temple Quay, Bristol

The Western Colleges Consortium for On-Line Learning

Towards the Radstock Community Vision

Working Together for Southmead, Bristol.

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the regeneration targets to be met by the South West Regional Development Agency. [23750]

**Alan Johnson:** The following are the agreed targets for the South West of England Regional Development Agency's regeneration programmes in 2001–02.

| | *Targets* |
|---|---|
| *Land and property—Partnership Investment Programme(PIP)—outputs* | |
| Private Investment generated (£000) | 61,964,750 |
| Area of brownfield land reclaimed/brought back into use (differentiated by soft and hard end use) (hectares) | 39 SE |
| Woodland created (trees planted or hectares) | 0 |
| Treatment of contaminated land (hectares) | 0 |
| Jobs—number created and safeguarded | 1,140 |
| New industrial commercial floorspace created (square metres) | 27,701 |
| Accessibility improved between homes and workplaces (length of footpath/cycleway created) | 0 |
| Housing units facilitated on brownfield land (number of housing units) | 250 |
| Spend (£000) | 6,000,000 |
| *Land and property—non PIP outputs* | |
| Jobs—number created and safeguarded | 1,790 |
| Private investment generated (£) | 20,500,000 |
| Area of brownfield land reclaimed/brought back into use | 84.9 ha (55 SE) |
| Woodland created (trees planted or hectares) | 0 |
| Treatment of contaminated land | 29.9 HE |
| New industrial/refurbished floorspace created | 51,800 |
| Accessibility improved between homes and workplaces | 10 |
| Housing units facilitated on brownfield land | 340 |
| Spend (£000) | 27,642,000 |
| *Single Regeneration Budget*[1] | |
| Jobs created/safeguarded[1] | 2,410/'80 |
| Homes and buildings with improved security | 4,125 |
| Voluntary organisations and community groups supported[1] | 4,205/'84 |
| New business start-ups[1] | 572 |
| | [1]40 |
| Hectares of land improved/reclaimed for open space and improved/reclaimed/serviced for development (of perhaps a combination of these) | 17 |
| Private finance attracted (£000) | [2]14,080 |
| Spend (£000) | 26,726,000 |
| *Rural Programme* | |
| Number of grants made or projects supported | 429 |
| Area of work space created/safeguarded (square metres) | 33,686 |
| Match funding attracted as a percentage of RDA's direct cash input (£ million) | 26.4 |
| Number of child care places created | 100 |
| Spend (£) | 9,388,000 |
| Jobs created/safeguarded | 2,167 |
| Business started up and surviving at least one year | 283 |
| Number/areas of redundant buildings converted to commercial use | 260 |
| Number of training places created | 1,593 |
| Number of new improved facilities | 404 |
| Number of additional visitors | 99,649 |

[1] Figures for ethnic minorities
[2] Million

## Innovation Funding

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will provide a regional breakdown of innovation funding in the UK. [23975]

**Ms Hewitt:** My Department's innovation programme expenditure is primarily providing support to industry UK-wide. In the financial year 2001–02, £340 million was allocated to this support. It would be a disproportionate cost to ascertain the regional breakdown of this expenditure. Moreover in many instances mapping the immediate recipient of the support would not give a reliable guide to the ultimate distribution of the benefit.

The only funding currently allocated by my Department on a regional basis that contributes to the DTI's innovation agenda is the Regional Innovation Fund (RIF), which was established on 1 April 2001.

RIF provides a funding stream to the nine English Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to enable them to support regional competitiveness, innovation and enterprise, and to support cluster development and business incubation in their regions. A breakdown of my Department's 2001–02 RIF allocation of £54.1 million to the RDAs is as follows:

*2001–02 RIF allocation*

| *RDA* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| One North East | 8.9 |
| North West Development Agency | 7.4 |
| Yorkshire Forward | 10.0 |
| East Midlands Development Agency (emda) | 4.3 |
| Advantage West Midlands | 6.3 |
| East of England Development Agency | 3.5 |
| SEEDA | 3.2 |
| South West of England Regional Development Agency | 4.7 |
| London Development Agency | 5.8 |

### Female Entrepreneurs

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking *(a)* to promote female entrepreneurs and *(b)* to create an enterprise environment that supports both men and women. [23973]

**Ms Hewitt:** The Government's priority on coming to office in 1997 was economic stability and employment. The economic challenge for the second term is enterprise and productivity.

The Government are promoting enterprise through:

stable macroeconomic conditions, sound public finances and low inflation

improving the tax regime, by introducing new measures to help small businesses grow, including simplifying VAT for half a million small firms and extension of the 10p corporation tax rate

radical rethink of the UK competition regime.

The Small Business Service (SBS) aims to build an enterprise society in which small businesses of all kinds thrive and achieve their potential. Last year it published "Think Small First"—a national strategy to create the right environment for SMEs. SBS is holding meetings across Whitehall to ensure all Government Departments consider the impact their actions have on them.

SBS's services are available to both male and female entrepreneurs in England, through the Business Link network, which provides local advice and support to all entrepreneurs on everything needed to start and grow a business. Business Connect delivers a similar service in Wales.

Women who are thinking of setting up or who are already running their own businesses are able to make use of the full range of services provided by SBS through the Business Link operators.

In addition, SBS has set up the Phoenix Fund to encourage entrepreneurship in disadvantaged areas and within groups which are currently under-represented in terms of business ownership (including women). The Phoenix Fund as a whole is worth £100 million over the four financial years from 2000–04. 16 projects specifically target the needs of women. The National Assembly for Wales has a separate budget to promote female entrepreneurs.

The SBS is working to research and better understand the needs of women entrepreneurs and tackle any specific barriers that they may face in starting and running their own businesses.

### Anti-competitive Behaviour

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many anti-competitive behaviour cases are being investigated by the Office of Fair Trading. [10136]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** Under UK competition legislation, responsibility for monitoring markets and considering allegations of anti-competitive behaviour is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading. I have asked the Director General to write to the hon. Member directly.

### Small Business Service

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Small Business Service in assisting the establishment of new companies. [11849]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The SBS delivers a range of support to start-up businesses through the Business Link network and manages a number of specific initiatives. All SBS services are subject to regular and rigorous evaluation.

In Quarter One (April-June) this year, the Business Link network helped around 30,000 individuals and start-up businesses including 2,000 high-growth start-ups.

An early assessment of the high-growth start-up initiative was completed in December 2000. This showed that:

the initiative had already had a positive effect in developing a targeted approach to working with high-growth start-ups;

considerable progress had been made in developing understanding of local markets and developing local/regional service offers;

funding should be rolled forward to enable more detailed evaluation;

support is being provided, across a variety of business sectors, to people who are traditionally considered to face barriers in starting and growing a business including women, ethnic minorities and young entrepreneurs. A full evaluation of this initiative has just commenced.

An assessment of the Business Volunteer Mentors Association (BVMA) initiative was completed in March 2001. This showed that, despite the early stage of the programme:

business mentoring plays an important role within the business support process. It provides the client with an on-going business relationship and a route to identifying and progressing entrepreneurial development needs. This is essential to SME development, especially at the pre and early start-up phase;

clients were impressed with the quality of the volunteers and that mentoring could make a difference to their business;

mentors were confident that they could make a difference to the businesses they were supporting;

the National Federation of Enterprise Agencies, who co-ordinate the delivery of the BVMA initiative, were confident that the scheme could make a significant contribution to support services for pre and early start businesses.

The Small Business Service is currently consulting on the development of a comprehensive strategy for supporting business start-ups. The consultation phase of developing the comprehensive strategy is to be completed by March 2002.

A full evaluation of all Business Link services, including those for start-ups, is planned for 2002.

The SBS is also monitoring the wider environment in which businesses start through its "Think Small First" indicators which will be published annually.

## Business Links

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the funding of Business Links by area in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. [11848]

**Nigel Griffiths:** Business Links exist and operate only in England. There are 45 Business Link operators, appointed by the Small Business Service (SBS), operating in 45 designated areas throughout England.

Business Link operators receive a grant from SBS in the form of a Core Services allocation, which funds the core business support services that the BL operator is obliged to deliver under the terms of their agreement. Other funding is provided by the SBS to deliver specialist services like the UK Online for Business, Local Partnership Fund and High Growth Start-ups programmes, these funds are allocated at regional level.

The table provides a breakdown of Core Services allocations to BL operators by SBS area for the 2001–02 financial year.

*Core Services allocations 2001–02*

| | *Allocation (£)* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|---|
| *Total* | 130,000,000 | 100 |
| *South East (6)* | | |
| Berkshire | 2,322,684 | 1.8 |
| Sussex | 4,165,051 | 3.2 |
| Hampshire and Isle of Wight | 4,660,054 | 3.6 |
| Kent | 3,967,756 | 3.1 |
| Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire | 3,772,524 | 2.9 |
| Surrey | 3,386,962 | 2.6 |
| Total | 22,275,032 | 17.1 |
| *London (1)* | | |
| London | 22,537,065 | 17.3 |
| *East (6)* | | |
| Bedfordshire | 1,438,456 | 1.1 |
| Cambridgeshire | 1,888,331 | 1.5 |
| Essex | 4,194,360 | 3.2 |
| Hertfordshire | 2,982,289 | 2.3 |
| Norfolk | 2,144,482 | 1.6 |
| Suffolk | 1,829,953 | 1.4 |
| Total | 14,477,870 | 11.1 |
| *South West (6)* | | |
| Dorset | 1,938,794 | 1.5 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 4,161,670 | 3.2 |
| Gloucestershire | 1,595,518 | 1.2 |
| Somerset | 1,371,800 | 1.1 |
| West | 2,528,148 | 1.9 |
| Wiltshire and Swindon | 1,577,421 | 1.2 |
| Total | 13,173,352 | 10.1 |

*Core Services allocations 2001–02*

| | *Allocation (£)* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|---|
| *West Midlands (6)* | | |
| Birmingham and Solihull | 2,789,038 | 2.1 |
| Coventry and Warwickshire | 2,029,638 | 1.6 |
| Herefordshire and Worcestershire | 1,970,340 | 1.5 |
| Shropshire | 1,159,965 | 0.9 |
| Staffordshire | 2,502,982 | 1.9 |
| The Black Country | 2,600,619 | 2.0 |
| Total | 13,052,581 | 10.0 |
| *East Midlands (5)* | | |
| Derbyshire | 2,298,793 | 1.8 |
| Leicestershire | 2,323,081 | 1.8 |
| Lincolnshire and Rutland | 1,813,842 | 1.4 |
| Northamptonshire | 1,562,786 | 1.2 |
| Nottinghamshire | 2,388,656 | 1.8 |
| Total | 10,387,158 | 8.0 |
| *Yorkshire and The Humber (4)* | | |
| Humber | 2,186,000 | 1.7 |
| North Yorkshire | 2,144,061 | 1.6 |
| South Yorkshire | 2,784,477 | 2.1 |
| West Yorkshire | 4,893,163 | 3.8 |
| Total | 12,007,701 | 9.2 |
| *North West (7)* | | |
| Cheshire and Warrington | 2,316,044 | 1.8 |
| Manchester CBS | 3,509,113 | 2.7 |
| Cumbria | 1,356,861 | 1.0 |
| East Lancashire | 1,230,138 | 0.9 |
| North Manchester CBS | 2,661,103 | 2.0 |
| Merseyside | 3,264,255 | 2.5 |
| North and West Lancashire | 2,315,636 | 1.8 |
| Total | 16,653,150 | 12.8 |
| *North East (4)* | | |
| County Durham | 1,038,692 | 0.8 |
| Northumberland | 754,893 | 0.6 |
| Tees Valley | 1,355,003 | 1.0 |
| Tyne and Wear | 2,287,504 | 1.8 |
| Total | 5,436,092 | 4.2 |

## Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list, with dates, the engineering companies *(a)* she and *(b)* her Ministers have visited since June. [21503]

**Mr. Wilson:** My colleagues and I regularly meet representatives from engineering companies and engineering trade bodies, both in visits and at other times. I list the visits made by myself and my ministerial colleagues to engineering companies since June 2001.

*(a)* Visits by the Secretary of State

5 November—MG Rover

10 December—IBC Vehicles Ltd.

10 December—Astrium Ltd.

10 December—Matra BAE Dynamics

*(b)* Visits by other DTI Ministers

23 July—Optima International—Nigel Griffiths

30 August—AGM Batteries—Brian Wilson

21 September—Aireshelta Ltd.—Lord Sainsbury

5 October—Fibrin (Humberside) Ltd.—Alan Johnson

9 October—Gorham and Bateson Ltd.—Nigel Griffiths

9 November—Textron Power Transmission—Alan Johnson

9 November—The Marshall Group of Companies—Lord Sainsbury

14 November—Rolls-Royce plc—Brian Wilson

17 December—Thales Optronics—Brian Wilson.

### Business Receiverships (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many businesses have gone into receivership in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [22647]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** Statistics of business receiverships are not available by year of receivership at the constituency level.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the public service agreement target on levels of energy, security, diversity, sustainability and competitive energy prices. [23168]

**Mr. Wilson:** The public service agreement target to maintain or improve levels of energy security, diversity, sustainability and competitive prices has been updated for 2001–04:

"To develop strong, competitive markets within a regulatory framework which promotes fairness and sustainability".

This was set out in HM Treasury's Public Service Agreements 2001–04 www.hm_treasury_gov.uk/Documents/Public Spending and Services/Public_Service_Agreements_2001–04

The energy targets relating to this objective and the progress towards these targets are as follows:

*Targets*

1. Ensure competitive gas and electricity prices in the lower half of the EU/G7 basket, while achieving security of supply and social and environmental objectives.

2. Improve the environment and sustainable use of natural resources, including by reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. from 1990 levels over the period 2008–12 and moving towards a 20 per cent. reduction in CO2 emissions by 2010 (Joint target with DEFRA).

*Progress*

*Competitive energy prices:*

Overall, in 2000, based on the data available from the International Energy Agency, UK industrial and domestic gas prices, both including and excluding taxes, were in the lower half of the EU/G7 basket. UK domestic electricity prices, including taxes, were also in the lower half of the EU/G7 basket during 2000. However, industrial electricity and domestic, excluding taxes, electricity prices were not in the lower half of the EU/G7 basket. But figures for the UK show that electricity prices have fallen in 2001.

*Security:*

The Department monitors electricity supply through supply interruptions and lost time. Between 1996–97 and 1999–2000 both the number of interruptions and average time lost have declined. Oil stocks are also monitored, with a target to maintain national emergency oil stocks at, or above, levels required by international obligations. At the end of the third quarter of 2001 the UK held stocks equal to 70 days of consumption, compared with an obligation of 67.5 days.

*Diversity:*

The Department has a target to achieve 10 per cent. of electricity generated from renewable resources by 2010, subject to the costs to consumers being acceptable. In 2000, renewables accounted for 2.8 per cent. of electricity generated in the UK.

*Social:*

The Department has introduced a social target of fuel expenditure as a percentage of income (including housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest) for the lowest three income deciles to be reducing and below 5 per cent. by 2003–04. Over the last three years fuel expenditure as a percentage of income has been reducing and in 1999–2000 was 7 per cent.

*Sustainability/environment:*

Projections suggest that the UK is on course to meet its Kyoto commitment to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 12.5 per cent. by 2008–2012 from 1990 level. The Department is also on course to meet the sulphur dioxide emissions target of 80 per cent. below 1980 levels by 2010.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the target on the unit cost of investigating bankruptcy and compulsory liquidation cases between 1999 and 2002. [23163]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** At the end of the last financial year, 31 March 2001, the unit cost of case investigation by the Insolvency Service had been reduced by 10.6 per cent.

### Citizens Advice Line

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on funding for the Citizens Advice Line for London beyond March 2002. [22880]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The Department does not provide funding for the Citizens Advice Line for London (CALL) general advice line. It has however provided time-limited funding support for a consumer helpline pilot run by CALL as one of three such pilots across England, each using different approaches. The pilot funding has always been time limited to March 2002.

### Sellafield

**Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations were made to her by *(a)* her Irish counterpart and *(b)* the Irish Energy Minister, in respect of Sellafield, at the recent EU Energy Council; and what response was given. [23191]

**Mr. Wilson:** None.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessments she has made of the reasons for the difference between the final voted departmental expenditure limit and provisional outturn for financial year 2000–01 as listed in the Treasury document, Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn, for Vote IX Trade

and Industry and Export Credit Guarantees Department subcategories *(a)* 1 Department of Trade and Industry: programmes and administration and *(b)* 2 Department of Trade and Industry: science; and if she will make a statement. [24105]

**Ms Hewitt:** The difference between the provisional and final voted outturn for financial year 2000–01 for Vote IX is within a reasonable margin of estimating error allowing for the uncertainties of export credit business.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the reasons for the difference between the initial voted annually managed expenditure and provisional outturn for financial year 2000–01, as listed in the Treasury document, Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn, for the Export Credit Guarantees Department and the self-financing public corporations categories; and if she will make a statement. [24108]

**Ms Hewitt:** Annually managed expenditure mainly comprises the refinancing of bank export finance loans made by commercial banks under ECGD's guarantee. Such refinancing produces worthwhile savings to the taxpayer. The refinancing programme has been significantly increased during 2000–01. Some of the rise in AME is due to costs associated with refinancing, but these are more than offset by the savings.

### Vibration White Finger

**Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* interim and *(b)* final payments were made between (i) 1 January and 1 July and (ii) 2 July and 1 December to vibration white finger claimants in St. Helens, South. [22956]

**Mr. Wilson** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, made 31 interim payments and 20 full and final payments amounting to £278,674 between 1 January and 1 July 2001 in the constituency of St. Helens, South for vibration white finger (VWF). Between 2 July and 1 December 2001, 34 interim payments and 28 full and final settlements were made, amounting to £342,762. There are 431 VWF claimants in total in this constituency.

### Consumer Credit Act

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Government plans to publish the summary of responses to its consultation document "Modernising the Consumer Credit Act 1974"; and what plans it has to take the review of the Act forward. [22785]

**Miss Melanie Johnson** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* DTI is currently analysing the many responses we received to our consultation paper "Tackling loan sharks—and more!"

### Miners' Compensation

**Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average final settlement figure in respect of chronic bronchitis and emphysema has been in *(a)* Nottinghamshire and *(b)* the United Kingdom via (i) the expedited route and (ii) the medical assessment process. [23332]

**Mr. Wilson:** To date, the average expedited payment in Nottinghamshire is £2,804 and £4,107 nationally. The average settlement following the full medical assessment is £4,973 in Nottinghamshire and £5,416 nationally. The discrepancies between the regional and national figures reflect the variances of compensatable disabilities among claimants.

### Depleted Uranium

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the *(a)* volume and *(b)* value of depleted uranium and products containing depleted uranium, imported into the United Kingdom in each year since 1985; and if she will make a statement. [22312]

**Nigel Griffiths** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Data on imports of depleted uranium and depleted uranium products since 1985 are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what regulations there are to control the importation of *(a)* depleted uranium, *(b)* munitions containing depleted uranium and *(c)* other products containing depleted uranium; and if she will make a statement. [22313]

**Nigel Griffiths** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 587.

### Sub-post Offices

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on whether new initiatives to support the sub-post office network are expected to be delivered within the planned timetable. [23593]

**Mr. Alexander** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The £2 million Government fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas came into operation in September. Development of funding proposals to implement the recommendations of the performance and innovation unit's report to help sustain and improve the Post Office network is continuing. The pilot of the Government Practitioner 'Your Guide' started in August. Work on other measures is well advanced. We have now received advice from the Postal Services commission on transitional financial assistance to rural post offices from 2003.

### Small Print

**Mr. Letwin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will investigate the size of the print used in setting out the terms and conditions of offers made by firms to the general public. [20177]

**Miss Melanie Johnson** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* We have no plans for such an investigation. Where an advertisement for an offer for goods or services is rendered misleading because relevant terms and conditions are illegible, it may breach the advertising industry's British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion. In that case the Advertising Standards Authority could direct the advertiser to amend or remove

the advertisement. Furthermore, any price indicated to consumers which is rendered misleading as a result of illegible terms and conditions could be the subject of a criminal prosecution under the Consumer Protection Act 1987. In relation to standard consumer contracts, the Director General of Fair Trading has used his powers under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 to ensure that these are presented in print of acceptable size. In relation to offers for credit, under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 in order for the terms of a consumer credit agreement to be enforceable they must be readily legible.

### SMART Awards

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who is consulted in allocating SMART awards; who oversees their administration; and what measures are in place to ensure that SMART moneys are spent appropriately. [23818]

**Nigel Griffiths:** In allocating SMART awards for research and development in England the Department of Trade and Industry seeks advice from its own staff with knowledge of particular sectors of industry, from qualified accountants, from the Patent Office, which carries out patent searches, from other Government Departments and from the following external sources of technical expertise:

AEA Technology plc
BRE
Capenhurst.tech Ltd.
Chimaeron Ltd.
EA Technology
Health and Safety Laboratory
The Institute of Materials
Laboratory of the Government Chemist
Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Materials Engineering Research Laboratory Ltd.
Medical Devices Agency
National Computing Centre (NCC Services Ltd.)
National Engineering Laboratory
National Physical Laboratory
Pera Innovation Ltd.
PIRA International Ltd.
QinetiQ
TRL Ltd.

SMART Feasibility Study and Development Project applications are administered and allocated by Government Offices for the Regions. Some SMART Micro Project applications are also administered by Government Offices for the Regions and others by the Small Business Service headquarters in London. By April 2002 all Micro Project applications will be administered by Government Offices for the Regions. SMART Technology Review and Technology Study applications are administered and allocated by the Small Business Service headquarters.

All SMART projects and associated expenditure are carefully monitored by staff from Government Offices for the Regions or the Small Business Service against the project proposals for which the grants are awarded. Grant moneys are paid only in respect of eligible expenditure and only if the project makes satisfactory progress towards its objectives. Additionally, full payment of grant is withheld until the project is completed and an independent accountant has reported the total expenditure on the project and confirmed it was incurred for the purpose intended.

### Seaside Resorts

**Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what guidance her Department has issued to regional development agencies on supporting seaside and coastal towns; [24151]

(2) which officials in her Department she has nominated as resort champions; [24142]

(3) what action her Department is taking to support the implementation of the English Tourism Council's "Sea Changes" report. [24146]

**Alan Johnson:** The Government have welcomed the publication of "Sea Changes". The Department is very much aware of the regeneration and economic development needs of seaside resorts, given its responsibility for the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and for co-ordination of policy on the assisted areas and structural funds maps.

We look to the RDAs to continue to develop and implement economic and regeneration strategies on a regional basis, working closely with other regional and local partners. In its guidance to the RDAs on preparing their Corporate Plans for 2002–04, the Department has specifically asked them to explain how they intend to work with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, local Regional Tourist Boards, and other regional, sub-regional and local authority bodies in the development and implementation of sustainable tourism strategies. The guidance makes clear that these strategies will need to include the promotion of coastal resort regeneration.

The DTI has not nominated specific resort champions.

**Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many regional development agencies have nominated a board member to be a resort champion for that region; and if she will list *(a)* the regional development agencies which have done so and *(b)* the board members nominated. [24152]

**Alan Johnson:** The Regional Development Agencies have not nominated specific board members as resort champions. The DTI is not in a position to instruct RDAs in such detail as to how they should achieve their objectives. However, RDAs will continue to play an important role in the regeneration of seaside resorts.

### New Electricity Trading Arrangements

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received in respect of the impact of the new electricity trading arrangements; what have been the concerns raised most frequently by these representations; and what plans she has for assessing the operation of the new electricity trading arrangements after a specified period of time. [21453]

**Mr. Wilson** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* My officials and I have met with a large number of industry representatives on the impact of the new electricity

trading arrangements (NETA). On the whole, NETA is seen to have been successful. Ofgem produced a report of the first three months of NETA and found that:

> Wholesale electricity prices are 20 to 25 per cent. below prices that would have been produced under the Pool.
>
> Market liquidity is established with a threefold increase in the volume of trades, and a doubling of the number of contracts struck compared to this time last year under the Pool.
>
> National Grid Company is working well to keep the electricity system in balance. Its daily costs of balancing the system have halved, which will also benefit customers.

Ofgem will be conducting a full review of the first year's operation of NETA.

A frequent concern that has been raised has been around the impact of the changes on smaller generators. At the request of DTI, Ofgem produced a report entitled a 'Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators' on 31 August 2001. In response, DTI issued a consultation paper. I have received 41 responses to the Government's consultation. These responses are from a wide cross-section of industry, including representatives of the renewables and CHP sectors, suppliers of electricity and industry and environment associations. The responses to the consultation have raised a wide range of issues which Government will need to consider carefully. We will be publishing a full Government response to our consultation and a summary of responses.

In the meantime, DTI and Ofgem have formed a working group to look urgently at the obstacles to consolidation services under NETA. The working group comprises a wide cross-section of industry.

### Aluminium

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1049W, on the aluminium industry, what assessment he has made of the extent to which the UK will be affected by the downturn in world aluminium markets. [22992]

**Mr. Wilson:** Alcan and Alcoa, the two largest employers in the UK aluminium industry, recently announced detailed proposals for restructuring their global operations as a result of recent falls in world demand for aluminium. This would result in a reduction of around 7 per cent. in the combined UK work forces of these two companies. Under these proposals two sites, Alcoa's Dolgarrog rolling mill and Alcan's Glasgow foil plant, would close completely with employee reductions at Alcan's Rogerstone mill. However Alcan's Bridgnorth plant would gain an extra 60 jobs and £13 million in investment. Industry assessments suggest that overall UK aluminium companies currently face low prices and profit margins, and that the market is likely to remain weak in the short to medium term.

### Packaging Waste

**Mr. Keetch:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to run an advertising campaign to reduce packaging waste; and if she will make a statement. [23817]

**Mr. Wilson** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended) and The Packaging (Essential Requirements) 1998 Regulations provide the regulatory framework aimed at encouraging a reduction in packaging and packaging waste in England and Wales. These, and similar regulations in Northern Ireland and Scotland, are designed to allow the United Kingdom to fulfil the European Union obligations of Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste.

These regulations encourage a reduction in packaging and packaging waste by setting demanding recovery and recycling targets along with requirements to discourage over-packaging. They also place financial burdens on business in relation to the weight of packaging they place on the market. Awareness of these regulations is already promoted by the Government and the enforcement agencies. This month the Commission has published a proposal to revise Directive 94/62/EC. The need for any future advertising campaign will be considered as part of the future implementation of the revised Directive.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Departmental Spending

**Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total expenditure was on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* polling, *(c)* focus groups, *(d)* design consultants, *(e)* caterers, *(f)* production of departmental publications and *(g)* photographs/photographers by his Department for each year since 1995 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms; what was (A) the annual percentage increase in spending on each category and (B) spending on each category as a percentage of the total departmental running costs; and if he will make a statement. [6926]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The Government are committed to using only whatever channel is judged to be the most cost-effective way to deliver the publicity necessary to support the implementation of policy.

The following table sets out the Department's expenditure on advertising, caterers and production of departmental publications from 1996–97 to 2000–01. Expenditure for 1995–96 is not available.

Expenditure on polling, focus groups, design consultants and photographs/photographers is not readily identifiable and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

| | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advertising (£) | 6,471.80 | 5,127.70 | 7,572.60 | 11,275.60 | 27,321.90 |
| Percentage of departmental running costs | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 1.3 |
| Expressed in real terms at 2000–01 level (£) | 7,133.00 | 5,495.70 | 7,890.80 | 11,487.70 | 27,321.90 |
| Publication Production (£) | 1,998.80 | 2,314.00 | 2,159.40 | 5,768.40 | 6,556.70 |
| Percentage of departmental running costs | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Expressed in real terms at 2000–01 levels (£) | 2,203.00 | 2,480.10 | 2,250.10 | 5,876.90 | 6,556.70 |

| | 1996–97 | 1997–98 | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Caterers (£) | 2,909.10 | 2,738.50 | 2,888.00 | 3,146.60 | 2,823.70 |
| Percentage of departmental running costs | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.1 |
| Expressed in real terms at 2000–01 levels (£) | 3,206.30 | 2,935.00 | 3,009.30 | 3,205.80 | 2,823.70 |

## Asylum Seekers

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the principles determining which local authority an asylum seeker will be referred to for housing assistance if they are recognised as a refugee or granted exceptional leave to remain. [22452]

**Angela Eagle:** Former asylum seekers who have received a positive decision on their application for asylum or who have been granted exceptional leave to remain are free to live where they choose within the United Kingdom. They can apply for housing assistance to any local authority.

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers living in the UK first entered the country in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1994, *(d)* 1996, *(e)* 1998 and *(f)* 2000 and made application for asylum, and have yet to have their cases resolved. [22479]

**Angela Eagle:** I regret that the information requested is not readily available, and could be obtained only by examination of individual case records and is, therefore, available only at disproportionate cost.

The number of applications for asylum in the United Kingdom lodged in the years above are shown in the table. However, it is not possible to determine in what year these applicants first entered the United Kingdom, or whether they are currently living in the United Kingdom.

*Applications for asylum in the UK, principal applicants*

| Year | Asylum Applications[1] |
|---|---|
| 1990 | 26,205 |
| 1992[2] | 24,605 |
| 1994 | 32,830 |
| 1996 | 29,640 |
| 1998 | 46,015 |
| 2000[3, 4] | 80,315 |

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5
[2] Figures do not include overseas applications
[3] May exclude some cases lodged at Local Enforcement Offices between January and March 2000
[4] Provisional figures

The number of asylum cases awaiting initial decision as at 30 September was 43,000 (provisional, to the nearest 100). However, it is not possible to determine in what year these applicants were made. Information on asylum applications, initial decisions and applications awaiting initial decision is published regularly in the annual statistical bulletin Asylum Statistics United Kingdom, a copy of which is available in the Library, and from the RDS website http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

## Police Medical Retirements

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by police authority area, the number of officers who have retired on medical grounds in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996, *(d)* 1997, *(e)* 1998, *(f)* 1999 and *(g)* 2000; indicating in each case, and in each police authority area, the percentage this represents of total retirement. [11807]

**Mr. Denham:** The requested data are given in the tables which have been placed in the Library.

Many forces have made considerable reductions in the level of medical retirements in the last five years. However, as the tables show, the position varies considerably between forces.

The Home Office has asked the Police Negotiating Board to explore and agree ways to deliver a fair and more consistent approach towards early retirement due to ill health, so that forces can match the performance of the best quartile by 2005. We will be introducing a national occupational health strategy for the police service, which should assist forces to manage cases of ill-health more effectively at the outset.

## Neighbourhood Warden Scheme (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding has been awarded for neighbourhood warden schemes in the Buckingham constituency in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what targets have been set to reduce crime under the schemes. [22626]

**Mr. Denham:** The neighbourhood and street wardens programme have funded a pilot programme of 85 neighbourhood warden schemes across England and Wales. These schemes can help to reduce crime and the fear of crime and deter anti-social behaviour. No applications were submitted from Buckingham and there are no schemes funded in the area. There is one neighbourhood warden scheme funded in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire.

## Police (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to visit the Buckingham constituency to meet police officers. [22658]

**Mr. Denham:** I have no current plans to visit the Buckingham constituency.

## Ministerial Visits (North-East)

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times since November 2000 Ministers from his Department have visited *(a)* the Teesside area and *(b)* Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency to meet locally based businesses. [19056]

**Mr. Blunkett:** While the Home Office does have a clear remit in relation to security for businesses and the contribution they can make to the civil and social agenda being pursued by the Department, this is organised on a regional or sub-regional basis as well as nationally. It is therefore not possible to disaggregate those businesses

that have been invited from the area to take part in such ventures. A number of Ministers did undertake visits on a political, as opposed to ministerial basis, in the early part of 2001.

### Police Spending

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of spending on police resources on an average per capita basis is *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the Buckingham constituency for the current financial year. [22629]

**Mr. Denham:** The gross cost of policing on an average per capita basis in England and Wales in 2001–02 is estimated at £165.5. A figure at Buckingham constituency level is not available.

*Source:*

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police Statistics (Estimates) 2001–02

### External Consultants

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was to his Department of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [21263]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The available information held by my Department on cost for the use of external consultants over the last four financial years is as follows:

| | £ |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 7,627,016 |
| 1998–99 | 4,588,445 |
| 1999–2000 | 10,302,672 |
| 2000–01 | 27,877,286 |

The increase in expenditure on consultancy in 2000–01 is primarily due to a major investment programme in the modernisation of the Home Office and in particular on IT related modernisation. This breakdown on expenditure is as follows:

| *2000–01* | £ |
|---|---|
| IT related consultancy | 12,550,540 |
| Non-IT related consultancy | 15,326,746 |

### Prison Officers

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers serving in prisons in England and Wales have been suspended from duty for more than 18 months owing to allegations as to their conduct for more than 18 months. [22486]

**Beverley Hughes:** There are currently eight prison officers suspended from duty for more than 18 months.

### Criminal Courts Review

**Stephen Hesford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he has taken to ensure that the views of students and young people are taken into account in the Government review of the criminal courts. [22603]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** In the new year I shall be attending events at various university law schools with the aim of giving young people an opportunity to express their views on these issues. They can also participate by visiting the review website at: www.criminal-courts-review-org.uk.

### Social Exclusion

**Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the competitive grant schemes, administered by the Home Office and its agencies, open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; and, for each scheme in each year *(a)* the number of applicants, *(b)* the number of successful applicants, *(c)* the total of grants awarded, *(d)* the number of pages in the application form and *(e)* if the grant can be used to fund the core costs of the applicant organisation; [22428]

(2) how many competitive grant schemes, administered by his Department and its agencies, were open in each of the last 10 years to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22386]

(3) if he will publish a list of the grants made under the competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22417]

(4) if he will place in the Library a copy of the application form for each of the competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion. [22410]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* This information is not centrally available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The hon. Member may, however, wish to note that information about grants from central Government is currently available in two recent publications, funded by the Home Office:

Central Government Funding of Voluntary and Community Organisations 1982–83 to 1999–2000: ISBN 1 84082 636–3; and

A Guide to Funding from Government Departments and Agencies—Second Edition: ISBN 1 900360 79, nine copies of which are available in the Library.

### Crime Clear-up Rate

**Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average crime clear-up rate was in England and Wales in 2000–01, broken down by force; what assessment he has made of the reasons for the differences in crime clear-up rates between forces; and if he will make a statement. [21624]

**Mr. Denham:** The proportion of crime detected was 24 per cent. in England and Wales in 2000–01. The following table shows the detection rate in each force and is taken from Criminal Statistics England and Wales 2000.

| Police force area | Percentages |
|---|---|
| Avon and Somerset | 22 |
| Bedfordshire | 27 |
| Cambridgeshire | 24 |
| Cheshire | 30 |
| Cleveland | 21 |
| Cumbria | 34 |
| Derbyshire | 26 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 34 |
| Dorset | 25 |
| Durham | 34 |
| Essex | 26 |
| Gloucestershire | 31 |
| Greater Manchester | 22 |
| Hampshire | 29 |
| Hertfordshire | 24 |
| Humberside | 21 |
| Kent | 28 |
| Lancashire | 27 |
| Leicestershire | 28 |
| Lincolnshire | 25 |
| London, City of | 27 |
| Merseyside | 28 |
| Metropolitan police | 15 |
| Norfolk | 26 |
| Northamptonshire | 33 |
| Northumbria | 31 |
| North Yorkshire | 30 |
| Nottinghamshire | 20 |
| South Yorkshire | 25 |
| Staffordshire | 23 |
| Suffolk | 35 |
| Surrey | 28 |
| Sussex | 23 |
| Thames Valley | 22 |
| Warwickshire | 22 |
| West Mercia | 27 |
| West Midlands | 28 |
| West Yorkshire | 23 |
| Wiltshire | 30 |
| England average | 24 |
| Dyfed-Powys | 63 |
| Gwent | 57 |
| North Wales | 31 |
| South Wales | 32 |
| Wales average | 41 |

As Policing a New Century: a Blueprint for Reform makes clear, these variations are unacceptable. The Standards Unit will identify the variations and the causes of those variations in order to identify and spread best practice in crime detection.

There are marked differences in detection rates for different types of offence. This is, in part, owing to the level of investigation that an offence merits although other factors will also play a part. For example, there are offences (such as harassment) where the victim may know the offender, which will increase probability of a detection. In general violent offences have a higher detection rate than crimes against property.

Comparisons of detection rates for individual police forces may reflect differences in the circumstances of offences between areas and variations in recording practice.

### Anti-terrorism Legislation

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he appointed an independent reviewer for the operation of anti-terrorism legislation; in what manner the announcement was made; and what are the terms of reference for this post. [21117]

**Mr. Blunkett:** Lord Carlile of Berriew was appointed on 15 November in respect of the Terrorism Act 2000. The appointment was announced in response to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford).

The reviewer's terms of reference are to review the working of the Terrorism Act 2000 considering whether (a) the Act has been used fairly and properly during the reporting period, taking into account the need to ensure that there are both effective powers to deal with terrorism and adequate safeguards for the individual; and (b) consider whether any of the temporary powers in Part VII of the Act can safely be allowed to lapse, and

> "report to the Secretary of State in order that he can lay a report before both Houses of Parliament at least once every 12 months in accordance with section 126 of the Act".

Some sections of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 amend the Terrorism Act 2000 and will be subject the same review provisions as that Act. It was announced during debate at Second Reading that the provisions relating to the detention of international terrorists would also be reviewed by the Terrorism Act reviewer.

**Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the use of powers under the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [25156]

**Mr. Blunkett:** Earlier today, on the basis of certificates I signed under part 4 of the Act, following careful and detailed consideration, the Immigration Service detained eight foreign nationals whom I suspect to be international terrorists. They were detained earlier today and will be held in secure prison accommodation. I shall not disclose their names unless they themselves first do so.

Part 4 of the Act gives me powers to issue a certificate in respect of someone whom I believe to be a risk to national security and suspect to be an international terrorist. The Act also gives powers for his deportation and, where his removal or departure from the United Kingdom is prevented (whether temporarily or indefinitely) for his detention.

A person detained has the right to apply for bail to the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, which is a superior court of record under the Act. He may also appeal to the Commission to have the certificate cancelled. In these circumstances it would be inappropriate for me to comment further. A person detained is free to leave the United Kingdom at any time.

I shall continue to keep the exercise of the powers in Part 4 of the Act under close review.

### Custody Suites

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many boroughs in the United Kingdom with a population of between 40,000 and 60,000 do not have a police station with a full custody suite; [20935]

(2) what estimates he has made of the availability of custody suites in south-east England; [20932]

(3) what his policy is on the retention of custody suites in police stations; [20931]

(4) how many custody suites have been closed *(a)* completely and *(b)* in part in the United Kingdom in each of the past five years; [20930]

(5) what research his Department has carried out into the need for the provision of custody suites in urban areas. [20933]

**Beverley Hughes:** No information is collected centrally on either the number of boroughs in the United Kingdom with a population of between 40,000 and 60,000 who do not have a police station with a full custody suite, or the number of custody suites that have been closed in each of the last five years. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

There has been no research carried out by the Home Office into the need for the provision of custody suites in urban areas and there have been no estimates as to the availability of custody suites in south-east England.

Forces have restructured over the last few years. Many have centralised to either basic command unit level or geographically based custody suites. This is in order to ensure consistency in the quality of custody suites both in terms of facilities and the skill levels of staff. It can also produce resource savings by reducing the number of locations at which custody facilities and support services need to be provided.

It is an operational decision for chief officers of police to determine the number and location of custody facilities/police cells required by his/her force.

### Criminal Justice

**Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Criminal Justice Cabinet Committee met to discuss the recommendations of the Halliday review of sentencing and the Auld review of the criminal courts; when he intends to publish his proposals based on the reviews; whether it is the intention to publish draft legislation based on the review; and if he will make a statement. [21642]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** The Criminal Justice System Cabinet Committee meets from time to time to discuss the delivery of the Government's policies for management and reform of the criminal justice system.

As I announced in a written answer on 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 356W, the level of interest in the Halliday review of sentencing has been considerable and a significant number of comments have been received in response to the public consultation exercise. Officials are now analysing the responses and a summary will be published, with copies in the Library, at the end of January. A Government response will be published at the same time.

Sir Robin Auld's review of the criminal courts is subject to a period of comment until 31 January 2002. The Government intend to publish their response to this and to publish legislation in draft later that year.

### Operation Shield

**Patrick Mercer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the progress of Operation Shield in the Newark and Retford area. [20928]

**Mr. Denham:** My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has made no formal assessment of Operation Shield, Nottinghamshire police's initiative to reduce violent crime, in the Newark and Retford area. But we applaud the determination of Nottinghamshire police, as evidenced by Operation Shield, to tackle violent and hate crime vigorously.

### Police Officers (Havering)

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers where available for ordinary duty on 30 November in the London borough of Havering. [21399]

**Mr. Denham:** I am told by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that on 31 October, the latest date for which information is available, there were 323 police officers available for duty in the Havering Division.

Havering Division also had 83 civilian support staff at the end of October.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for reducing the economic costs of crime. [17047]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** There are a wide range of economic and social costs associated with crime, not all of which are easy to measure, but the Criminal Justice Departments have jointly developed an indicator of the economic and social costs of crime as part of the Public Service Agreement commitment. The methodology used to measure the economic and social cost of crime were published in a report in December 2000, "The economic and social costs of crime" (Home Office Research Study 217).

### Crime (Romford)

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to reduce the level of street robbery in Romford. [21013]

**Mr. Denham:** We are determined to reduce the number of robberies across the country as a whole. That is why we have given the five metropolitan forces, including the Metropolitan police, an additional £20 million specifically to assist their efforts in tackling robbery, and have set them the challenging target of a 14 per cent. reduction of robbery in our principal cities by March 2005. We are working with those forces, as well as progressing an extensive robbery research programme, to enable us to identify good practice in tackling robbery which we will ensure is disseminated to all forces.

We have launched a national initiative with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the mobile phone industry to crack down on robbery of mobile phones. We have also published a Robbery Toolkit which is available

to all forces and those involved in crime reduction and community safety and will help them to work as effectively as possible in tackling robbery.

### "Safe From Harm"

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to update the "Safe from Harm" guidance booklet published by his Department. [23047]

**Angela Eagle:** We have no such plans. Separate guidance has already been issued about the recent legislation which I believe my hon. Friend has in mind.

### UK Citizenship

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the norms of acceptability those from ethnic minorities seeking citizenship of the UK should be expected to adopt. [22913]

**Angela Eagle:** The requirements for British nationality are currently under review and the Government will announce their conclusions in a forthcoming asylum, immigration and nationality White Paper.

### Cyclists

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance relating to the penalties imposed upon cyclists who ride through red traffic lights. [21838]

**Mr. Denham:** No. There are guidelines in the Magistrates Court Sentencing Guidelines, published by the Magistrates Association in September 2000, covering the penalty for failing to comply with red traffic lights. These apply to cyclists as to all other vehicles covered by the relevant offence.

### Parenting Orders

**Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers have *(a)* the police and *(b)* local authorities to issue parenting orders; and if she will make a statement. [21782]

**Mr. Denham:** There are no powers for the police or local authorities to impose a parenting order. It is a civil order available to family proceedings courts and criminal courts including youth courts. It can be imposed if a child has offended, or following a conviction of their parents for failure to secure their child's regular attendance at school.

### Immigration and Nationality Directorate

**Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last reviewed the operation of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate; and if it met its target in respect of applications for leave to remain in the United Kingdom. [22140]

**Angela Eagle:** The work of Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) is under constant review to ensure that it meets the priorities which we have set for it. In the year 2000–01 the Integrated Casework Directorate made 281,000 general casework decisions which exceeded its numerical targets. This year it is again on course to exceed its numerical target. However, in the light of very heavy intake it is not currently meeting targets on turnaround times. We are looking at ways of improving the latter performance.

**Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the application from Ms Tetyana Vasylchenko, a constituent, of Southern Road, Cheltenham, for an extension to her visa to study in the United Kingdom, will be logged on the system of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate; and when he expects a decision to be made on her application. [22142]

**Angela Eagle:** Ms Vasylchenko's application was received on 13 November and registered on the General Settlement Case Information Database on 16 November. She was granted a further extension of stay in the United Kingdom as a student on 3 December.

### Council of Ministers

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long in advance he receives agendas for meetings of the EU Council of Ministers. [21962]

**Angela Eagle:** The Council Rules of Procedure state that provisional agendas for meetings of the European Union Council of Ministers, which are drawn up by the Presidency, must be sent to other members of the Council and the Commission at least 14 days before meetings take place. A statement attached to the rules of procedure provides that, for Councils dealing with Justice and Home Affairs issues, the President shall endeavour to ensure that the provisional agenda and any documents reach members of the Council at least 21 days before the beginning of the meeting. Provisional agendas are divided into two parts, part A, where items are adopted without discussion, and part B, items for substantive discussion.

For recent Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council meetings, part A of the agenda, crucial to the domestic parliamentary scrutiny process, has not recently been provided within the 14 days stipulated by the Council Rules of Procedure. For example, prior to the JHA Council on 6 and 7 December, my officials did not receive part A of the agenda until three days before the meeting took place. Delays such as this, which are outside our control, have made it impossible for the Department to provide more timely information to the Scrutiny Committees.

Despite this, there were no scrutiny overrides at the recent JHA Council on 6–7 December.

### Blantyre House

**Mr. Norman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug tests have been undertaken on inmates at Blantyre house in the last 12 months; and how many were undertaken in the preceding 12 months. [21845]

**Beverley Hughes:** The number of drug tests carried out at Blantyre house for the period requested, is set out in the table.

| | 1 November 1999 to 30 October 2000 | 1 November 2000 to 30 October 2001 |
|---|---|---|
| *Number of:* | | |
| Mandatory tests | 149 | 152 |
| Voluntary tests | 989 | 2,150 |

Of the total tests conducted in 1999–2000, five tests (0.44 per cent) and in 2000–01 eight tests (0.35 per cent) were positive. The random testing programme for the same period reported levels of 1.5 per cent. and 2.2 per cent. respectively.

### Metropolitan Police

**Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the Metropolitan Police Authority's oversight of the work of the Metropolitan Police Service since June 2000. [22298]

**Mr. Denham:** As with any other police authority, it is the statutory responsibility of the Metropolitan Police Authority to ensure that the Metropolitan Police Service provides efficient and effective policing within the metropolitan police district. All police authorities are subject to inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and the Audit Commission in respect of their responsibilities under the Best Value provisions of the Local Government Act 1999, and police authorities are ultimately accountable to me for the way in which they meet these duties.

### Criminal Justice Units

**Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the levels of staffing and IT provision in the Police Services' Criminal Justice Units on a regional basis. [22300]

**Mr. Denham:** There are no plans to develop criminal justice units on a regional basis. The staffing levels and other resources provided for criminal justice units by police forces are matters for the professional judgment of chief officers of police. The overall resourcing for criminal justice units is a matter for local agreement.

### Correspondence

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to answer the letters from the right hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East of 9 July and 19 November about Mr. Fuat Altunyurt. [21756]

**Angela Eagle:** I wrote to the hon. Member on 18 December 2001. I am sorry I did not send an earlier reply.

### Police Vehicles

**Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is given to police forces for purchasing *(a)* cars and *(b)* vans. [21983]

**Mr. Denham:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 648W.

### Photocard Passports

**Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the findings of the technical feasibility study into photocard passports. [21987]

**Angela Eagle:** The results of the United Kingdom's Passport Service's studies into the planned introduction of a passport card will be published in due course.

### Blakenhurst Prison

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the running of HMP Blakenhurst since it was taken back into public sector control. [22260]

**Beverley Hughes:** The management of Blakenhurst prison was handed over to the Prison Service on 19 August 2001. None of the formal inspections or assessments of performance have been made of the prison's management since that date. However, the prison has operated smoothly.

*Assessments of HMP Blakenhurst*

All prisons, whether privately managed or directly managed, are subject to the following ongoing assessments:

*HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMCIP)*

HMCIP inspected Blakenhurst under UKDS management three times: in May 1984, October 1998 and January 2001. Blakenhurst is not scheduled for inspection in 2001–02 and the new schedule for 2002–03 will not be finalised till May 2002. However, the Inspectorate also carry out unannounced inspections.

*Standards and Security Audits*

The Area Manager is currently negotiating with the Standards Audit Unit with a view to arranging an audit in late summer or early autumn 2002. The last such audit was in May 1999.

*Board of Visitors (BoV)*

BoVs report annually. The Blakenhurst BoV cycle is to report on the year ending in June.

*Additional Service Level Agreement (SLA) Assessment*

Monthly reports on compliance with the SLA are issued by the on-site Compliance Monitor; and

Regular SLA audits carried out at the prison by members of Contracts and Competition Group. The next audit at Blakenhurst is scheduled for August 2002.

### Extradition Arrangements (Spain)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Spanish authorities concerning the extradition of UK nationals. [22282]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** There have been no recent discussions with the Spanish authorities concerning the extradition of United Kingdom nationals specifically. However, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary met the Spanish Minister of Justice on 23 November to sign a bilateral treaty on fast-track judicial surrender, which would apply to all nationals.

### Prisons (Performance)

**Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for identifying and improving poorly performing prisons. [24433]

**Beverley Hughes:** On 12 January the then Minister of State, Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), announced the intention to develop a "performance testing" scheme, under which poorly performing prisons would be identified and required to develop a plan for improvement within a fixed period; if the plan was acceptable, the prison would operate under a Service Level Agreement with strict monitoring of delivery against its proposals; if unacceptable, the prison would face closure or contracting out to the private sector.

The Director General has selected two establishments, Her Majesty's Prison Leicester and Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre Reading, for performance testing. They will be given six months to produce proposals for a much improved level of service.

## Terrorism

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on projects planned under section 7 of the Ghent Statement on Terrorism. [22885]

**Peter Hain:** I have been asked to reply.

The objective of developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law as part of the EU's common foreign and security policy is set out in Article 11 of the Treaty of Amsterdam. Both prior to and post-11 September, the EU has been active in projects restoring and maintaining the rule of law.

For example, the EU is conducting a police training mission to bolster the rule of law and management of state borders in Albania. Other examples include EU projects in Georgia (together with OSCE) and Bosnia. Following 11 September, other projects are currently under consideration.

The Gothenburg European Council in June 2001 identified four areas of work for civilian crisis management including rule of law, policing and civil administration. Under the Belgian presidency, the Police Capabilities Commitment Conference in November 2001 confirmed that the EU had met its target of up to 5,000 police officers deplorable for peacekeeping operations on international missions by 2003. The Laeken European Council in December 2001 also noted progress on the other areas of work and mandated the incoming Spanish presidency with taking them forward in order to meet the 2003 targets established at Gothenburg.

## Police Complaints Authority

**Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will make a new appointment to the Police Complaints Authority. [24502]

**Mr. Denham:** I have appointed a new full-time member to the Police Complaints Authority. The appointment will be for three years. The new member is:

Name: Marcus Williams

Start date: 3 December 2001

Previous position: Department of Trade and Industry.

## Security Service

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the position is on certificates, under section 28 of the Data Protection Act 1998 concerning the Security Service; and if he will make a statement. [25158]

**Mr. Blunkett:** On 10 December, I signed a new certificate describing in general terms the personal data that the Security Service may process that requires exemption under the Data Protection Act 1998 on the grounds of safeguarding national security. I have placed a copy of that certificate together with the public reasons for my signing it in the Library.

The new certificate takes account of the comments made by the National Security panel of the Information Tribunal in their determination on 1 October in respect of the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker). The new certificate supersedes the one quashed by the Tribunal in that appeal.

## Charity Commission

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change the Charity Commission's Departmental Expenditure Limit and administration costs for 2001–02. [25157]

**Angela Eagle:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Charity Commission Department Expenditure Limit will be increased by £631,000 from £22,161,000 to £22,792,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £631,000 from £20,852,000 to £21,483,000. Within the Department Expenditure Limit change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

| | £ |
|---|---|
| *Resources* | |
| Change | 631,000 |
| New DEL | 21,463,000 |
| *Of which:* | |
| Voted | 21,463,000 |
| Non-voted | 0 |
| *Capital* | |
| Change | 0 |
| New DEL | 1,329,000 |
| *Of which:* | |
| Voted | 1,329,000 |
| Non-voted | 0 |

The change in the resource element of the Departmental Expenditure Limit arises from the take-up of £631,000 in respect of administration costs end year flexibility arrangements. The total increase in administration costs is £631,000.

The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

### Criminal Incidents (London Buses)

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* criminal incidents were reported as occurring on London buses and *(b)* arrests have been made in (i) Havering and (ii) Greater London as a whole, in the past 12 months. [22938]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I have been asked to reply.

Since January 2001 6,887 criminal incidents have been reported to London Buses, including assaults on staff and passengers. However, many incidents go unreported. There are also a number of incidents reported to the police which London Buses are unaware of.

Figures for criminal incidents on buses for individual boroughs are not currently available.

Within the Greater London area there were 1,202 arrests at the end of October for arrests for criminal incidents on the transport network as a whole.

## TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

### Kirkham and Wesham Station

**Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the reasons for Railtrack's inability to honour the commitment made in September 2000 to co-fund with Lancashire county council the building of a lift at Kirkham and Wesham station. [17377]

**Mr. Spellar:** Railtrack's decision, taken before it went into administration, followed the conclusion of the Rail Regulator's periodic review of the company's access charges. The Rail Regulator and the Strategic Rail Authority have subsequently confirmed that Railtrack is only funded to provide "like for like" replacement under its repair and maintenance obligation at franchised stations.

### Railtrack

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish statistics on the delays attributed to Railtrack over the last four weeks, compared with the four weeks before 5 October. [19961]

**Mr. Spellar:** Railtrack have provided the following data for the four weeks before and after 5 October.

| *Week ending* | *Railtrack direct delay minutes* |
|---|---|
| 15 September 2001 | 163,048 |
| 22 September 2001 | 148,205 |
| 29 September 2001 | 172,638 |
| 06 October 2001 | 183,157 |
| 13 October 2001 | 227,163 |
| 20 October 2001 | 203,454 |
| 27 October 2001 | 204,175 |
| 03 November | 215,649 |

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff have left Railtrack, broken down by grade since Railtrack was put into administration; what changes there have been in the number of delayed trains in each of the five weeks *(a)* prior to and *(b)* since administration; and what estimate has been made of the amount of funding to be allocated to Railtrack during the administration period, indicating how much capital investment has been allocated for each project. [19803]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The management of Railtrack plc during administration is a matter for the administrator. The Government have provided adequate funding to enable the administrator to discharge his responsibilities and has stressed to him the importance of retaining and motivating key staff.

My Department does not receive regular reports on the number of train delays. Information on total delay minutes attributable to Railtrack was provided by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in his reply given today to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) (PQ 19961), at column 493W.

As the length of the administration is unknown, it is not possible to estimate the amount that will be required to fund Railtrack plc in administration.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which aspects of Railtrack Group plc's *(a)* operations and *(b)* assets he considers to be core business; and which aspects of its operations have been classified as public interest. [21044]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The core business of Railtrack Group plc is the provision of railway network services. It is for the administrator to consider what assets are required for the management of the network. It is in the public interest for the network to be managed safely, efficiently and effectively.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what applications he has made for state aid approvals as outlined in section 8.1.10 of the commercial loan agreement with the Railtrack administrator; and for what amounts. [21483]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Secretary of State submitted an application for state aid approval on 28 November 2001. The premature release of the figures may prejudice the administrator's orderly release of commercially sensitive information in detailed discussions with potential bidders for Railtrack plc.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the weekly rates of remuneration of the administrator of Railtrack are. [22872]

**Mr. Spellar:** I refer the right hon. Member to my answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 383W.

**Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much Railtrack has incurred in penalty charges for delays and cancellations since being placed into administration; and what the figure was for the same period in 1997. [22917]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is a commercial matter between Railtrack and train operating companies.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 558W, on Railtrack, what estimates the Railtrack administrator has given him of the amounts likely to be drawn down under the working capital facility by 1 April 2002; [23217]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 558W, on Railtrack, what representations he has received from the Railtrack administrator about likely draw downs under this facility before 15 April 2002; and from which departmental and Government budgets the sum has been drawn. [23211]

**Mr. Jamieson:** It is estimated that £211 million will be required to 31 March 2002, but this figure is under constant review. The facility is part of the loan agreement and is not a call upon the departmental budgets.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guarantees he has received from the Railtrack administration that funds will be available at the end of the administration period to repay the loans drawn down under the commercial loan agreement. [23152]

**Mr. Jamieson:** None have as yet been asked for.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answers of 11 December 2001, ref 18945 and 18957, *Official Report*, column 782W when he expects the administrator to complete this review and make detailed representations to the SRA and the Department. [23222]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The nature and timing of the review of Railtrack's expenditure needs is a matter for the administrator, acting in accordance with his duties to the High Court.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, ref 21485, if the management accounts revealed major variances between the budget and actual results. [23224]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I am informed that this information is market sensitive.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 556W, on what dates his Department had discussions with the Treasury about Railtrack administration between 1 October and 30 October. [23155]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I refer the hon. Member to my previous answer to which he refers.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 438W, on Railtrack, for what reason the provision of a drafting date is exempt from disclosure. [23210]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Code of Practice on Access to Government Information makes clear that information on internal opinion, advice, recommendation, consultation and deliberation is exempt from disclosure.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, ref 21487, what requirement the management accounts reveal for further draw downs of the facility. [23220]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Draw down requirements are covered in 8.1.6 (h) of the Loan Agreement.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 558W, on Railtrack, if he will list the consents applied for by the administrator. [23213]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The train protection and warning system; the Leeds First project; and the Thameslink Advanced Signal Works.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the sources from which funds could be obtained to secure the repayment of loans drawn down under the commercial agreement. [23154]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is a matter for the administrator.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answers of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 558W, for what reason a repayment has been made. [23669]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Repayments have been as a result of the working capital cash sweep.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the decision not to create RenewCo led to Railtrack entering administration; and for what reason his Department did not implement the Renewco agreement. [23611]

**Mr. Jamieson:** No, Railtrack plc entered into administration because it was, or shortly would be, unable to meet its debt liabilities. The decision not to proceed with RenewCo was taken following advice from the ONS that the proposed RenewCo structure would classify in the public sector and as a result did not satisfy the conditions agreed on 2 April and in light of Railtrack's directors being informed of the decision on 5 October to reject their 'Project Rainbow' proposal for additional funds.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the funding requirement for Railtrack in the period to 31 March 2002 will come from sources other than funds covered by the commercial loan agreement; and if he will list these alternative sources. [24125]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Railtrack plc in administration continues to receive funding to the level and profile determined in the regulator's October 2000 periodic review and the 2 April agreement. This incorporates income from track access charges, network grants and 'single-till' sources. It is not possible at this stage to speculate what proportion of overall income this constitutes.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 1015W, in what circumstances he will increase the funding provided for in the commercial loan agreement, as provided for in sections 9.1, 2.1 and 2.2. [24253]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Any request by the administrator for increased funding would be considered on its merits, taking into account the circumstances pertaining at the time of the request.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority (i) has taken and (ii) plans to take to change the nature and level of constraints placed upon the sale of strategic land and property by Railtrack; and if he will make a statement. [23148]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Under the modification to Condition 26 of its network licence, which came into effect on 15 November, Railtrack plc must now seek the rail regulator's specific consent in important cases of the disposal of land that may be used for railway purposes. The purpose of the new licence condition is to ensure that those parts of the Railtrack property portfolio which may be required for the future development of the railway are retained for that purpose.

## Road Spending

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 386–87W, on roads (Surrey), if he will provide similar figures for each *(a)* county, *(b)* unitary authority and *(c)* metropolitan area in England and Wales. [19270]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The provision made for capital expenditure on local major road schemes and maintenance of local roads and bridges, and revenue funding for structural and routine maintenance of non-principal roads and routine maintenance of principal roads in each local authority in England in the period 1996–97 to 2001–02 is set out in the tables which have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Information on expenditure on roads in each local authority in England in 1995–96 is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The tables exclude provision for expenditure in 2001–02 on roads and road related schemes in London, the responsibility for which has transferred to the Mayor for London. Expenditure on roads and road related schemes in Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he is planning changes to the amount allocated to roads under the 10-year plan. [22900]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 9W.

## London Underground

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many new carriages will be ordered by London Underground by 2006 under PPP; [21941]

(2) how many new carriages were ordered by London Underground between *(a)* 1992 and 1997 and *(b)* 1997 and 2001. [21966]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is an operational matter for London Underground (LU) who inform me that since 1992 carriages have been ordered and brought into service as follows.

| | *New carriages ordered* | *New carriages brought into service* |
|---|---|---|
| 1993 | 354 | — |
| 1995 | 636 | — |
| 1997 | — | First Jubilee line stock |
| 1998 | — | First Northern line stock |
| 2001 | — | Last Jubilee and Northern line stock |

[1] 59 Jubilee line trains
[2] 106 Northern line trains

Under the modernisation plans, three infrastructure companies will work under contract to London Underground and will be required to deliver a comprehensive programme of investment to improve track, signals and stations as well as trains. The infrastructure companies will be responsible for ordering new carriages required for them to achieve the standards set by London Underground. I understand that details of the infrastructure companies' plans will be made public once the competitions have been completed.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice his Department has received from the Treasury about the phasing of infrastructure projects on London Underground under PPP. [21948]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Treasury and DTLR officials are in regular contact about various aspects of the PPP. London Underground are responsible for negotiating the PPP contracts, including the phasing of infrastructure projects.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many trains are running per hour on the Jubilee line at peak times. [21848]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is an operational matter for London Underground, who inform me that, in peak hours, 24 trains per hour are running on the Jubilee line.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Jubilee Line is operating at the service levels originally envisaged; and if he will make a statement. [21967]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The original contract between London Underground and Westinghouse Signals Ltd. was to deliver a signalling system with a long term operating capacity of 36 trains per hour (tph) and a fallback capacity of 27 tph in the event that the development of the advanced signalling system failed to meet the contract programme. It was necessary to implement fallback arrangements utilising existing technology to deliver a system capable of supporting 24 tph.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the cost of additional rail inspectors under the PPP arrangements for London Underground. [21960]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Under the underground modernisation plans, the infrastructure companies will be required to bring all assets up to a satisfactory standard, including rails. London Underground will be responsible for managing the contracts with the infrastructure companies. The Health and Safety Executive will be responsible for safety regulation and enforcement, through HM Railway Inspectorate. The Secretary of State has therefore made no assessment of the cost of rail inspectors.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 37–38W, on London Underground, if he will publish line-by-line figures for London Underground *(a)* predicted average passenger journey time and *(b)* passenger excess journey time for (i) each year since 1998–99 and (ii) the whole of 2001–02 to date. [22750]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is an operational matter for London Underground who have provided the information in the table showing scheduled journey time and excess journey time for each full financial year from 1998–99, and for the period 1 April to 10 November 2001.

*London Underground—scheduled journey time (minutes) and excess journey time (minutes), by line*

| | 1998–99 | | 1999–2000 | | 2000–01 | | [1]2001–02 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Schedule* | *Excess* | *Schedule* | *Excess* | *Schedule* | *Excess* | *Schedule* | *Excess* |
| Bakerloo | 24.08 | 5.17 | 24.24 | 5.77 | 27.09 | 7.28 | 27.15 | 7.36 |
| Central | 33.58 | 6.98 | 33.50 | 6.35 | 32.56 | 5.53 | 32.55 | 4.42 |
| District | 27.88 | 3.74 | 27.60 | 4.58 | 27.73 | 5.67 | 27.72 | 5.35 |
| East London | 22.78 | 3.09 | 24.89 | 3.91 | 20.93 | 2.83 | 20.83 | 1.83 |
| Jubilee | 24.30 | 3.26 | 23.77 | 4.64 | 25.40 | 6.04 | 25.43 | 6.17 |
| Metropolitan, Circle and Hammersmith and City | 31.17 | 5.49 | 31.67 | 6.71 | 31.18 | 7.91 | 30.85 | 8.48 |
| Northern | 29.01 | 5.47 | 29.03 | 4.68 | 28.83 | 4.76 | 28.83 | 5.14 |
| Piccadilly | 30.72 | 6.50 | 30.47 | 5.89 | 30.54 | 6.22 | 30.89 | 6.51 |
| Victoria | 22.17 | 4.77 | 22.40 | 5.13 | 22.38 | 6.48 | 22.38 | 5.56 |
| Waterloo and City | 9.81 | 0.48 | 9.41 | 0.52 | 9.40 | 0.73 | 9.41 | 0.95 |

[1] From 1 April to 10 November

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 623W, on London Underground, for what reason his Department allowed London Underground to give a waiver to senior LU managers in regard to a legal challenge by infrastructure companies and bidders; and if the waiver will extend to such a challenge by a member of the public. [22740]

**Mr. Jamieson:** London Underground is responsible for managing the competitions for the contracts to modernise the tube infrastructure.

I understand that, as is common in such transactions, the legal documents for effecting the transfer of the infrastructure companies to the bidders contain various limitations on the bidders' ability to make claims against London Underground, including in relation to information disclosed by London Underground as part of the bid process. Although considered unlikely, it is possible that a bidder could seek to make a claim against an employee of London Underground rather than the company itself. Since employees are insured against such claims by London Underground, the effect would be to circumvent the intended cap on London Underground's liability. London Underground therefore intends to include a waiver in relation to claims by a bidder against employees of London Transport, London Underground or the infrastructure companies.

As stated in my answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 623W, the wavier will not prevent legal action by London Transport or London Underground against their own employees. Nor will it extend to potential claims by a member of the public.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 38W, on London Underground, if he will publish the average annual percentage of peak hour trains that ran on each line of the London Underground for the whole of 2001–02 to date. [22746]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is an operational matter for London Underground who have provided the information set out in the table, showing the percentage of trains in peak service for the period 1 April to 10 November 2001. The figures take account of all cancellations including those due to factors beyond LUL's control, such as security alerts and passenger action.

*Percentage of trains in peak service (1 April to 10 November 2001)*

| *Line* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| Bakerloo | 93.0 |
| Central | 96.0 |
| Circle | 91.3 |
| District | 93.0 |
| East London | 96.8 |
| Hammersmith and City | 93.8 |
| Jubilee | 96.0 |
| Metropolitan | 93.7 |
| Northern | 98.7 |
| Piccadilly | 91.8 |
| Victoria | 98.5 |

*Percentage of trains in peak service (1 April to 10 November 2001)*

| *Line* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| Waterloo and City | 97.8 |
| Total LUL | 95.0 |

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the merits of establishing a not-for-profit company to run London Underground. [22821]

**Mr. Spellar:** The Government considered all of the options for the future of the tube prior to the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement of the way forward in March 1998—including the possibility of a not-for-profit private sector trust.

There is no need for a not-for-profit solution for the underground. Public sector London Underground will continue to be responsible for running the railway. The operation of track, signals, trains and stations will remain in public hands. The public sector will also be responsible for managing the contracts to maintain and improve the tube.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many potential bidders for the London Underground PPP *(a)* asked for documents to consider bidding and *(b)* sent in a bid. [22704]

**Mr. Spellar:** London Underground is responsible for managing the competition for the contracts to modernise the Tube infrastructure. I understand that six applications to pre-qualify were received for the BCV and JNP contracts, and that four bidders submitted bids (two for both contracts). Four applications to pre-qualify were received for the SSL contract and three bids were submitted.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who will be responsible for safety in the PPP plan for London Underground. [22818]

**Mr. Spellar:** London Underground is responsible for managing the competition for the contracts to modernise the tube infrastructure. London Underground, in the public sector, will remain responsible for safety across the single unified system. As the operator of the trains and the infrastructure controller, London Underground is required to have a statutory safety case in accordance with the Railway (Safety Case) Regulations 2000. In addition to general health and safety law, the infrastructure companies will be required to comply with a contractual safety case. The independent Health and Safety Executive will remain responsible for safety regulation and enforcement.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the costs incurred by the bidders for the London Underground PPP in preparing the bids. [22711]

**Mr. Spellar:** No such estimate has been made.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to build new underground lines. [22822]

**Mr. Spellar:** This is a matter for the Mayor for London to consider in the context of his transport strategy. He will need to liaise closely with the Strategic Rail Authority to ensure that plans for London Underground effectively complement the development of the national rail network.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what public money the Government are promising in each of the first three years to each of the planned infracos for London Underground. [22816]

**Mr. Spellar:** I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 11 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 379W.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the costs of preparing bids for the London Underground PPP are an allowable cost against corporation tax. [22707]

**Mr. Spellar:** [illegible] costs of preparing bids are treated for taxation purposes in the same way as any other cost.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what alternative to a PPP the Government are evaluating for London Underground. [22824]

**Mr. Spellar:** I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 33W.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many firms of consultants *(a)* the Government and *(b)* London Underground has used on London Underground matters in the last two years. [22703]

**Mr. Spellar:** As to part *(a)* of the question the Department has used Ove Arup (advice in respect of Jubilee Line extension project), Herbert Smith (legal advice), Maggie Leates (pensions advice) and Ernst & Young (currently reviewing London Underground's value for money evaluation of the tube modernisation plans).

As to part *(b)* this is an operational matter for London Underground.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who has overall responsibility for *(a)* policy, *(b)* performance and *(c)* funding of London Underground. [22694]

**Mr. Spellar:** The London Regional Transport Act 1984 sets out the framework for the current operation of London Regional Transport, the parent company of London Underground Ltd., and its subsidiaries.

Responsibility for London Underground Ltd. policy lies with the board of London Regional Transport, which is appointed by the Secretary of State. The board's policies must accord with principles from time-to-time approved by the Secretary of State.

Responsibility for performance also lies with the board of London Regional Transport, and is encapsulated in its general duty to provide a rail service for Greater London with due regard to transport needs, efficiency, economy and safety of operation.

In respect of funding, the Secretary of State may, with the consent of Treasury, make grants to London Regional Transport (for any purpose and on such terms and conditions as the Secretary of State thinks fit). It is the duty of London Regional Transport to apply those sums to aid capital investment or operating costs in respect of the public passenger transport services it provides (including its subsidiary—London Underground Ltd.).

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is in the Public Expenditure budget for London Underground in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; and how much of the total is provision for capital spending. [22823]

**Mr. Spellar:** Parliament has approved provision of £520 million for London Underground in 2001–02.

The financial requirements of London Underground in 2002–03 will not finally be known until negotiations with bidders for the Tube modernisation plans have been completed. The Government have made it clear that, as long as the final bids represent value for money, Transport for London will receive the appropriate level of central Government grant to allow for London Underground's need to make payments to the contractors.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what requirements the Government have requested of bidders for London Underground with respect to new capital investment. [22819]

**Mr. Spellar:** London Underground is responsible for managing the competition for the contracts to modernise the Tube infrastructure. The contracts will require the infrastructure companies to deliver increased capacity, improved reliability and higher quality infrastructure.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Government will reimburse part of the costs of *(a)* unsuccessful and *(b)* successful bidders for the London Underground PPP. [22706]

**Mr. Spellar:** The Government will not reimburse the costs of either unsuccessful or successful bidders. However, the successful bidder on each competition will reimburse 90 per cent. of the eligible costs of unsuccessful bidders, up to a maximum of £7 million. In addition, London Underground has agreed to compensate bidders if the competition should be terminated for reasons other than bids not representing value for money. On the two deep Tube competitions, the preferred bidder will receive up to £12 million, with up to £7 million available for the reserve bidder. On the sub-surface line competition, where three bidders were short-listed, they will receive up to £7 million each.

In the event of the competitions being terminated because no bid is adjudged to represent value for money, then no compensation is payable.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much has been spent to date by the Government on advisory fees for the PPP for London Underground. [22696]

**Mr. Spellar:** The Department has employed Ernst and Young to carry out a review of London Underground's value for money evaluation of the Tube modernisation plans. No payments have yet been made under the contract.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what are the respective roles of *(a)* the Secretary of State, *(b)* the Mayor's Office, *(c)* Transport for London, *(d)* the Government Office for London and *(e)* London Underground Ltd. in the creation of policy and management of the London Underground. [22695]

**Mr. Spellar:** Under the London Regional Transport Act 1984, the role of the Secretary of State is to set principles from time to time, with which London Regional Transport's general duty—to provide rail services—must accord. In addition, the Secretary of State has other roles including specific purposes such as issuing approvals, consents, determinations and directions to London Regional Transport. The Secretary of State may also with the consent of Treasury, make grants to London Regional Transport, which in turn can be applied to aid capital investment and operating costs in respect of its subsidiary, London Underground Ltd. The Government Office for London is part of the Government.

Under the Greater London Authority Act 1999, in the transitional period until London Underground Ltd. is transferred to Transport for London, the Mayor of London, Transport for London and London Underground Ltd. are required to consult and co-operate with each other.

The role of London Underground Ltd. is to provide such railway services as London Regional Transport requires in pursuance of its statutory duty under section 2(1) of the London Regional Transport Act 1984,

> "to provide or secure the provision of public passenger transport services for Greater London by railway".

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the length in pages of an infraco franchise agreement for London Underground. [22708]

**Mr. Spellar:** London Underground is responsible for managing the competition for the contracts to modernise the tube infrastructure. I understand that the core contract for each of the three infrastructure companies is approximately 100 pages long. In addition there are a number of detailed supporting and related documents.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what financial guarantees the Government will seek from bidders for the London Underground infracos. [22817]

**Mr. Spellar:** London Underground has carried out a thorough evaluation of the bidding consortia to ensure that they are financially robust and capable of meeting their obligations under the tube modernisation contracts.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the deadline was for submitting bids for the London Underground PPP; and what the Government's estimate is of when a decision on the bids will be announced. [22710]

**Mr. Spellar:** London Underground is responsible for managing the competition for the contracts to modernise the tube infrastructure. Bidders are required to submit final pricing early in January and London Transport will take a decision in principle whether to proceed with the modernisation plans, subject to consultation with the Mayor and Transport for London, in February.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what requirements the Government have placed on bidders for London Underground with respect to safety. [22820]

**Mr. Spellar:** London Underground is responsible for managing the competition for the contracts to modernise the tube infrastructure. In addition to general health and safety law, the infrastructure companies will be required to comply with a contractual safety case.

The independent Health and Safety Executive will be examining these contractual safety cases as part of the assessment process for the next revision to London Underground's statutory Railway Safety Case. The Government have always made it clear that the plans for modernising the tube will only go ahead if the Health and Safety Executive are satisfied that London Underground has made an acceptable case for safety.

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many criminal incidents were reported as occurring on the London Underground in the past 12 months; and how many arrests there have been. [22940]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The British Transport police (BTP) have provided the following information. During the period December 2000 to November 2001, 12,787 notifiable and 5,013 non-notifiable offences were recorded by the BTP area responsible for the London Underground. The term "notifiable" refers to those offences that police forces in England and Wales are required to report to the Home Office. The term "non-notifiable" refers to those offences that are not reportable, and are generally of a less serious nature. The number of arrests is not recorded by the BTP.

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library correspondence he has had with the *(a)* Health and Safety Commission and *(b)* Health and Safety Executive on the London Underground PPP. [14481]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Secretary of State has not personally written to the Health and Safety Commission or Health and Safety Executive in relation to the plans for the modernisation of London Underground.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many trains per hour are timetabled to run on each section of each London Underground line during peak hours; and what the maximum number of trains per hour to have run on each equivalent section in peak hours was in the past. [22699]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is an operational matter for London Underground who have provided the information set out in the table showing scheduled trains per hour for the trunk sections of each line. Trunk sections are the busiest core sections of each individual line which carry the heaviest peak hour traffic.

*London Underground-trains per hour in morning peak hour on trunk sections of lines*

| *Line/section* | *1980* | *1990* | *2001* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Bakerloo* | | | |
| Elephant and Castle to Queens Park | 18 | 21 | 22 |
| Queens Park to Elephant and Castle | 20 | 22 | 22 |
| *Central* | | | |
| White City to Leytonstone | 24 | 24 | 22 |
| Leytonstone to White City | 29 | 29 | 29 |
| *District and Circle* | | | |
| Gloucester Road to Tower Hill | 25 | 30 | 29.5 |
| Tower Hill to Gloucester Road | 26 | 29 | 29.5 |
| *East London Line* | | | |
| Surrey Quays to Whitechapel | [1]— | [1]— | 10 |
| Whitechapel to Surrey Quays | [1]— | [1]— | 10 |
| *Jubilee* | | | |
| West Hampstead to Charing Cross | 22 | 23 | [2]24 |
| Charing Cross to West Hampstead | 20 | 20 | [3]20 |
| *Metropolitan* | | | |
| Baker Street to Harrow-on-the-Hill | 17 | 16 | 23 |
| Harrow-on-the-Hill to Baker Street | 23 | 23 | 25 |
| *Metropolitan, Hammersmith & City and Circle* | | | |
| Liverpool Street to Baker Street | 22 | 25 | 29 |
| Baker Street to Liverpool Street | 29 | 30 | 30 |
| *Northern* | | | |
| Kennington to Camden Town (via Charing Cross) | 18 | 20 | 19 |
| Kennington to Camden Town (via Bank) | 18 | 20 | 19 |
| Camden Town to Kennington (via Charing Cross) | 18 | 19 | 18 |
| Camden Town to Kennington (via Bank) | 18 | 19 | 18 |
| *Piccadilly* | | | |
| Acton Town to Arnos Grove | 28 | 27 | 27 |
| Arnos Grove to Acton Town | 30 | 24 | 27 |
| *Victoria* | | | |
| Brixton to Seven Sisters | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| Seven Sisters to Brixton | 27 | 29 | 28 |
| *Waterloo & City* | | | |
| Waterloo to Bank | [1]— | [1]— | 18 |
| Bank to Waterloo | [1]— | [1]— | 18 |

[1] Data not available
[2] Figure for 2001 relates to Willesden Green to North Greenwich
[3] Figure for 2001 relates to North Greenwich to Willesden Green

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 623W, on London Underground, what discussions took place between his Department and London Underground about the *(a)* recent and *(b)* continuing advertising campaigns to promote the public-private partnership for the underground, giving details of which (i) Ministers and (ii) officials were involved. [22722]

**Mr. Jamieson:** DTLR officials have regular contract with London Underground on a wide range of issues. DTLR Ministers have occasional meetings with London Transport and London Underground directors, but have not specifically discussed London Underground's advertising campaign.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if *(a)* the companies and *(b)* their subsidiaries, including ones that have subsequently been taken over by other companies, that make up the consortia that are the preferred bidder

infracos for London Underground, have at any time in the past 10 years provided London Underground with (i) trains, (ii) signalling equipment and (iii) other (A) infrastructure and (B) service that has failed to achieve the level of performance required by the contract originally signed. [22697]

**Mr. Jamieson:** London Underground is responsible for managing the competition for the contracts to modernise the tube infrastructure. I understand that each of the bidders has previous experience of supplying goods or services to London Underground and that such experience was considered by London Underground. Detailed information on performance of its contractors is a matter for London Underground.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 37–38W, on London Underground, if he will publish the *(a)* predicted average passenger journey time and *(b)* passenger excess journey time for the whole of 2001–02 to date. [22749]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is an operational matter for London Underground (LU) who inform me that the weighted scheduled journey time and weighted excess journey time for the period 1 April to 10 November 2001 were 35.4 minutes and 7.30 minutes respectively.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish *(a)* in which year new escalators were most recently installed at Angel station, *(b)* on how many occasions since these new escalators were installed the station has had to be closed because of escalator problems, *(c)* the length of time of each closure and *(d)* the name of the manufacturer of the escalators. [22698]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is an operational matter for London Underground who inform me that:

*(a)* new escalators were installed at Angel station in August and September 1992;

*(b)* and *(c)* they do not collect information in the form requested;

*(d)* the escalators at the Angel were manufactured by CNIM.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the private companies, consultancies and partnerships that have provided *(a)* his Department, *(b)* London Transport and *(c)* London Underground with consultancy advice concerning the public-private partnership for London Underground since the PPP negotiations began. [22752]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The principal firms employed by London Transport and London Underground are:

PricewaterhouseCoopers (financial)

Freshfields (legal)

Ove Arup (engineering)

Arthur Anderson (restructuring)

PA Consulting (infraco structuring)

Marsh (insurance)

Pugh Roberts (modelling)

Bacon & Woodrow (pensions)

KPMG (review of public sector comparator).

The Department is currently employing Ernst & Young to carry out a review of London Underground's value for money evaluation of the tube modernisation plans.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will give details of the improvements that will occur for passengers using the Northern line between Morden and Kennington as a result of the public private partnership for London Underground in the first five years of the PPP, giving output targets to be achieved for *(a)* stations, *(b)* track and *(c)* trains; [22718]

(2) if he will give details of the improvements that will occur for passengers using the Jubilee line between Wembley Park and Baker Street as a result of the public-private partnership for London Underground in the first five years of the PPP, giving output targets to be achieved for *(a)* stations, *(b)* track and *(c)* trains; [22716]

(3) if he will give details of the improvements that will occur for passengers using the Central line between Marble Arch and Liverpool Street as a result of the public-private partnership for London Underground in the first five years of the PPP, giving output targets to be achieved for *(a)* stations, *(b)* track and *(c)* trains. [22717]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 622W.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 831W, on London Underground, if he will publish the annual change in the gross operating costs of London Underground for each year since 1997–98. [22742]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The gross operating costs of London Underground are set out in London Transport's annual report documents, which incorporate their audited annual accounts.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answers of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 622W, on London Underground, whether his Department has undertaken a consultation exercise specifically to discover what *(a)* outputs and *(b)* outcomes the London public wishes to see achieved as a result of the public-private partnership for London Underground; and if he will place the results in the Library. [22756]

**Mr. Jamieson:** London Underground is responsible for managing the competitions for the contracts to modernise the tube infrastructure. London Underground regularly undertakes consultation exercises and surveys of customers attitudes. I understand that the performance requirements in the modernisation contracts have been developed to deliver the improvements customers want, in particular increased capacity, improved reliability and higher quality (including safety and security).

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 622W, on London Underground, which year will be used as the base-line against which performance by PPP Infracos will be measured; and what penalties will be incurred if an Infraco achieves a performance 5 per cent. *(a)* above or *(b)* below this base-year starting-point. [22759]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The reliability, capacity and quality of travelling environment delivered by the infrastructure companies will be measured against benchmarks that are based on performance in the current year.

On reliability, an infrastructure company that performs 5 per cent. better than current performance will be penalised at a rate of £3 per lost customer hour for any deterioration in that performance level. If it performs 5 per cent. worse than current performance, then the penalty rate doubles so that a further deterioration in performance is penalised at a rate of £6 per lost customer hour.

A similar mechanism is used to incentivise improvements in capacity and the quality of the travelling environment. On these measures, the payment rate varies according to the line in question, but in every case the benchmark is set so that the marginal payment rate doubles if performance deteriorates below the current level. I understand that London Underground intends to make details of the contracts available once they have been signed.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the annual service performance targets set for London Underground by his Department and its predecessors *(a)* for each year since 1996–97, showing the actual performance achieved in each and *(b)* for 2001–02, showing actual performance achieved so far. [22700]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The annual service performance targets set for London Underground, and their actual performance, are set out in London Transport's Annual Reports. The performance targets set at the start of 1999–2000 were, however, two-year targets to be achieved by the end of March 2001.

The Government targets for 2001–02 were announced to the House on 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 367W. London Underground's actual performance will be published as soon as possible after the end of March 2002.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 622W, on London Underground, if he will state, for each London Underground line, the last year in which it carried *(a)* 10 per cent. and *(b)* 25 per cent. fewer passengers than it does today. [22741]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is an operational matter for London Underground, who inform me that they do not hold the information requested in a readily available form and that it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 36W, on London Underground, in which months since they were introduced the trains on the *(a)* Central, *(b)* Jubilee and *(c)* Northern lines have failed to achieve their original contractual requirements; and what the mean distance between failure figure for the most recent month available was. [22754]

**Mr. Jamieson:** London Underground inform me that they do not hold readily available information on the months when contractual requirements were not met and that this could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Detailed in-year operational information such as monthly figures for mean distance between train failures is a matter for London Underground.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions Ministers have had with the Mayor of London and the Transport Commission for London about the London Underground in the last month. [22712]

**Mr. Spellar:** Ministers have frequent meetings with the Mayor and Commissioner of Transport for London. The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions most recently met the Mayor on 12 December to discuss a range of issues, including London Underground, and I last met him on 13 December.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 560W, on London Underground, (1) if he will provide comparable information on signal failure for the remaining underground lines; [23212]

(2) if he will provide comparable information for the remaining parts of the lines. [23658]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is an operational matter for London Underground who have provided the information set out in the following table showing the number of signal failures causing delays to services for each underground line. The data relate to the period 1 January to 10 November 2001 unless otherwise stated.

*Service delays arising from signal failures (by line)*

| *Underground line* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Bakerloo | 133 |
| Central | 402 |
| Circle | 125 |
| District | 343 |
| East London | 54 |
| Hammersmith and City | 106 |
| Jubilee[1] | 232 |
| Metropolitan | 372 |
| Northern[1] | 166 |
| Piccadilly[1] | 94 |
| Victoria | 256 |
| Waterloo and City | 9 |

[1] Data for the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines relates to the period 9 December 2000 to 8 December 2001.

**Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, (1) pursuant to his answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 443W, on the Underground environment, what are the relative weights ascribed to the passenger ambience factors by the PPP contracts for London Underground in respect of *(a)* graffiti, *(b)* litter, *(c)* scratched windows, *(d)* broken lights and *(e)* dirt; [24249]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 443W, if he will publish each weight applied to each attribute covered in the PPP contracts. [24251]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is a matter for London Underground. I understand that London Underground intend to make details of the contracts available once they have been signed.

**Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 443W, how many mystery shoppers are employed on the London Underground; and how the findings are reported. [24250]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is a matter for London Underground and for NOP who conduct the mystery shopper survey on their behalf.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish the Ernst & Young report into the value for money review of PPP. [23940]

**Mr. Jamieson** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* Ernst & Young's report will be published as part of the consultation process and before decisions are taken on whether to sign contracts for the Government's tube modernisation plans.

### Train Protection and Warning System

**Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made by Railtrack in fitting train protection and warning system to the rail network; how many miles of track have been fitted with TPWS in *(a)* Railtrack's southern zone, *(b)* the south eastern network and *(c)* Kent and Sussex; how many miles of track have been fitted with TPWS since 7 October; and how many miles of track were fitted with TPWS in the same period last year. [22926]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The information is not available in the form requested.

### Structural Faults (Railways)

**Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many structural defects have been *(a)* identified and *(b)* repaired since Railtrack plc was placed into administration; and what the figure is for the same period in 1997. [22925]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This information is not held by the Department.

### Vehicle Excise Duty

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many motorists did not qualify for a VED rebate because they bought a licence for the year starting July 2000 with a single payment. [21802]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The number of annual licences taken out during the period between July and October 2000 and thus were not eligible for a VED rebate was some 1.2 million.

### Public Transport Projects (London)

**Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the major public transport projects being built in London, with starting dates. [22462]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The following major public transport projects are currently being built in London:

the East London Line Northern Extension—work commenced on 3 December 2001,

the channel tunnel rail link stage 2—work commenced on 2 July 2001,

the upgrade of Kings Cross/St. Pancras London Underground Ltd. station—work commenced 6 August 2001, and

the west coast main line upgrade, Euston approaches—work commenced spring 1997.

### Speed Cameras (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many speed cameras are located in the Buckingham constituency. [22654]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There are six fixed speed camera sites and up to three mobile units operating in the Buckingham constituency.

### Aston Clinton Bypass

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many people are employed in the construction of the Aston Clinton Bypass; [22558]

(2) what his most recent estimate is of the cost of construction of the Aston Clinton Bypass in the Buckingham constituency. [22566]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. John Bercow, dated 19 December 2001:*

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the Aston Clinton bypass.

The contract price for the by-pass was £21.7 million. I am afraid it is not possible to disaggregate a value for the part of the by-pass that is in the Buckingham constituency. During November, 51 people were employed on the contract but numbers fluctuate from month to month depending on the nature of the work.

If you would like any further information please, contact Andy Finch the Project Sponsor in our Dorking office, who will be pleased to help you. He can be contacted on 01306–878343.

### Local Government Finance

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to revise and re-issue the consultation document for the 2002–03 Local Government Finance Settlement published on 4 December 2002, taking into account errors subsequently identified; and if he will make a statement. [22709]

**Dr. Whitehead:** In line with practice in previous years, the Department will shortly be issuing further information to local authorities, which include such data as are available now but were not available in time for inclusion in the data sent out on 4 December 2001. A copy of this information will be placed in the House Library. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced to the House on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 137, his intention to meet the concern raised by shire districts

during the consultation on the settlement, in relation to the way in which their grant floor has been calculated. We will announce the full details of how we will do this at the time of the final settlement, around the end of January 2002.

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the content of the letter dated 6 December to himself from Sir Jeremy Beecham, with particular reference to the points relating to the local government settlement for Lewes district council; [22950]

(2) for what reasons certain district councils will not benefit from the minimum increase of 2.3 per cent. provided to councils as part of his recent statement on the local government settlement. [23190]

**Dr. Whitehead** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 137.

### Standard Spending Assessment (Essex)

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement summarising the changes in the responsibilities of local councils which led him to adjust the figures for the SSA and general grants for Essex county council and the Rochford district council for the current financial year. [21774]

**Dr. Whitehead:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 137.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage increase in local rates will be required to be imposed by Essex county council and Rochford district council if they spend the full SSAs allocated to them for 2002–03 and receive the full general grant for that year announced on 4 December. [21775]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The responsibility for setting council tax levels lies with local authorities. The provisional local government finance settlement, announced in the House on 4 December, does not require any local authorities to set council tax at any particular level.

### South Eastern Rail Network

**Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many trains have been cancelled since 7 October in *(a)* the southern zone, *(b)* the south eastern network and *(c)* Kent and Sussex; and what the figures are for the same period in 1997; [22916]

(2) how many trains running in November were late in reaching their destination within *(a)* Railtrack's southern zone, *(b)* the south eastern network and *(c)* Kent and Sussex; and what the figures were for November 1997. [22919]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The information is not available in the form requested.

**Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps have been taken by Railtrack to improve the power supply for the south eastern rail network, with particular reference to Kent and Sussex; how much money was spent on the required upgrading *(a)* before and *(b)* since Railtrack plc was placed into administration; and how much is required before all new rolling stock can be utilised together. [22927]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Connex Transport UK Ltd., in conjunction with Railtrack, are seeking to find a means of ensuring that the power supply is adequate for the operation of these trains. Until these means are identified the investment required to solve the problem will not be known.

**Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money Railtrack plc has spent on maintenance and repair of the south eastern rail network, with particular reference to Kent and Sussex, since being placed into administration; and what the comparative figures are for the same period in 1997. [22922]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is a matter for the Administrator.

**Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many newly commissioned trains and carriages are unutilised within the south eastern rail network with particular reference to Kent and Sussex as a result of the power supply in the southern zone. [22918]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There are currently no commissioned units stabled in Kent or Sussex which are not in use. There are units stabled at these locations while undergoing a rigorous process to gain acceptance for use on the network. There are no units out of use due to any issues concerning power supply.

### National Rail Timetable

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps have been taken by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority to monitor the performance of the public timetable information service provided by Railtrack by (i) telephone and (ii) the internet; and if he will make a statement. [23193]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The National Rail Enquiry Service (NRES) is provided collectively by the train operating companies, not Railtrack. The Strategic Rail Authority monitor call handling performance. No less than 90 per cent. of calls must be answered in any one four-week period, and 92.5 per cent. of calls must be answered in the year to 31 March 2002. NRES is currently meeting these targets. Qualitative performance is monitored by independent researchers every six months through mystery shopping surveys. There are no requirement on train operators or Railtrack to provide an internet based system. Where they do so it is done as a commercial initiative and is not subject to performance monitoring.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what process the national rail timetable is created; what steps his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to modify the process by which the national rail travel timetable is created; and if he will make a statement. [23146]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Railtrack convene an annual timetable conference at which train operators submit their aspirations for the following years' timetables (summer and winter). Following the conference Railtrack work with each company to produce a draft timetable offer, taking into account the comments of local authorities and Rail Passengers Committees. Each company then has a short period to review the offer and re-bid for any changes that they may wish to see made. Once this re-bidding is completed Railtrack will produce a final version of the timetable, normally 12 weeks before the date of the timetable change. There are no plans to change this process.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* representations his Department has received from and *(b)* discussions his Department has had with (i) train operating companies, (ii) Railtrack, (iii) the Rail Passenger Council, (iv) rail passenger committees, (v) the Strategic Rail Authority and (vi) others on the process by which the national rail travel timetable is created; and if he will make a statement. [23147]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Ministers have received no representations on this issue, but discussed it with train operators, Railtrack, the Strategic Rail Authority and the Rail Passenger Council in the context of broader considerations about making the best use of the railway network.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the monthly performance figures are for the Railtrack public timetable information service since it became operational according to the criteria for performance as defined by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority. [23194]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Statistics on the performance of the National Rail Enquiry Scheme (operated by the Association of Train Operating Companies) are contained in National Rail Trends, which is published quarterly by the Strategic Rail Authority, most recently on 13 December. A copy is placed in the Library of the House.

## West Coast Main Line

**Mr. John Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has received a proposal for the Ford Motor Company to construct a rail link between the Land Rover plant at Solihull and the west coast main line; if the link has passenger potential; and if he will make a statement on road to rail. [22911]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Strategic Rail Authority has been in discussions with Ford Motor Company about this proposal but they have not received a formal application for support. The scheme has potential to transfer freight traffic from road to rail which is in line with the objectives of our 10-year plan. No assessment has been made as to whether this rail link, if built, would have potential passenger use.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what financial commitment the Government have made to *(a)* the West Coast Phase 1 upgrade, *(b)* the West Coast Phase 2 upgrade and *(c)* the Virgin Cross Country Franchise upgrade. [22773]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Virgin Trains have so far been paid some £300 million under the West Coast Trains franchise since it commenced on 9 March 1997. In addition to making payments under that franchise, the SRA is discussing, with my Department, Railtrack and Virgin Trains, various options for the outputs to be delivered under the west coast modernisation programme. Until the final outputs are agreed it is not possible to say what the costs involved will be. Value for money is one of the considerations under discussion.

Virgin Trains have so far been paid over £400 million under the cross country franchise since it commenced on 5 January 1997. The upgrade to cross country services, including the lease of new trains and infrastructure enhancements, are a commercial venture by Virgin Trains.

Subsidy levels decline year on year. The company will be paying premiums under the West Coast Trains franchise from 2002–03 and under the cross country franchise from 2010–11.

## Trains (Criminal Incidents)

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many criminal incidents have been reported as occurring on trains in *(a)* the south-east, *(b)* East Anglia, *(c)* the south-west, *(d)* the midlands, *(e)* the north-west and *(f)* the north-east in the last 12 months. [22939]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The British Transport Police (BTP) have provided the following information regarding the number of notifiable and non-notifiable on-train offences recorded by all BTP areas, except London Underground, during the period from December 2000 to November 2001.

| *Area* | *Notifiable offences* | *Non-notifiable offences* | *All offences* |
|---|---|---|---|
| London North | 3,447 | 212 | 3,659 |
| North-east | 939 | 251 | 1,190 |
| Scotland | 992 | 484 | 1,476 |
| North-west | 2,240 | 977 | 3,217 |
| Midlands | 1,183 | 643 | 1,826 |
| South-west | 1,058 | 450 | 1,508 |
| London South | 4,998 | 327 | 5,325 |
| Total | 14,857 | 3,344 | 18,201 |

## Planning Obligations

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish his consultation document on planning obligations. [24260]

**Mr. Byers:** I am publishing today a consultation document entitled "Planning obligations: delivering a fundamental change" which is one of a series of consultation papers that together propose a radical reform of the planning system.

Planning obligations (also known as section 106 agreements) are typically agreements between developers and local authorities negotiated in the context of granting a planning consent. They have been criticised by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Nolan Committee) for being insufficiently transparent. Business finds them slow to negotiate, unpredictable and, in some cases, unfair. They are then a disincentive to developers who may find themselves with long, expensive planning delays.

I am proposing to replace the present system of negotiated planning obligations with a tariff that will be set by local authorities in their local development plans. The tariff will apply in principle to all development that receives a planning consent. It will therefore give business much more certainty about what cost, in terms of planning obligations, it faces if it chooses to buy and develop a particular piece of land or property. I am also proposing that some development should be exempt because it is too small, it is financially marginal—such as development of an urban brownfield site—or serves a clear purpose in promoting sustainable development.

The tariff would be spent in line with the priorities set out in local development plans. I would expect the provision of affordable housing to be a high priority in most plans.

My proposals will create an open, accountable and predictable system that will enable business to see, at the outset of a development, what level of planning obligation is likely to be incurred. The tariff will, so far as possible, require no negotiation. It will be much easier for local authorities to administer and should allow planning permissions to be issued much faster.

I propose in the consultation document to allow planning obligations to be used to enable communities to share in the benefits of sustainable growth. Development pressures in some areas are placing heavy burdens on the existing infrastucture and especially on the supply of affordable housing for nurses, teachers, police officers and other keyworkers. We need to ensure that new development supports the investment required in new facilities to help improve the quality of life for local communities.

Copies of the consultation document will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Rail Franchising Policy

**Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on rail franchising policy. [24405]

**Mr. Byers:** I have today laid before the House a policy statement, "Passenger Rail Franchising". The statement sets out the benefits that I wish the Strategic Rail Authority to seek to achieve through rail franchising and requires it to explore the full range of options for securing them. It also incorporates the statement of policy referred to in section 26(10) of the Railways Act 1993, as amended by the Transport Act 2000.

### Ports (Appraisal Framework)

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on an appraisal framework for ports in the United Kingdom. [23387]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Department is issuing today a consultation document concerned with the development of an appraisal framework for port projects in the UK.

The development of an appraisal framework for ports was identified in "Modern Ports: A UK Policy" as an important plank in the application of a sustainable transport policy to ports. The intention of the appraisal framework is to put ports on a similar footing to other modes, to make the appraisals more consistent with each other and to take full account of the role of ports in promoting sustainable transport. We believe that the use of a common framework assists promoters, objectors, local authorities, other public bodies and all those involved in planning inquiries to consider whether all relevant factors have been covered. The framework is also a contribution to the package of measures designed to speed up planning decisions on major infrastructure projects announced by the Department in July 2001.

The consultation will assist the Department in drawing up a guidance note for all those involved with port developments requiring some form of official approval. It is intended that the guidance note will be issued later in 2002.

We are inviting comments from all those with an interest in port related matters, including ports, port users, environmental interests, other Government Departments, local authorities, and other public and private bodies.

The document outlines an appraisal framework derived from the guidance for multi-modal studies, but taking account of the particular effect of port developments. The document invites comments and suggestions on a number of topics, such as the content and format of strategic appraisal, scheme description, coverage and measurement of detailed effects and the appropriate level of detail required.

The consultation is being conducted in accordance with the criteria contained in the Cabinet Office's Code of Practice on Written Consultation. Responses are requested to be sent to my Department by 5 April 2002. Copies of the consultation document are in the Library, and it is also available from my Department (EAMI Division, Zone 1/34, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DR) and on the Department's website.

### Ordnance Survey

**Mr. Pound:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of the Quinquennial Review of Ordnance Survey. [24994]

**Ms Keeble:** I am pleased to announce today the outcome of the first Stage of the Quinquennial Review of Ordnance Survey. I have placed copies of the Stage 1 Report in the Libraries.

Stage 1 of the Review of Ordnance Survey, announced on 15 February 2001 was managed by a Steering Group chaired by my Department. It also included representatives from Ordnance Survey, HM Treasury, Cabinet Office and two external members from the Association of Geographic Information (AGI) and the London borough of Lewisham. Consultation took place with a wide range of stakeholders and customers in the geographic information business in Great Britain.

Ordnance Survey is a Government Department and Executive Agency operating within a Trading Fund regime. The main recommendation of the review is that it should further strengthen its business focus by becoming a Government-owned plc on 1 April 2003, with Government owning 100 per cent. of the shares. This would provide Ordnance Survey with additional commercial freedoms that are considered to be essential if it is to use its full potential to develop the geographic information and e-business marketplace.

The Stage 1 Review rejected the options of abolition, merger, contracting out and market testing. It considered privatisation carefully, but stated that this was not a real option at present because there is much for Ordnance Survey to do to increase its value as a business through increasing market presence and decreasing cost through operational efficiencies. Additionally, the reviewers concluded that privatisation could endanger Ordnance Survey's existing partnerships, both within the Government and the private sector. Government-owned plc status would balance the requirement of the national interest in maintaining consistent, up-to-date, and fit-for-purpose geographic information, with the commercial imperatives of an efficient organisation.

I have carefully considered the Stage 1 Report and its argument that there is a need for a further step change from the current Trading Fund status to enable Ordnance Survey to respond effectively to the requirements of the marketplace. I have accepted that the change in status will enable the further development and expansion of their business of providing geographic data for others to add value and generate commercial products, but I wish to have this confirmed by means of a clear business case.

The report's recommendation is in line with the wider Government policy of increasing accountability for Government organisations and increases the potential for high quality managers to raise the return to Government from the efficient and effective use of Ordnance Survey assets and investment.

I am minded to accept the Review's recommendation and have authorised the Steering Group to proceed to a Stage 2 Review which will be asked to undertake a detailed analysis of the best structure for a company, confirm the benefits and costs compared to the current Trading Fund status, consider the right operating framework, and propose means of removing any obstacles which will influence the establishment of Ordnance Survey as a Government-owned company by 1 April 2003. Stage 2 will also investigate how further public-private partnerships might benefit Ordnance Survey.

I will make a further statement when the Stage 2 Review is complete and I have assessed its findings.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 279W, on the Ordnance Survey, what further stages in the Quinquennial Review of the Ordnance Survey will follow stage one; what the timetable will be for completion of such stages; and whether a staged timetable was envisaged when the Government announced the Quinquennial Review on 15 February. [22757]

**Ms Keeble:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) regarding Stage 1 of the Quinquennial Review of Ordnance Survey, at columns 518–19W.

Cabinet Office guidelines stipulate a two-stage approach to Quinquennial Reviews. The content of the second stage of Quinquennial Reviews is dependent on decisions made following the first stage. The first stage of the review has considered and made recommendations regarding the most appropriate organisation for delivering the functions currently carried out by Ordnance Survey.

Work will begin on the second stage of the review early in the new year, which will consider further the issues raised within Stage 1, and on how Ordnance Survey can improve its performance. Cabinet Office guidelines recommend that the second stage of a review should be completed within three months.

I can confirm that a staged timetable was envisaged when Stage 1 of the Ordnance Survey Quinquennial Review was announced.

### Night Flights

**Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the Hatton case on night flights issued on 2 October. [25095]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Hatton judgment raises serious questions about the interpretation and application of the European Convention on Human Rights. We are therefore submitting a request for the case to be referred for consideration by the Grand Chamber of the Court. The grounds for this request are set out in a letter to the Court, copies of which will be placed in the Library.

### Homelessness

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned in the last five years and *(b)* plans to commission into the causes of older homelessness. [24188]

**Ms Keeble:** There has been a proliferation of research into the causes of homelessness over the past decade, including recent studies on older people. The Government have announced that they are establishing a new homelessness directorate to bring together existing work to help homeless people as well as to develop new work to prevent homelessness and investigate its causes, as part of this consideration will be given to further research in this area.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate his Department has made of the number of specialist hostel places available for single homeless women, broken down by region. [24187]

**Ms Keeble:** Information about hostel provision is not collected centrally and no estimates of specialist provision for women have been made. However, the hon. Member might be interested to know that information gathered on 3,387 people contacted by the contact and assessment teams in London during 2000–01 show that around 10 per cent. of rough sleepers are women, with around a fifth of this group being aged under 25.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimates his Department has made of the number of people made homeless as a result of administrative errors and failures by housing benefit units. [24192]

**Ms Keeble:** Information reported to the Department relates to the number of households accepted under the homelessness provisions of Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need. Cases that are the result of rent arrears are identified, although the number of these attributable to delays or errors in housing benefit administration are not separately distinguished.

The Department's housing policy statement "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all—The way forward for housing" (December 2000) recognised that the fundamental challenge facing housing benefit is its administration. Problems with administering housing benefit can result in unacceptable levels of fraud and error, as well as backlogs of delayed claims. Our immediate priority has therefore been to work in partnership with local authorities to improve standards of administration. We have also set up a help fund to enable local authorities to formulate and implement improvement plans. In addition, we will introduce national performance standards to support the better administration of housing benefit from spring 2002.

The best value regime is also helping to drive up standards of delivery across all local authority services. Best value performance indicators in place since April 2000 include a measure of the average speed of processing housing benefit claims. Provisional and unaudited best value performance information published by the Department suggests that about a quarter of English local authorities took on average 60 days or longer to process new housing benefit claims in 2000–01. Final performance figures for 2000–01 will be published early in 2002.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what baseline figures his Department has for the number of *(a)* officially recorded and *(b)* unofficial estimates of older homeless people (i) sleeping rough, (ii) in hostel accommodation, (iii) in move-on accommodation, (iv) in bed and breakfast accommodation and (v) in special needs accommodation. [24186]

**Ms Keeble:** The most recent street count showed that there were 532 people sleeping rough across England on any one night. We estimate that between 15 and 20 per cent. of those will be aged over 50. Information gathered by Housing Services Agency (HSA) shows that in London during 2000–01 the contact and assessment teams (CATs) contacted some 609 (17 per cent.) rough sleepers or former rough sleepers who are over 50-years-old.

Information gathered by Housing Services Agency shows that in London during 2000–01 there were 26 moves into permanent accommodation and 319 moves into temporary accommodation, including 180 moves into hostel accommodation by rough sleepers aged over 50 years. Due to the nature of rough sleeping some people will be recorded more than once in these figures as they may have been moved into a hostel, or other temporary accommodation, more than once during the year.

Due to the way the information is collected and the fluctuating pattern of rough sleeping by some people, it is not possible to provide exact figures on the number of older rough sleepers and former rough sleepers currently sleeping rough, in hostel accommodation, in move-on accommodation, in bed and breakfast or in special needs accommodation.

On 30 September 2001, the total number of households being accommodated by local housing authorities in bed-and-breakfast hotels under existing homelessness legislation was 12,290 and a further 9,480 households were being accommodated in hostels. Information is not held centrally on the proportion of these that are older homeless people.

Information is not held centrally on the number of older homeless people in special needs accommodation.

### Emergency Landing (Newcastle Airport)

**Andrew Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Air Accidents Investigation Branch's report into the emergency landing at Newcastle Airport on 3 February involving the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan police will be published; and what the cause of the delay is. [24085]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The AAIB report on the circumstances of the emergency landing at Newcastle airport on 3 February 2001 involving the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan police will be published on 7 February 2002. The emergency landing was caused by the incorrect assembly of the nose landing gear retraction mechanism on the American manufactured Piper PA 34 aircraft. The sequence of events had occurred before on other aircraft of the type and the examination of the maintenance standards issues raised by this emergency landing has led to the delay in publishing the report.

### Seaside Resorts

**Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) which officials in his Department he has nominated as resort champions; [24147]

(2) what action his Department is taking to support the implementation of the English Tourism Council's "Sea Changes" report. [24145]

**Ms Keeble:** The Government have welcomed the publication of the English Tourism Council's "Sea Changes" report. The report contains a number of

recommendations, some of which are relevant to DTLR, including one that Government Departments should nominate a senior official as a resort champion. It also explains that to take its recommendations forward with relevant key partners, the ETC intends to broker individual meetings with them to discuss plans for implementation.

Although my Department has not yet been approached by the ETC for a meeting, it is already actively supporting the regeneration of resorts through various programmes, including the single regeneration budget. In addition, Regional Development Agencies have been asked to explain in their 2002–04 Corporate Plans how they will be involved with developing regional tourism strategies, including the promotion of coastal resort regeneration.

### Party Affiliation

**David Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce legislation to vacate the seats of Members who have changed party affiliation. [23947]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The basis of elections to this House is that the electorate is invited to vote for candidates and not the political party they may represent. We have no plans to seek amending legislation to require Members who change their political affiliation to vacate their seats. It is for the representative to determine whether they wish to test the strength of their position by vacating their seat and re-submitting themselves for election.

### Rail Safety

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action has been taken on implementing the recommendations arising from Part 1 of Lord Cullen's public inquiry report; and when the Health and Safety Commission plans to publish the six month progress report which Lord Cullen recommended. [25155]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Lord Cullen's final recommendation was

> "that a review of compliance with his recommendations be conducted on behalf of the Health and Safety Commission within six months of this report".

I am informed that this review has been completed and that the Health and Safety Executive officials will be reporting on progress to the Commission in February and that they intend to publish a progress report in March. I shall arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many safety visits were conducted by the senior management of Railtrack in each month from January 2000 to November 2001. [21034]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Railtrack have advised that in April 2000 the company initiated an internal programme of visits for senior managers to assist the promotion of safety tours across the business. Railtrack report that good progress has been made since initiation although monthly figures are not readily available.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason he amended the Cullen Declaration on rail safety; and if he will make a statement. [23613]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The declaration by the Paddington Survivors Group was agreed in advance by all parties before signing.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps the Government are taking to ensure that the administrator is running Railtrack to ensure that *(a)* routine signal, track and other maintenance is carried out and *(b)* the safety standards previously required of Railtrack are maintained. [23986]

**Mr. Jamieson** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* During the period of administration, the Government will continue to provide the administrator with sufficient funding to ensure the operation of the network. The terms of Railtrack's licence require it to ensure the safe operation of the network. The Health and Safety Executive is working closely with both Railtrack plc and the administrator to ensure that safety is maintained.

### Planning

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions further to the European Commission Regional Policy Directorate-General's proposals on spatial planning in the EU, if he will make a statement on the involvement of the European Union in local, regional and national planning matters. [12575]

**Mr. Byers** *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The European Union is not directly involved in local, regional and national planning in the UK. However, account is taken of jointly agreed policy objectives in the preparation of land-use plans in the UK.

### Bob Kiley

**Harry Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the document about Mr. Kiley which had been shown to journalists referred to by Sir Richard Wilson on 1 November. [13268]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

### Rents

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what he estimates will be the average *(a)* council and *(b)* registered social landlord rent in (i) each region in England and (ii) each London borough in 2011–12 in constant prices, after adjusting for the effects of the Government's rent restructuring proposals. [19817]

**Ms Keeble:** Individual councils and registered social landlords (RSLs) retain responsibility for rent-setting. Rents in 2011–12 are therefore a matter for individual social landlords. The rate of increase of actual council and RSL rents over the next 10 years will depend, among

other things, on the outcome of future Spending Reviews (for council rents) and periodic reviews by the Housing Corporation (for RSL rents).

### Train Delays/Cancellations

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many trains of each train operating company arrived late by *(a)* more than five minutes and *(b)* more than 10 minutes in each month from January 2000 to November 2001; in each case, what proportion of these delays were due to (i) train breakdowns, (ii) signal failures, (iii) track/points failures, (iv) leaves on the line, (v) staff shortages, (vi) adverse weather conditions and (vii) other factors; and what were the same figures for peak hours; [21032]

(2) how many trains in each train operating company were cancelled for each month from January 2000 to November 2001; in each case what proportion of these cancellations were due to *(a)* train breakdowns, *(b)* signal failures, *(c)* track/points failures, *(d)* staff shortages, *(e)* adverse weather conditions and *(f)* other factors; and what were the same figures for peak hours. [21033]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The information on causes of delay by period is not readily available. The information distinguishing between peak and off-peak is available only for London commuter train operating companies. The latest information available on delays and cancellations which goes up until 16 September 2001 is being placed in the Libraries of the House.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on changes to the number of cancellations on the railways between September and December. [23128]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Strategic Rail Authority maintain performance records by four week period, not by calendar month. The figures represent the percentage of trains which either did not run or did not operate for more than half their scheduled mileage shown in the timetable.

2.1 per cent. between 19 August 2001 and 15 September 2001

2.0 per cent. between 16 September 2001 and 13 October 2001

1.8 per cent. between 14 October 2001 and 10 November 2001.

### Speed Restrictions Railway

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many speed restrictions were in force on the railways during *(a)* August and *(b)* September. [22871]

**Mr. Spellar:** I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 869–70W.

### Airline Industry

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received on the Commission authorising EU Governments *(a)* to pay compensation for the four-day shutdown of US airspace in the absence of insurance cover and *(b)* to pay for additional security to meet public policy objectives; and if he will make a statement. [22780]

**Mr. Jamieson:** We have received various representations from the air transport industry on these issues. Having had regard to these views, we have accepted that the circumstances are exceptional and therefore merit exceptional assistance. We announced on 13 December that we had decided to provide up to £40 million of financial assistance to compensate airlines for losses arising directly from the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States. Qualifying airlines have been invited to submit claims under this scheme and a copy of the scheme conditions has been placed in the Library. Assistance under this package is in conformity with Commission guidelines on state aid, and we have notified the Commission of our intention accordingly.

In addition, the Government continue to underwrite, on a temporary basis, third party war risk insurance for UK airlines and service providers to the airline industry. The initiative has been extended until 23 January 2002.

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what representations his Department has received from *(a)* airline companies, *(b)* providers to the airline industry, *(c)* hon. and right hon. Members and *(d)* others requesting financial support other than the underwriting of third party war insurance to be given to airline companies; [22965]

(2) what financial support the Government plan for UK airline companies following the events of 11 September; [23083]

(3) what discussions he has had with airline companies regarding Government financial support since 11 September. [23084]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 13 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 1013W.

### Rail Passenger Surveys

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department has taken to take account of the results from national passenger surveys in developing policies for the rail network; what conclusions have been reached by his Department on the findings on national passenger surveys; if he will place copies of documentation related to the national passenger survey published by *(a)* the Strategic Rail Authority and *(b)* his Department in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [23144]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The national passenger survey has shown that the key issue for passengers is performance. The Strategic Rail Authority plans to include targets for passenger satisfaction in new franchises. The results of the NPS are published in the Authority's "On Track" publication, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

### Rail Freight

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* carried out, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* consulted upon into the future rail freight demand (i) for Great Britain as a whole,

(ii) between different train operating companies, (iii) in relation to temporal variations and (iv) according to geographical variations; if he will place copies of published research reports in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [23149]

**Mr. Jamieson:** My Department commissioned research into future demand to move deep-sea containers by rail to inform consideration of Freightliner's recent application for track access grant. There is no published research report.

My Department has commissioned a review of freight modelling techniques across all modes. This will inform the future development of the Department's national transport model for Great Britain as a whole. There is no published research report.

My Department had regard to advice from the Strategic Rail Authority into future rail freight demand to inform the development of the 10-Year Plan and the last Spending Review. Details of the model and its results are reported in 'The Background Analysis' paper of 'Transport 2010: The 10-Year Plan', copies of which were placed in the Library in July 2000.

### Rail Passenger Projections

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* carried out, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* consulted upon into future rail passenger demand (i) for Great Britain as a whole, (ii) between different train operating companies, (iii) in relation to temporal variations and (iv) according to geographical variations; if he will place copies of published research reports in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [23143]

**Mr. Jamieson:** My Department developed a model of future rail passenger demand for Great Britain to inform the development of the 10-Year Plan and the last Spending Review. Details of the model and its results are reported in 'The Background Analysis' paper of 'Transport 2010: The 10-Year Plan', copies of which were placed in the Library in July 2000.

My Department commissioned research into future rail passenger demand on Eurostar. These forecasts were used to inform commercial negotiations undertaken earlier this year with Railtrack Group plc and London and Continental Railways concerning section 2 of the channel tunnel rail link. There is no published research report.

My Department has commissioned research to develop a model of rail passenger demand. This will be a component of the Department's national transport model to be used to inform decisions taken in the current spending review. The model will consider Great Britain as a whole, temporal variations in so far as they affect crowding in the peak period, and broad geographical corridors. There is no published research report.

My Department receives advice from the Strategic Rail Authority in relation to passenger rail franchises. When awarding new franchises the SRA makes assessments of bidders' passenger forecasts.

### Transport Ticketing and Information

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to improve (i) through ticketing between different modes of transport and (ii) a public timetable information service for all modes of transport; and if he will make a statement. [23145]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The information is as follows:

*(a)* (i) Bus and train operators already offer a number of number of multi-modal ticketing products on a commercial basis, under the auspices of Journey Solutions, an initiative of the UK transport industry to promote and improve integration between transport modes. We support this initiative.

*(a)* (ii) Traveline, a telephone-based national public transport information system, is available throughout Great Britain and provides route and timetable information for all modes from a single national rate telephone number (0870 608 2 608). Traveline is run by local authorities and transport operators. The start-up costs were paid by central Government.

*(b)* (i) We are developing Transport Direct, a fully integrated internet travel service. By 2003, we expect that Transport Direct will offer internet booking of long-distance journeys involving different forms of transport. In the longer term it will be possible to book and pay for travel at the time the inquiry is made, and obtain the travel authority/ticket(s).

The Department is also working with local authorities and transport operators to increase the use of Smartcards, which will make the retailing of multi-modal ticketing products much easier.

*(b)* (ii) Transport Direct will also provide a full multi-modal travel information service via the internet to allow people to plan their journeys and to compare routes and prices.

### Transport Infrastructure (London)

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the expected investment in London's transport infrastructure is projected to come from *(a)* central Government, *(b)* the Mayor and *(c)* the private sector between 2001 and 2010. [22904]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Government's 10-Year Plan for Transport assumes that London's transport infrastructure will benefit from £17.8 billion of capital investment over the period 2001–02 to 2010–11. Of this around 40 per cent. will be funded by central Government and 60 per cent. will be funded by the private sector. The plan does not assume that the Mayor will use income from council tax to increase transport investment in London, although it is open to him to do so.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much central Government funding will be allocated to transport improvements in London as part of the 10-Year Plan. [22894]

**Mr. Jamieson:** £15.2 billion of central Government funding is allocated for transport improvements in London as part of the 10-Year Plan for Transport.

### Channel Tunnel Freight Services

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has made to the French Government concerning the reduction of channel tunnel freight services since 7 November. [22895]

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations have been made to the Government of France to remove SNCF's restrictions on the number of freight trains travelling from France to the United Kingdom through the channel tunnel; what reduction in freight traffic through the channel tunnel has taken place as a result of SNCF's decision; and what estimate he has made of the financial loss to UK operators. [23209]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 225W.

### Merchant Ships

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many merchant ships are registered in the UK; and how many were registered in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1996. [22901]

**Mr. Jamieson:** At the end of September 2001, 423 merchant trading vessels were registered in the UK. The equivalent figures for the end of September in 1991 and 1996 were 519 and 384 respectively.

### Rail Track Access Charges

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations have been made by train operating companies to *(a)* him, *(b)* the SRA and *(c)* the Rail Regulator to secure reduced access charges as a result of under-performance of Railtrack since administration. [23153]

**Mr. Jamieson:** None. Train operating companies are compensated for poor Railtrack operational performance through their track access agreements, which are approved by the Rail Regulator. After approval, they are enforceable by the parties to them and not by the Regulator.

### Heathrow

**Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will issue an interim report on the trial to establish the feasibility of extending the runway alternation at Heathrow to include the hour from 6.00 am to 7.00 am. [22942]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The then Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) explained on 23 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 64W, that the trial was expected to continue for up to two years. It commenced in August 2000 but has been subject to interruptions which make it difficult to draw any preliminary conclusions. During 2001 the trial was disrupted by resurfacing of the northern runway and replacement of the instrument landing systems (ILS); essential work which will continue next year when the southern runway is resurfaced and other ILS equipment is replaced. There are no plans to issue an interim report.

### Traffic Calming (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much has been spent in the constituency of Buckingham on *(a)* installing road humps on established roads, *(b)* installing mini-roundabouts on established roads and *(c)* other traffic calming measures in each year since 1999; and what effect these measures have had on the number of road accidents. [23738]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Statistics on expenditure on road safety schemes are not held centrally but are a matter for each local authority.

### Train Punctuality Statistics

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance has been given to the Strategic Rail Authority with reference to the publication of monthly train punctuality statistics; if he will place copies of such guidance submitted by his Department to the Strategic Rail Authority in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [23524]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority which are currently in force and the draft issued for consultation on 29 June require the authority to publish a regular bulletin describing the performance of franchise operators.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will give details of the means through which *(a)* the Strategic Rail Authority, *(b)* Railtrack, *(c)* train operating companies and *(d)* other organisations and companies within the rail industry disseminate statistics on train punctuality to the travelling public; what steps his Department is taking to improve the dissemination of information on train punctuality to the travelling public; and if he will make a statement. [23523]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Strategic Rail Authority publishes a regular bulletin describing the performance of franchise operators, which is available on its website www.sra.gov.uk. Train operating companies are required to publish Passenger's Charter statistics every four weeks at major stations. Details of the stations at which the figures are displayed can be obtained from the individual train operating company.

### Railway Staff

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff were employed by *(a)* Railtrack plc and *(b)* Railtrack Group plc in each month since September, broken down by category of employee, including (i) senior management, (ii) electrical engineers, (iii) mechanical engineers, (iv) administration and (v) others. [23525]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I understand from Railtrack that there has been no significant change in staff turnover since September in the categories listed.

### Mark 1 Passenger Carriages

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* collisions, *(b)* derailments and *(c)* SPADs involving mark 1 passenger carriages in the last four years, broken down by (i) vehicle stock and (ii) train operating company. [23528]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate have advised that this information is not available in the form requested.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the date by which all Mark 1 passenger carriages will be replaced, broken down by *(a)* vehicle stock and *(b)* train operating company. [23527]

**Mr. Jamieson:** All Mark 1 stock must be removed from the network by 1 January 2005.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many railway rolling stock leases involving mark 1 passenger carriages are in existence; and in respect of each lease, what is *(a)* the name of the rolling stock company owning the vehicles and *(b)* the name of the train operating company leasing them; and how many mark one vehicles are covered by that lease; and what is the date to which the train operating company is committed to leasing the vehicles. [23529]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The information is shown in the following table:

*Mark one rolling stock operated by UK train operating companies*

| *Train operating company/ type[1,2]/lessor* | *Number of vehicles* | *Lease expires* |
|---|---|---|
| c2c[1] | | |
| Angel Trains[1] | 92 | 31 March 2002 |
| Angel Trains[1] | 16 | 31 January 2002 |
| HSBC[1] | 4 | 31 March 2002 |
| Total | 112 | |
| *Connex South Eastern* | | |
| Angel Trains[1] | 12 | 31 December 2002 |
| Angel Trains[1] | 264 | 31 March 2004 |
| HSBC[1] | 80 | 31 December 2002 |
| Porterbrook[1] | 170 | 31 October 2002 |
| Porterbrook[1] | 32 | 31 March 2004 |
| Total | 558 | |
| *First Great Eastern* | | |
| Angel Trains[1] | 96 | 31 October 2002 |
| Angel Trains[1] | 4 | 31 March 2003 |
| Total | 100 | |
| *First North Western* | | |
| Angel Trains[2] | 16 | 20 June 2002 |
| Angel Trains[2] | 16 | 6 May 2002 |
| Total | 32 | |
| *Scotrail* | | |
| Angel Trains[1] | 51 | 31 December 2001 |
| Angel Trains[1] | 10 | 31 December 2001 |

*Mark one rolling stock operated by UK train operating companies*

| *Train operating company/ type[1,2]/lessor* | *Number of vehicles* | *Lease expires* |
|---|---|---|
| Total | 61 | |
| *South Central* | | |
| Angel Trains[1] | 292 | 31 March 2002 |
| HSBC[1] | 28 | 25 May 2003 |
| Porterbrook[2] | 27 | 31 March 2002 |
| Porterbrook[1] | 33 | 25 May 2003 |
| Porterbrook[1] | 156 | 31 March 2002 |
| Total | 536 | |
| *South West Trains* | | |
| HSBC[1] | 384 | 3 February 2003 |
| Porterbrook[1] | 2 | 5 February 2003 |
| Porterbrook[1] | 116 | 31 December 2002 |
| Porterbrook[1] | 77 | 3 February 2003 |
| Total | 579 | |
| Total | 1,978 | |

[1] EMU
[2] DEMU

### Strategic Rail Authority

**Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list *(a)* each meeting held between his Department's Ministers or civil servants and the Strategic Rail Authority since 1 September, *(b)* those meetings at which the subject of current franchise performance was discussed and *(c)* those meetings at which the subject of specialist manpower shortages in the railway industry was discussed; and if he will make a statement. [21767]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There are frequent contacts between my Department, both Ministers and officials, and the Strategic Rail Authority. Franchise performance and specialist manpower shortages have been among the matters discussed.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will provide details of changes in the responsibilities of *(a)* himself, *(b)* other departmental ministers and *(c)* the Department in terms of day to day (i) direction and (ii) control of the activities of the Strategic Rail Authority; what plans he has further to change the nature of these relationships; and if he will make a statement; [23514]

(2) what *(a)* directions and *(b)* guidance was given to the Strategic Rail Authority in July; and if he will make a statement. [23516]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Strategic Rail Authority is subject to directions and guidance issued to it by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State under sections 206(3) and 207(5) of the Transport Act 2000. Draft directions and guidance were issued for consultation on 29 June and a final version will be issued early in the new year. Interim directions and guidance were issued on 31 January 2001 and a copy was placed in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide details of the conclusions of research his Department has *(a)* carried out, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* consulted upon, into rail passenger (i) demands and (ii) requirements for information on (A) reliability and frequency of services, (B) fares and (C) real-time

information; if he will place copies of the research reports published as a result of such research conducted in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [23522]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The SRA are working on a number of initiatives to improve information for passengers. These include a feasibility study into a proposed national real-time information database, a proposal for a National Rail Enquiry Service (NRES) on the internet and encouraging NRES to develop closer links with telesales.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* representations his Department has received from and *(b)* discussions his Department has had with (i) train operating companies, (ii) Railtrack, (iii) the Rail Passenger Council, (iv) rail passenger committees and (v) others in relation to the update of directions and guidance given by his Department to the Strategic Rail Authority in September 1999 (A) between September 1999 and July 2001 and (B) since July; if he will outline what plans he has further to update his Department's directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority; and if he will make a statement. [23515]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Draft directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority were published for consultation on 29 June. We intend to publish a final version, together with a summary of comments received during consultation and the Government's response to them, early in the new year.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what targets the Strategic Rail Authority has set for the regulation of fare levels on passenger rail services; what progress has been made towards meeting the targets; what steps are planned to meet the targets; and if he will make a statement. [23499]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Since January 1999, increases in regulated fares have been limited to RPI-1 per cent., with performance-related arrangements also applying to London commuter operators. The Strategic Rail Authority monitor fares increases to ensure that the train operating companies keep within the permitted level. The authority has recently commissioned an independent evaluation of the success of Fares Regulation since it commenced in 1995. The study will consider how regulation has performed in practice compared to the expectations of the policy at the time. The results to this study are expected to be published in spring 2002.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what targets the Strategic Rail Authority has set for improving the reliability of passenger rail services; what progress has been made towards meeting the targets; what steps are planned to meet the targets; and if he will make a statement. [23500]

**Mr. Jamieson:** All train operating companies have performance targets in their franchise agreements which can lead to enforcement action being taken if not met. There are also targets for performance in train operating companies' Passenger's Charters which, if not met, trigger discounts to passengers renewing season tickets. In his draft franchising policy statement of 16 July the Secretary of State asked the Strategic Rail Authority to look at what could be done within existing franchise agreements, or by negotiating short extensions, to drive up the reliability and punctuality of services. The authority have revised their franchise replacement programme and will make an announcement shortly.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to ensure that the needs of disabled passengers are taken into account in the awarding of train operating company franchises; and if he will make a statement. [23512]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The draft Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority, issued for consultation on 29 June, address this issue. The SRA will publish a revised code of practice early next year. Train operating companies will be required to revise their Disabled Peoples Protection Policies to take account of it.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide details of research his Department has *(a)* carried out, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* consulted upon on (i) the reliability of and (ii) regulation of fare levels on passenger rail services as measured by the Strategic Rail Authority; if he will place copies of reports published as a result of such research in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [23498]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Strategic Rail Authority has recently commissioned an independent study to evaluate fares regulation since it commenced in 1995. The study will consider how regulation has performed in practice compared to the expectations of the policy at the time, and will involve formal consultation with train operators, passenger groups and other interested parties. The results are expected to be published in spring 2002, and will help to determine future fares strategy.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what deadline was imposed on the Strategic Rail Authority for delivery of its strategic plan within his Department's direction and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority of *(a)* September 1999, and *(b)* July 2001; if he will outline what action (i) has been and (ii) is planned to be taken, as a consequence of the failure to meet a deadline; and if he will make a statement. [23513]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Current Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority do not impose any deadline for completion of its strategic plan. The draft Directions and Guidance published on 29 June proposed a deadline of November but this has been extended by agreement with the new Chairman of the Authority, who took up office on 1 December. The strategic plan will now be published on 14 January.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what role *(a)* the Rail Passenger Council, *(b)* rail passenger committees and *(c)* other rail passenger interest groups play within (i) the Strategic Rail Authority and (ii) the Rail Regulator; what plans he has to alter the nature of the relationship between these groups; and if he will make a statement. [23510]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Rail Passenger Council and rail passenger committees are funded through the Strategic Rail Authority, which also appoints members to the

committees. They are otherwise independent of the authority and of the Rail Regulator, as are other passenger interest groups. We have no plans to make any change.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department has had with and what representations his Department has received from *(a)* Railtrack Group, *(b)* the Railway Administrator and *(c)* First Group, with regard to the operation of totaljourney.com; and if he will make a statement. [23509]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Totaljourney.com was a private commercial initiative implemented by Railtrack and FirstGroup. The decision to cease operation of the site was taken by those parties.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* carried out, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* consulted upon into timetable information provided by Railtrack; what plans he has to assist in the improvement of timetable information systems in the railway industry; if he will place copies of reports published as a result of such research in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [23508]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Standards of provision of timetable information by Railtrack, Train Operators and the National Rail Enquiry Service are monitored constantly by the Strategic Rail Authority. The National Passenger Survey monitors passengers satisfaction with the provision of information. Improvement in customer satisfaction ratings will be required in new franchise agreements.

### Rail Services (Overcrowding)

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will give details of the measure of overcrowding being used by the Strategic Rail Authority; and if he will make a statement. [23504]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Passenger in Excess of Capacity (PIXC) standard states that

> "in respect of all trains operated by the Franchise Operator on the specified routes and services, (i) the PIXC in the morning peak shall not exceed 4.5 per cent., (ii) the PIXC in the evening peak shall not exceed 4.5 per cent., (iii) the PIXC on the morning and the evening peak shall not exceed 3 per cent. and (iv) the PIXC shall not be unduly concentrated on any particular route or service".

PIXC is applied to the 10 train operators running services in and out of London as well as Scotrail's services across the Fife Bridge.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority of the levels of overcrowding (i) for each train operating company, (ii) temporally and (iii) geographically; and if he will make a statement. [23503]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There is a strong commercial incentive on train operators to supply sufficient levels of comfort for passengers on the services they provide. The SRA measures commuter overcrowding using the "Passengers in Excess of Capacity" mechanism, for which the results are published annually.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* carried out, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* consulted upon on the measure of overcrowding levels of rail passenger services as used by the Strategic Rail Authority; if he will place copies of reports published as a result of such research conducted in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [23506]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The SRA expect commuter Train Operating Companies to undertake impartial passenger counts up to twice per annum for peak commuter services. Where PTEs specify limits for peak overcrowding they use a similar approach.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps *(a)* have been and *(b)* are planned to be taken by (i) his Department and (ii) the Strategic Rail Authority to improve the measure of overcrowding used by the Strategic Rail Authority to take account of variations (A) between train operating companies, (B) temporally and (C) geographically; and if he will make a statement. [23502]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Strategic Rail Authority is developing a new process for a consistent method of calculating overcrowding in commuter areas across the network. It will be based upon the existing Passengers In Excess of Capacity (PIXC) mechanism used for London commuter operators and for services from Fife into Edinburgh.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority in reducing levels of overcrowding on the rail network; and if he will make a statement. [23501]

**Mr. Jamieson:** A number of measures have been introduced to reduce overcrowding including: the introduction of new trains that are designed to accommodate high loading levels; additional rolling stock to increase the number of vehicles available; and franchise commitments to improve services.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide details of the measure of overcrowding levels of rail passenger services outlined *(a)* in "A New Deal for Transport", *(b)* in "Transport 2010: The Ten Year Plan", *(c)* within his Department's direction and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority of September 1999 and *(d)* within his Department's direction and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority of July 2001; and if he will make a statement. [23507]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There is a requirement in the draft Directions and Guidance provided by the Secretary of State in July to reduce overcrowding to meet Strategic Rail Authority standards—no passengers standing for journeys of more than 20 minutes, no more than 30 per cent. standing for shorter journeys—by 2010.

### Integrated Transport Research

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* carried out, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* consulted upon on the progress his Department has made towards developing an integrated transport policy as outlined in (i) "A New Deal for Transport" and (ii) "Transport 2010: The Ten Year Plan"; if he will place copies of the documentation in relation to this research which is not publicly available in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [23520]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The DTLR Science and Innovation Strategy covers all research commissioned by the Department and states the general policy of open publication of research requirements and results. It is available at http://www.research.dtlr.gov.uk/sis2001/index.htm

The draft Strategy for Integrated Transport Research was published for consultation in March 2001 and is available on the web at http://www.dtlr.gov.uk/itwp/consult/research/index.htm.

It highlights those areas where research is already being carried out in support of the Government's integrated transport objectives and outlines the key strategic research issues arising from "A New Deal for Transport" and "Transport 2010—The Ten Year Plan".

Details of the Department's transport research programmes are published annually, and are also available on DTLR's website at the following address: http://www.research.dtlr.gov.uk/research/03.htm. These documents set out the objectives and priorities of the individual research programmes, summarise latest research findings and provide details of new projects.

Copies of these documents are being placed in the Libraries of the House.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* carried out, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* consulted upon in relation to progress made towards the development of (i) a real time travel information service, (ii) Transport Direct and (iii) a comprehensive travel information and retailing service; if he will place copies of documentation in relation to this research which is not publicly available in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [23519]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The following research is currently under way on real time information:

a wide ranging market research programme is in the process of being let. This will include the extent to which the public seek real time information and the manner in which they wish to see it delivered.

We are also seeking the creation of common standards for bus real time information systems, and are currently preparing a specification to outline common standards and compatibility for real time information systems. A consultation document will be released in the new year.

On the railway network, the Strategic Rail Authority has funded a feasibility study on Real Time Train Movements (RTTM) and this is due to report in March 2002.

On Transport Direct, which will be a comprehensive travel information and retailing service, the following major items of research have been commissioned or conducted. For a full list, please refer to the annual Departmental Research Compendium, "Roads and Local Transport Research Programme: Compendium of Research Projects 2000–2001", a copy of which is already in the House of Commons Library.

The Transportation Research Group (TRG) at Southampton University has recently carried out a review of previous, current and planned research in areas relevant to Transport Direct. Their report is available on my Department's website and the report will be placed in the Library.

We have commissioned a data management framework study, to define the way in which data may be input, exchanged, transferred, retrieved and manipulated. This study will allow us to assess the data management task that Transport Direct will need to tackle.

We have some research under way looking at the standards which will be necessary for Transport Direct and seeing whether further standards should be developed.

We envisage further technological work being commissioned to underpin Transport Direct.

Work has begun on the development of a Business Plan for Transport Direct. This will be published next summer.

Further research may also be necessary to support traveline.

### Transport Direct

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide details of progress which has been made by his Department with the delivery of Transport Direct against the timetable originally outlined; what further steps he plans to take to implement these plans according to the original timetable; what amendments to the original timetable *(a)* have been made and *(b)* are planned; and if he will make a statement. [23518]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The 10-Year Plan, published in July 2000, said that by 2003 we expect Transport Direct to include:

real-time train operating information;

real-time information on many local bus services;

internet travel information, covering road journeys as well as all forms of public transport at a single point of contact;

internet booking of long-distance journeys involving different forms of transport; and

development of internet based maps that allow travellers to examine public transport options both for visiting a specific venue and for general travel around an area.

We are on course to deliver these targets.

Since the publication of the "10-Year Plan", we have made considerable progress:

Traveline is up and running;

Traveline has a website and an increasing number of areas should be added to this during 2002;

Journey Solutions is expecting to launch the work it is doing in spring 2002 and has added several new schemes;

a feasibility study for rail real time has started and should report in March 2002;

we are investing heavily—£20 million—in bus real time systems next year as part of the local transport plan arrangements;

Sir Malcolm Field has been appointed as Transport Direct's external adviser.

### Rail Regulator

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 789W, what form this contact takes. [23657]

**Mr. Jamieson:** My right hon. Friend maintains oral and written contact with the Rail Regulator.

### Central Railway

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about Central Railway. [23411]

**Mr. Spellar:** The Government are considering carefully Central Railway's proposals for a hybrid Bill. We will take a view on the issues raised by proposals, including the conclusions of the SRA's high level review, and respond to Central Railway in due course.

### Government Offices (Access)

**Mr. Gummer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what *(a)* procedure and *(b)* consultation took place in respect of the closure of the access to Ambassadors entrance to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; and how long he expects it to be closed; [23595]

(2) when and under what authority an order was placed to close Downing street to public access; what discussions were held with interested parties; and if he will make a statement on *(a)* the public right of way and *(b)* the Highways designation in Downing street; [23649]

(3) what public right of way there is to the Ambassadors entrance to the Foreign Office. [23674]

**Mr. Spellar:** Downing street is a public highway for which Westminster city council is the highway authority. The road at the Ambassador's entrance is owned by the Royal Parks Agency, and is not a public right of way.

Access to both roads is controlled by the police under common law powers which allow them to take reasonable steps to preserve the peace and prevent threats to it. The level of restriction by the police is constantly under review.

### Local Authorities (Best Value Regime)

**Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will abolish the best value regime. [23366]

**Dr. Whitehead:** No. It is clear that many authorities have used best value to make substantial improvements in services and savings. We want to make it even better which is why my right hon. Friend initiated a three month review of best value in October. The review has brought in expertise and experience from a wide range of bodies with an interest in improving public services. We aim to produce new guidance in early 2002.

### National Air Traffic Services

**Sandra Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans NATS has to increase its prices to customers in line with other European countries following the events of 11 September. [23563]

**Mr. Jamieson:** NATS has published its en-route charges for 2002 and in line with its regulatory requirements its element of the UK Unit Rate is to decrease by RPI—3 per cent. with effect from 1 January 2002. Any review of the price cap relating to NATS' charges is the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority.

**Sandra Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which centralised functions will go to Scotland as a result of the NATS facilities review. [23562]

**Mr. Jamieson:** NATS is currently reviewing its accommodation requirements. No firm decisions have yet been taken. NATS is consulting widely on its Business Plan which assumes that the Manchester Area Control Centre is to be moved to Prestwick.

### Jumbo Water Tower, Colchester

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will call in for determination the appeals lodged in respect of the Jumbo Water Tower in Colchester; and if he will make a statement. [23287]

**Ms Keeble** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The Inspector's decision on these appeals has now been issued and the Secretary of State therefore has no further jurisdiction in this matter.

### Departmental Policies (East Devon)

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the East Devon constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [23751]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The principal funding that this Department has provided to East Devon district council and Devon county council in the years 1997–98 to 2001–02 is shown in the tables. These include grants and borrowing approvals for revenue and capital expenditure.

It is not possible to determine how much of this money has been spent on East Devon constituency. It is for the local authority to decide where within its boundary these resources are applied.

*£ million*

| *Nature of funding* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *2001–02* | *2002–03* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *East Devon district council* | | | | | | |
| Revenue Support Grant[1] | 2.510 | 2.173 | 2.086 | 1.742 | 2.063 | [2]1.541 |
| Income from National Non-Domestic Rates[1] | 3.924 | 3.949 | 4.272 | 4.738 | 4.738 | [2]5.385 |
| Housing Investment Programme | [3]0.518 | 0.671 | 1.007 | [4]1.715 | [5]3.220 | [6]1.204 |
| Housing Revenue Account Subsidy | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | [11]1.383 | n/k |

£ million

| Nature of funding | 1997–98 | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 | 2001–02 | 2002–03 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Capital Receipts Initiative | 0.162 | 0.495 | 0.000 | n/a | n/a | — |
| Single Capital Pot[3] | — | — | — | — | — | 0.477 |
| *Devon county council* | | | | | | |
| Revenue Support Grant[1] | [4]266.389 | 155.634 | 158.924 | 150.930 | 166.866 | [2]153.390 |
| Income from National Non-Domestic Rates[1] | [4]205.912 | 138.460 | 151.558 | 173.050 | 170.054 | [2]187.755 |
| Local Government Reorganisation Supplementary Credit Approval | 1.812 | 0.765 | 0 | 0 | 0 | — |
| Transport Supplementary Grant | 1.738 | 1.238 | 1.861 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Transport Supplementary Credit Approvals | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.350 | 1.000 |
| Transport Annual Capital Guideline | 1.738 | 1.238 | 1.861 | 0 | 0 | [10]n/a |
| Transport Block Supplementary Credit Approval | 2.560 | 1.214 | 2.842 | 10.281 | 20.703 | [10]n/k |
| Rural Bus Challenge Grant[9] | 0 | 0 | 0.640 | 0.300 | n/k | n/k |
| Rural Bus Subsidy Grant | 0 | 1.409 | 1.409 | 1.409 | 1.799 | 2.059 |
| Capital Challenge (Supplementary Credit and Basic Credit Approvals) | 2.694 | 2.257 | 1.554 | 0 | 0 | — |
| Single Capital Pot[3] | — | — | — | — | — | 40.498 |

[1] The amounts of Revenue Support Grant and Income from National Non-Domestic Rates shown for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are the revised amounts allocated under ""The Local Government Finance Report (England) 1997–98 Amending Report 1999" and "The Local Government Finance Report (England) 1998–99 Amending Report 2000" respectively.

[2] The amounts of Revenue Support Grant and Income from National Non-Domestic Rates shown for 2002–03 are provisional and are subject to change. Final figures will be available in February 2002.

[3] 2002–03 is the first year of the Single Capital Pot. It is a cross-service capital allocation mechanism incorporating funding for Transport, Housing, Education and Social Services. The funding is not ring-fenced for any particular service so Councils have flexibility to take national and local priorities into account in determining their investment plans. Education and Social Services allocations do not appear in the table for earlier years.

[4] Devon was subject to a Structural Change Order on 1 April 1998. The figures for Revenue Support Grant and National Non-Domestic Rates quoted for Devon county council for 1997–98 include an amount for the areas covered by The City of Plymouth and The Borough of Torbay. The figures for 1998–99, 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 exclude the amount for the areas covered by The City of Plymouth and The Borough of Torbay.

[5] 1997–98 HIP allocation inherited from the previous Government's spending plans. Present Government introduced CRI from 1997–98

[6] Single Housing Pot introduced from 2000–01 resulting in CRI being merged with HIP

[7] Resource accounting has resulted in a change to the way capital resources are allocated for 2001–02, with the introduction of a new Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) to cover the cost of maintaining local authority housing in a sound condition. East Devon's MRA allocation for 2001–02 is £2.274 million and, for comparison purposes, is included in the 2001–02 HIP allocation above.

[8] HIP allocation only, MRA and Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) allocations for 2002–03 not yet announced. DFG included within HIP figures shown for all years 1997–98 to 2001–02.

[9] Rural Bus Challenge figures represent awards—actual spend profiles for schemes may cover more than one year. Awards for 2001–02 and 2002–03 not yet announced.

[10] Transport Annual Capital Guidelines are included in the Single Capital pot for 2002–03. Prior to 2002–03 and the introduction of the Single Capital Pot, the transport block was allocated through Supplementary Credit Approvals.

[11] Provisional

Parts of the Constituency were included in the areas covered by one SRB scheme. Funding provided for the scheme since 1997–98 is included in the table.

*SRB scheme*

| | *Unlocking potential* |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 128,000 |
| 1998–99 | 134,000 |
| 1999–2000 | 128,000 |

## Railway Line Closures

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contingency plans his Department and the SRA have made for line closures. [23941]

**Mr. Jamieson** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* There are statutory procedures prescribed in the Railways Act 1993, as amended by the Transport Act 2000, which must be followed before a full line closure can take place. There are currently no plans to take forward any new closure proposals.

## Road Accident Blackspots

**Alistair Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions where the top six predicted road accident blackspots are; and what estimate he has made of the predicted number of deaths in each one in the next 30 year period. [24059]

**Mr. Jamieson:** It is not possible to predict where specific accident blackspots will be in the future. Casualties at different sites vary from year to year and the numbers can be affected in particular years by major incidents which are not typical.

## Operation Stack (Working Party)

**Mr. Howard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce his decision on the recommendations contained in the report of the working party into alternatives to Operation Stack. [23939]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* My officials have scrutinised the report of the working party into the provision of an alternative to Operation Stack. It is important that we find the right way forward and further consideration is being given as to the way ahead in liaison with Kent CC. Decisions will be made in due course.

## Air Safety

**Sandra Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the relationship between the Civil Aviation Authority Economic Regulator and Safety Regulator, with particular reference to the means by which they communicate to ensure air safety. [23561]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Directors of the Consumer Protection Group (which issues airline licences), Economic Regulation Group (ERG) and Safety Regulation Group (SRG) are all members of the Board of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). They all sit on the Executive Committee, which has responsibility for corporate governance, the approval of strategy and ensuring the development and execution of policy.

In the event of there being concerns about the financial viability of an air operator or an air traffic service provider, particularly where the safety of operations may be affected, arrangements are in place for this to be brought to the immediate attention of the Group Director Safety Regulation. The Safety Regulator, based on the information before him, would in turn instigate appropriate action to ensure the continued maintenance of air safety.

Section 2(1) of the Transport Act 2000 enshrines the paramountcy of safety by placing it ahead of other regulatory considerations for the CAA. Furthermore the CAA has set up an internal committee comprising representatives of SRG, ERG and the Directorate of Airspace Policy to exercise oversight of the air traffic services licence.

The primary objective of the Chairman of the CAA is to ensure that the CAA continues to promote, in an efficient and cost-effective way, high standards of safety in all aspects of civil aviation.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Tuesday 8 January 2002*

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards meeting the revised Public Service Agreement target for internet connections in public libraries. [22554]

**Dr. Howells:** The proportion of public libraries in the UK with public internet access reached 67 per cent. in August 2001, on course for meeting the target of 100 per cent. access by the end of 2002.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on performance against the target to improve her Department's procurement practices. [22569]

**Dr. Howells:** The Department has increased its use of ICT in procurement and has undertaken Gateway Reviews of procurement projects where required.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will make a statement on the funding for digitisation which has so far been awarded; [22576]

(2) if she will make a statement on progress towards the target to develop and introduce the Library element of the New Opportunities Fund Lottery funding stream for literacy learning. [22577]

**Dr. Howells:** All public library authorities have submitted plans to the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) Community Access to Lifelong Learning programme for ICT infrastructure and for staff training. All libraries will have completed network installation by the end of December 2002. Training for 40,000 public library staff is under way. Fifty-four awards have been made under the NOF Digitisation programme totalling £45 million. Projects will be completed by December 2004 with first materials available by December 2002.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the performance target is for the Public Service Agreement target of facilitating and promoting competitiveness in the creative industries. [22548]

**Dr. Howells:** The Department tracks a range of indicators of the economic performance of the creative industries, baselines for which were established in the creative industries Mapping Document published by DCMS. The Department's 2001–04 Service Delivery Agreement includes a target comparing the productivity of the creative industries with the all-industry average.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the progress towards the target for the payment of undisputed invoices. [22581]

**Dr. Howells:** The outturn for the 2000–01 financial year was 99 per cent. of undisputed invoices paid within 30 days.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will make a statement on performance against the target for the reduction of sickness absence in 2001; [22573]

(2) what steps she is taking to meet the Department's target for reduced sickness absence by 2003. [22572]

**Dr. Howells:** The figure for the first 11 months of 2001 is 7.3 days sickness absence per staff year. The Department will continue to monitor trends and address any particular areas of concern. The Department has recently introduced a revised sick absence policy and will support managers to manage attendance and ensure that the policy is implemented. We will also continue to offer health awareness and health care information to staff.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target to promote the competitiveness of UK broadcast-related industries and the early take-up of digital broadcast services. [22545]

**Dr. Howells:** Results of enhanced Government/industry co-operation include a better statistical base, improved overseas promotion, a stronger trade association and increased opportunities in new media.

The Government published a draft Digital Television Action Plan on 12 October 2001, setting out a series of actions to be undertaken by Government and industry to achieve switchover from analogue to digital television. Further to this Action Plan, on 11 December, the Government published a consultation paper on planning the digital television spectrum. Nearly eight million UK households (about 30 per cent. of the total) have switched on to digital television since 1998.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for what reason the Public Service Agreement target for Lottery distributing bodies to develop strategic plans does not apply to the Millennium Commission. [22562]

**Dr. Howells:** The target does not apply because by April 1999 the Commission had already committed almost all of its funds.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target to maintain standards and diversity of broadcasting output and ensure that content is socially inclusive to secure wide access to broadcast material. [22556]

**Dr. Howells:** The Broadcasting (Subtitling) Order 2001, which increases the target for subtitling on digital terrestrial television to 80 per cent., came into force on 4 July 2001. The targets will be extended to digital cable and digital satellite services as part of the forthcoming Communications Bill. A conference in October 2001 of the Cultural Diversity Network reported on the progress made by the signatory broadcasters in the first year of operation.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement

target to develop proposals for a future regulatory system for broadcasting which recognises market and technological developments. [22546]

**Dr. Howells:** The Office of Communications Bill was introduced to the House of Lords on 12 July 2001. The Bill allows for the establishment of the Office of Communications (OFCOM) which will prepare itself to take on the duties proposed to be conferred upon it later as the new single regulator for the media and communications sector. A draft Communications Bill, containing the Government's proposals for the regulatory framework which OFCOM will apply, is to be published in this Session of Parliament.

### Libraries

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many public libraries there were per head of population for each year since 1979. [23071]

**Dr. Howells:** The answer is as follows:

*Population per library in England (total population divided by the number of public libraries open 10 hours plus per week, including mobiles)*

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1999–2000 | 14,211 |
| 1998–99 | 14,125 |
| 1997–98 | 13,953 |
| 1996–97 | 13,742 |
| 1995–96 | 13,550 |
| 1994–95 | 13,425 |
| 1993–94 | 13,369 |
| 1992–93 | 13,290 |
| 1991–92 | 13,170 |
| 1990–91 | 13,069 |
| 1989–90 | 11,461 |
| 1988–89 | 13,915 |
| 1987–88 | 13,545 |
| 1986–87 | 13,781 |
| 1985–86 | 13,189 |
| 1984–85 | 13,317 |
| 1983–84 | 13,004 |
| 1982–83 | 13,006 |
| 1981–82 | 13,054 |
| 1980–81 | 12,986 |
| 1979–80 | 12,725 |

The figures exclude special services offered by library authorities to members of the public, for example, homes and hospitals. Across England these services have increased from 9,806 in 1979–80 to 14,617 in 1999–2000.

### Millennium Commission

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many projects have been given grants by the Millennium Commission; what proportion of the projects have been completed on time; how many Millennium Commission projects are yet to be completed; if she will list those projects which are *(a)* more than 12 months behind schedule and *(b)* which have been aborted, along with their value; and if she will make a statement; [24135]

(2) how much has been spent by the Millennium Commission; what amount the Commission has allocated but is yet to distribute; what amount is available and unallocated to projects; and if she will make a statement; [24136]

(3) when she expects the Millennium Bridge to re-open; what the total cost of this project has been; what the cost of repair work carried out on the bridge has been; who is responsible for the extra cost; and if she will make a statement; [24134]

(4) what proportion of total Millennium Commission expenditure has been spent in the Greater London area; and if she will make a statement. [24137]

**Tessa Jowell:** This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will write to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chair of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

### Television Licences

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether residential homes have to purchase television licences for televisions that are watched by residents over the age of 75 years and other people. [24226]

**Dr. Howells:** Residents aged 75 or over living in residential homes are entitled to a free television licence to cover the installation or use of television in their private accommodation. Such licences do not extend to cover television sets in the communal parts of a residential home, which require a separate, full fee licence. However, we have received representations on this subject and our policy is currently under review.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people benefit from the £5 concessionary television licence scheme; and, in the last year for which figures are available, how many people stopped being entitled to a reduced fee licence because the *(a)* social mix and *(b)* level of warden cover at their accommodation changed. [24225]

**Dr. Howells:** At the end of October 2001, there were a total of 633,000 units of accommodation covered by the Accommodation for Residential Care concessionary television licence scheme, of which 200,000 were occupied by residents under 75, who pay a £5 fee, and 433,000 by residents aged 75 or over, who pay no fee. An accurate breakdown of the number of people who have ceased to be entitled to the concession because of changes to the social mix or the level of warden cover is not currently available, but we have contacted the BBC to request the information required and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available, placing copies of my letter in the Library.

### Tourism

**Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment she has made of the cost of implementing the English Tourism Council's "Sea Changes" document; [24144]

(2) what funding the English Tourism Council has allocated to implementation of its "Sea Changes" document; [24149]

(3) what progress has been made in establishing a Government unit to co-ordinate the case for resorts within Government; [24148]

(4) if she will list her Department's priorities for action on the implementation of the English Tourism Council's "Sea Changes" document. [24143]

**Dr. Howells** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The Government have welcomed the publication of "Sea Changes" and we are working with the English Tourism Council (ETC) to take it forward. The ETC is consulting closely with the British Resorts Association and relevant local authority tourism officers.

The ETC does not have a specific budget for implementing the report since its role is to inform and help develop the strategies of public agencies and the private sector, predominantly at local and regional level. The Government have not set out specific priorities for action in relation to the report and have not made any assessment of the potential cost of implementation. We are awaiting a preparatory assessment from the ETC and will then be in a better position to consider how best an impact can be made.

We do not propose to establish a separate unit to co-ordinate the case for resorts within Government. This is already the responsibility of my Department and we have raised the profile of resort regeneration in discussions both at national level at the March 2001 inter-Ministerial Tourism Summit, shortly after "Sea Changes" was published, and in ministerial meetings with Regional Development Agency (RDA) chairmen since then. We have also ensured that the new draft corporate planning guidance for RDAs asks them to work with regional and local partners on sustainable tourism strategies which should include the promotion of coastal resort regeneration.

### Golden Jubilee

**David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what arrangements have been put in place for public holidays relating to the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [24417]

**Mr. Caborn:** As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 23 November 2000, *Official Report,* column 294W, Tuesday 4 June 2002 will be a bank holiday in place of the Spring Bank Holiday, which would otherwise fall on 27 May. Monday 3 June will be an additional Bank Holiday for the Golden Jubilee.

### Sports Clubs (Charitable Status)

**Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many community and amateur sports clubs will benefit from the revised Charity Commission guidelines on charitable status. [25001]

**Mr. Caborn:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), on 13 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 1029W.

### Museums (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the museums in the Buckingham constituency that have received funding from her Department allocated to cutting museum entry fees; and the amount awarded in each case. [23744]

**Dr. Howells:** No museums in the Buckingham constituency have received funding from my Department allocated to cutting museum entry fees. None is sponsored by my Department.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the museums based in the Buckingham constituency which have received funding from the Designated Museums Challenge Fund indicating *(a)* the nature of the project, *(b)* the date of the award and *(c)* the amount of funding provided in each case. [23717]

**Dr. Howells:** There are no designated museums within the Buckingham constituency.

### Arts Bodies

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of staff turnover at *(a)* regional arts boards and *(b)* the Arts Council of England since the proposals outlined in 'Working Together for the Arts' were made; and if she will make a statement. [23572]

**Dr. Howells:** Staff turnover at the Arts Council of England in the period 1 April 2000–31 March 2001 was 28.4 per cent. In the first quarter of 2001–02, turnover reduced to 25 per cent. and reduced again in the second quarter to 20.5 per cent. Policies have been prepared to maximise staff retention, and these have been taken to the local union/management groups for ratification and workplace-based application.

The Regional Arts Boards are autonomous organisations, which report to their own boards about the turnover of staff.

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what has been the funding for the Arts Council of England in each year since 1995; what proportion of that funding in each of those years has been spent on salaries; what the Arts Council of England has spent in each year since 1995 on salaries; what the average salary of an Arts Council of England employee has been in each year since 1995; what the average salary of an employee of a regional arts board has been in each year since 1995; and if she will make a statement. [23573]

**Dr. Howells:** The following information has been supplied by the Arts Council of England, in answer to the question:

*Arts Council*

*£000*

| | *Funding in each year since 1995 (grant-in-aid and lottery combined)* | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1995–96* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
| GIA and Lottery funding | 435,327 | 426,013 | 454,788 | 400,904 | 416,271 | 420,584 |
| Proportion spent on salaries (percentage) | 0.8 | 1.0 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 1.3 | 1.6 |
| How much spent on salaries | 3,481 | 4,351 | 6,020 | 6,457 | 5,603 | 6,615 |
| Average salary of ACE employee | 21 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 28 | 33 |

*Regional Arts Boards*

| | *Average salary in year* | *Percentage of total expenditure spent on salaries* |
|---|---|---|
| *1995–96* | | |
| East England | 19,402 | 13 |
| East Midland | 15,606 | 14 |
| London | 22,794 | 7 |
| Northern | 17,856 | 9 |
| North West | 21,111 | 7 |
| Southern | 18,985 | 15 |
| South East | 18,583 | 16 |
| South West | 16,731 | 11 |
| West Midlands | 18,699 | 11 |
| Yorkshire | 17,368 | 10 |
| *1996–97* | | |
| East England | 18,085 | 11 |
| East Midland | 15,898 | 13 |
| London | 23,270 | 6 |
| Northern | 19,585 | 8 |
| North West | 15,308 | 8 |
| Southern | 17,998 | 12 |
| South East | 20,388 | 14 |
| South West | 17,489 | 12 |
| West Midlands | 18,757 | 10 |
| Yorkshire | 17,689 | 9 |
| *1997–98* | | |
| East England | 18,828 | 13 |
| East Midland | 16,599 | 14 |
| London | 22,332 | 7 |
| Northern | 18,774 | 9 |
| North West | 18,003 | 7 |
| Southern | 20,990 | 15 |
| South East | 19,509 | 16 |
| South West | 17,586 | 11 |
| West Midlands | 18,479 | 11 |
| Yorkshire | 19,095 | 10 |
| *1998–99* | | |
| East England | 21,194 | 15 |
| East Midland | 16,670 | 14 |
| London | 23,463 | 7 |
| Northern | 19,272 | 9 |
| North West | 19,334 | 9 |
| Southern | 21,021 | 14 |
| South East | 20,802 | 17 |
| South West | 17,803 | 11 |
| West Midlands | 18,458 | 11 |
| Yorkshire | 18,779 | 10 |
| *1999–2000* | | |
| East England | 21,542 | 14 |
| East Midland | 17,042 | 14 |
| London | 25,625 | 7 |
| Northern | 20,560 | 8 |
| North West | 18,963 | 8 |
| Southern | 20,461 | 13 |
| South East | 21,531 | 20 |
| South West | 17,968 | 12 |
| West Midlands | 19,371 | 11 |
| Yorkshire | 20,372 | 10 |
| *2000–01* | | |
| East England | 22,629 | 12 |
| East Midland | 19,367 | 12 |
| London | 24,181 | 5 |
| Northern | 21,363 | 6 |
| North West | 19,888 | 5 |
| Southern | 24,046 | 9 |
| South East | 22,530 | 15 |
| South West | 19,730 | 10 |
| West Midlands | 21,054 | 7 |
| Yorkshire | 21,951 | 8 |

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the Arts Council of England has distributed to each of the regional arts boards in each year since 1995. [23574]

**Dr. Howells:** The Arts Council of England has been supplied the following information, which includes grant-in-aid and lottery funding combined:

*Summary of RAB audited accounts*

*Total funding from ACE* £

| *All RABs* | *1995–96* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| East England | 5,011,053 | 5,109,835 | 5,248,710 | 5,322,280 | 6,152,450 | 9,718,024 |
| East Midlands | 4,480,158 | 4,443,540 | 4,502,900 | 4,938,120 | 6,454,107 | 9,682,517 |
| London | 14,157,380 | 13,762,832 | 13,789,202 | 14,603,194 | 16,284,439 | 32,014,120 |
| Northern | 6,209,766 | 6,353,287 | 6,212,970 | 6,353,287 | 7,399,758 | 11,714,473 |
| North West | 8,099,977 | 8,028,610 | 8,441,000 | 8,515,529 | 9,766,313 | 18,039,684 |
| Southern | 3,598,450 | 3,839,771 | 3,918,786 | 4,267,846 | 5,159,652 | 11,192,305 |
| South East | 2,907,688 | 2,931,214 | 3,109,264 | 3,319,040 | 4,216,479 | 6,999,710 |
| South West | 4,577,422 | 4,516,883 | 4,972,630 | 5,084,757 | 6,027,128 | 9,133,900 |
| West Midlands | 5,955,357 | 5,853,052 | 6,169,350 | 6,388,082 | 7,545,188 | 13,598,401 |
| Yorkshire | 7,173,613 | 6,988,962 | 7,316,013 | 7,296,347 | 8,513,200 | 12,458,582 |

*Note:*
These are total figures, both GIA and Lottery combined.

### Royal Armouries (International)

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for how long the PFI contract her Department holds with Royal Armouries (International) for the management of Leeds Royal Armouries exhibition runs; what the total cost of the project has been to her Department; what funding was required to rescue the project; what estimate she has made of the future costs of the project to her Department; what estimates she has made of the value of RAI's new contract; under what terms the nature of the initial contract was changed; and what assessment she has made of the performance of RAI. [23568]

**Dr. Howells:** Under their current 57 year contract with the Armouries, Royal Armouries (International) plc (RAI) are responsible solely for providing catering, corporate

entertainment and car parking. The responsibility for managing the museum and its retail outlets was transferred to the Royal Armouries in 1999.

The total cost of the project to build the Royal Armouries museum at Leeds was £43 million. Over £14 million of the construction cost was met by RAI. The Government contributed £20 million via the Royal Armouries, and Leeds city council and Leeds Development Corporation together provided £8.5 million.

As part of the renegotiation of the original PFI-type deal, RAI's outstanding debt of £21 million was borne by the private sector. To cover the additional responsibilities assumed by the Royal Armouries my Department has provided additional grant of £1 million a year since 1999. The future cost to my Department is £1 million a year in additional grant. My Department has not provided any funding to RAI.

The value of RAI's new contract is a matter for RAI. Under the new arrangements agreed in July 1999 RAI retains responsibility for the repayment of its debt of £21 million. RAI also retains responsibility for the provision of corporate entertainment and catering services for a period of 40 years and car parking for a period of 57 years, together with the income from those functions. The Royal Armouries took over responsibility for all other operations and retail outlets. The Armouries stands to receive 20 per cent. of RAI's turnover from corporate entertainment and catering activities once RAI has paid off its debt plus 20 per cent. of its car park income after 40 years.

The current agreement between RAI and the Royal Armouries sets out the standards of performance required. This is a matter between RAI and the Royal Armouries.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Tanzania

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her priorities are for development projects in Tanzania. [25198]

**Hilary Benn:** Our Tanzania Programme supports the implementation of the Government of Tanzania's Poverty Reduction Strategy, in line with the Millennium Development Goals. Priority sectors identified in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper are health (including HIV), education, rural water, rural roads, agriculture, and the judicial and legal systems.

The Department for International Development assistance to Tanzania is now provided through a single medium term budget support instrument (about £40 million a year), with a complementary programme of technical co-operation (circa £30 million a year). This is designed to increase Government capacity to improve economic management and deliver public services, support private sector development and pro poor growth, and to help the Government improve their accountability to civil society.

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what priority her Department accords to a military air traffic control system for Tanzania in plans for that country's development. [25171]

**Hilary Benn:** Development priorities for Tanzania are set out in the Government of Tanzania's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper which my Department is supporting, along with other donors.

### Iran

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many Afghan refugees have been deported from Iran. [24930]

**Hilary Benn:** The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has received periodic reports of the deportation of small groups of Afghans over the past few months but does not have precise figures. It also estimates that over 140,000 Afghans returned home voluntarily from Iran during 2001, one-third of them since Herat city fell on 12 November 2001.

We continue to do all we can to ensure that Afghan refugees are properly cared for and give neighbouring countries the necessary support to cope with the burden of refugees, for whom they have generously provided for so long.

### Sudan

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has made to all sides in the conflict in Sudan to establish a permanent ceasefire and humanitarian access to those living in the Nuba mountains. [25003]

**Hilary Benn:** We regularly press for independent humanitarian access to the Nuba mountains, both directly and through the British ambassador and his staff in Khartoum. At present there is a ceasefire in place in the area and humanitarian access has improved as a result.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is visiting Sudan from 6 January and will discuss the Nuba mountains situation during her meetings with the representatives of both sides.

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of humanitarian access in areas of Sudan, with particular reference to the southern Blue Nile; and what steps she is taking to encourage all parties in the conflict to agree to long-term and unimpeded humanitarian access to Sudan. [25004]

**Hilary Benn:** We regularly press the Government of Sudan and the rebel forces to remove obstacles to independent humanitarian access to all areas including the southern Blue Nile. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is visiting Sudan from 6 January and will raise the issue of humanitarian access with the leaders of both warring sides.

### Afghanistan

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what help the Government are giving to sustain supplies and services to Afghanistan over the winter. [25416]

**Hilary Benn:** We have so far allocated £60 million for the provision of financial, technical and in-kind support for humanitarian and recovery assistance in Afghanistan. Almost £40 million of this UK support has been provided

to United Nations agencies, the Red Cross movement and NGOs, including support for the provision and stockpiling of assistance for the winter.

With our help, the UN, under the leadership of the World Food Programme, is maximising food delivery through both road and air routes and is prioritising deliveries to areas where access may become more difficult over the continuing winter, including the Central Highlands, the Panjshir valley and the north-east of the country. It has deployed specialist equipment and personnel to keep routes to these areas open as long as possible.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to include the states surrounding Afghanistan in the reconstruction plan for that country. [24275]

**Clare Short:** Both the recovery and reconstruction strategies will be informed by a regional approach, as the support of neighbouring countries will be crucial for long-term stability. Neighbouring countries have been invited to attend the Afghanistan Reconstruction Steering Group meeting, which is taking place in Brussels this week.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to prevent the export of heroin from Afghanistan to surrounding areas. [24273]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I have been asked to reply.

With strong British support it was agreed at the Bonn Conference (27 November to 5 December) that the Interim Administration would co-operate with the international community in the fight against drugs. The UK will play a significant part in reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. We think that this should include the promotion of economic and law enforcement policies in Afghanistan which encourage and support opium poppy farmers in pursuing other livelihoods.

We are providing assistance to Afghanistan's neighbours such as Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics to help them prevent drugs from being trafficked from Afghanistan. In financial year 2001–02 we are providing over £2 million worth of equipment to assist the local law enforcement agencies in these countries to detect drugs and drug traffickers.

### Central Asia

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has made to the EU regarding development assistance to *(a)* the Kyrgyz Republic, *(b)* Tajikistan and *(c)* Uzbekistan. [24272]

**Clare Short:** I have discussed future EC assistance to Central Asia with Chris Patten, Commissioner for External Relations. My officials have also discussed this on a number of occasions with Commission staff. I am very pleased that EU development assistance to the region, which includes the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, is to double.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the British Council to open an office in the Kyrgyz Republic. [24274]

**Clare Short:** I have not made representations to the British Council. I understand, however, that if a bid for funds is successful, the Council plan to open an office in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2004–05.

### Hearing Aids

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has *(a)* received and *(b)* made to (i) the EU and (ii) the WTO regarding the provision of hearing aids to the deaf and hearing impaired in developing countries. [24270]

**Clare Short:** My Department has received two representations, neither of which has been from the EU or the WTO, on the provision of hearing aids during 2001. I have not made any representations on this subject, as they are not part of my Department's priorities for health, which are in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

## DEFENCE

### Procurement

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on major procurement plans relating to land-based projects. [18757]

**Dr. Moonie:** We are investing in a number of new systems which will ensure that the Army's capability is maintained at the highest level. Plans for future equipment include the WAH-64 attack helicopter; improvements to the range and accuracy of our artillery weapons; a fully integrated fighting system for the infantry; a new range of armoured fighting vehicles; and new armoured engineering vehicles. We are also planning to procure a number of systems to improve logistics and combat support.

In addition, we have taken decisive action to rectify two long-standing equipment problems by undertaking a successful modification programme for the SA80 rifle and by placing a contract for the Bowman radio.

Our service personnel have excellent equipment that is the envy of most other armed forces. We are continually looking to modernise this equipment to ensure that our soldiers are fully able to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason the question tabled by the hon. Member for Lewes on 23 October relating to the cost at that point of Operation Enduring Freedom, Ref. 8769, has not yet been answered; and if he will make a statement. [24398]

**Mr. Hoon:** I wrote to the hon. Member on 19 December 2001.

### Far East Prisoners of War

**Peter Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost to date of the ex-gratia scheme for ex-prisoners of the Japanese; and what would have been the additional cost of allowing the applications of those barred following the clarification of the definition of British earlier this year. [24728]

**Dr. Moonie:** The ex-gratia scheme to make payments to those held prisoner by the Japanese during the Second World War is administered by the War Pensions Agency. As at 21 December 2001 there had been 22,794 payments made at a total cost of £229,940,000. At the same date, there had been a total of 4,019 applications rejected, of which 1,097 were on grounds of nationality. Assuming that the 1,097 rejected applicants met all other criteria for the ex-gratia payment, the additional payment cost would be £10,970,000.

### Territorial Army (Medals)

**Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will announce that service in Category C of the Territorial Army is reckonable service for the efficiency decoration and the efficiency medal as recommended by the Joint Service Review of Honours and Awards. [25130]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ministry of Defence, in conjunction with other Departments, is currently considering this recommendation of the Joint Services Review of Honours and Awards.

### Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department is taking to prevent the spread of Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever to special forces personnel operating in Afghanistan. [24998]

**Mr. Hoon:** Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever is a tick-borne virus; most patients are animal husbandry workers and it is uncommon in the winter months. The overall risk of Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever to UK troops is perceived as low. However, recommendations have been made to protect UK personnel from tick bites including the wearing of appropriate clothing, the treatment of clothing and the use of repellents.

### Afghanistan

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost has been to the UK of *(a)* the military and *(b)* the humanitarian campaign in Afghanistan. [25203]

**Mr. Hoon:** £100 million has been made available by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to cover new equipment and immediate Operational requirements needed for operations in Afghanistan and the campaign against international terrorism. Up to 31 October 2001, the net additional costs of Operation Veritas were £14.5 million. The Department for International Development (DfID), which is responsible for the humanitarian campaign, has set aside £60 million of which almost £40 million has already been allocated to UN agencies, the Red Cross movement and NGOs to support their response to the current crisis, both in Afghanistan and in the region. As well as financial assistance, DfID is also providing technical, personnel, logistical, material and other practical support.

### MOD and Military Police (Retirement)

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel have retired from *(a)* the Military police and *(b)* the MOD police in each of the last five years. [15166]

**Mr. Ingram:** The number of personnel who have retired from the Military police and the Ministry of Defence police by financial year is as follows:

| | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Naval Service | 16 | 20 | 22 | 33 | 20 |
| Army | 59 | 47 | 38 | 25 | 24 |
| RAF | 109 | 77 | 93 | 76 | 72 |
| MOD police | 38 | 41 | 28 | 24 | 27 |
| Total | 222 | 185 | 181 | 158 | 143 |

'Retirements' have been defined as personnel leaving at the end of an agreed period of service.

### Porton Down

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many films are held by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down of its biological warfare trial known as Operation Cauldron; and if he will place a list of the titles and dates of the films on this trial in the Library. [23129]

**Dr. Moonie:** During the late 1940s and early 1950s the Ministry of Supply undertook a series of major sea trials of the dissemination of biological warfare agents. It is believed that films, each consisting of several reels, were taken of the individual trials, including Operation Cauldron, which was conducted in 1952. Porton Down holds a videotape, entitled "Operation Cauldron—1952", which contains approximately 20–30 minutes of footage extracted from that shot during the trial. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 9 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 197W, in which I explained that the titles of the 1,200 films in the archive at Dstl Porton Down have not been catalogued and in many cases are not very informative. It would involve disproportionate cost to collate a list of films. Therefore we cannot say if reels of film containing footage of Operation Cauldron are held in the archive at Dstl Portdon Down. Films held in the archive are gradually being transferred to the Imperial War Museum where they are being reviewed and catalogued. This is being undertaken in accordance with MOD policy.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a list of the common and chemical names of the incapacitants which have been tested on service volunteers at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down, during the Service Volunteer Programme; and how many service volunteers were tested with each of these incapacitants. [22932]

**Dr. Moonie:** Agents known to have been used at Porton Down during the Service Volunteer Programme, and which are generally considered to be incapacitants include those listed.

Sensory irritants:

CS (orthochlorobenzylidine malononitrile) and its ortho-bromo ortho-nitro, ortho-hydroxy, ortho-cyano, meta-hydroxy, di-chloro and di-ethyoxy derivatives;

CN or CAP (chloroacetophenone) and its ortho-nitro, meta-fluoro, and 2-hydroxy-5-methyl derivatives;

Benzyl bromide derivatives including para-bromo, para-nitro, para-cyano, ortho-cyano and bromo-cyano; para-nitro and para-bromo benzyl iodides;

BBC (bromobenzlcyanide);

ethyl bromoacetate;

ortho-xylene dibromide and derivatives;

bromo-p-toluamide;

CR (dibenzoxazepine);

methoxycycloheptatriene;

fumaronitrile;

ammonia;

ethyl alcohol;

tri-n-propyl lead beta chloropropionate;

DA (diphenylchloroarsine);

DM (diphenylamine chloroarsine) and a range of chloroarsine derivatives;

Capsaicin.

Centrally acting agents such as:

LSD (D-lyseric acid diethylamide);

BZ (3-quinclidinyl benzoate) and a range of other glycollates;

oripavine and its derivatives;

a range of morphine derivatives and Pyrexal.

However, definitions of what constitutes an incapacitant vary and there are many agents used in the Service Volunteer Programme on which information is not readily available. Precise numbers of volunteers exposed to the various agents are not known. Collation of such data would involve extensive detailed searches of all the Porton Down record books. It is hoped that this information will become available as a result of the proposed research into the health of Porton Down Volunteers.

### Local Overseas Allowance

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if local overseas allowance is payable to air crews on exercise Saif Sareea and Operation Veritas; what the weekly value is of the *(a)* welfare package offered to air crews during Saif Sareea and *(b)* local overseas allowance; and if he will make a statement. [24373]

**Mr. Ingram:** No Local Overseas Allowance (LOA) was payable to personnel, including aircrew, for Exercise Saif Sareea II, nor is it payable for those deployed on Operation Veritas. In both cases deployed personnel have been eligible for the Operational Welfare Package (OWP).

LOA is not part of the military salary or a reward for overseas service. It is a cost of living addition paid only in circumstances where personnel are likely to incur greater day-to-day expenditure overseas than they would in the UK. This is not generally the case for those deployed on operations or major exercises in remote locations.

A comprehensive OWP was made available to deployed personnel engaged in Exercise Saif Sareea II. I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces gave on 19 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 12, to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) which covered the welfare arrangements for exercises lasting for two months or more. The package provided a personal allowance of 20 minutes of publicly funded telephone calls per week; free forces aerogrammes and concessionary parcel rates; access to the internet and e-mail; newspapers and book packs; BFBS TV and Radio; televisions, video recorders and video tapes; Expeditionary Forces Institute shops; publicly funded laundry, fitness equipment and a Combined Services Entertainment show. Similar facilities are being made available to those deployed on Operation Veritas.

The cost of providing the OWP to Exercise Saif Sareea II is estimated to be £8.5 million, but it is not possible to quantify the value to an individual where there is no comparable local market for the services provided. If LOA had been judged appropriate for those exercising in Oman, examples rates are £67.97 per week for an RAF Corporal and £80.71 per week for a Squadron Leader.

### Expenditure

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent to date, including research and development and manufacturing costs, on the *(a)* Type 45 and the PAAMS system, *(b)* CVF, *(c)* Astute class SSN and *(d)* Merlin ASW helicopter. [23622]

**Dr. Moonie:** The information is as follows.

*Expenditure on research and development and manufacturing costs (VAT inclusive) as at 31 March 2001*

| | £ million |
|---|---|
| Type 45 and PAAMS | [1]491 |
| CVF | 18 |
| ASTUTE Class SSN | 490 |
| Merlin ASW helicopter | 3,507 |

[1] This figure includes Type 45 warship development plus the UK element of research and development costs on the Principal Anti Air Missile System (PAAMS), the Horizon Programme and WR21 gas turbine development.

Costs are not recorded by the Ministry of Defence under headings of "Research and Development" and "Manufacturing". They are divided into five project phases: Concept, Assessment, Design and Manufacture, In-Service and Disposal, with Assessment being the closest to R&D.

### Forces Mail

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if letters and parcels from services personnel on active service overseas are carried free of postage; if letters and parcels for families to service personnel at BFPO addresses are carried free of postage; if he will call for a report about postal services offered free of charge to US services personnel; and if he will make a statement. [24032]

**Mr. Ingram** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]*: The Review of Operational Welfare, the results of which my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced on 29 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 731–32W, concluded that the best method of maintaining communication between personnel deployed on operations and their families is to provide a

comprehensive package across a range of media which is common to all operational theatres. Consequently, the new arrangements we introduced in April provide a full package—free 'blueys' (forces aerogrammes), free 'e-blueys', other mail and parcels at forces concessionary rates (which are considerably lower than normal rates), publicly funded telephone calls (20 minutes per week) and internet access. We have provided some £60 million of additional resources over a four year period to support these enhancements. As part of the review we did examine the US model of welfare support to deployed forces—as well as canvassing the views of several hundred British service personnel on operations.

### Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, 'Winning the Generation Game', *(a)* what progress his Department has made and *(b)* what future plans his Department has for acting on them; and if he will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24201]

**Dr. Moonie** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 335W, by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office.

### Cruise Missiles

**Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of maintaining and servicing the cruise missile arsenal has been in each year since 1983. [21551]

**Mr. Hoon** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM) system which entered service in 1998 is the first, and currently only, cruise missile in service with UK armed forces. Delivery of the missiles commenced in 1997 and the cost of maintaining and servicing the arsenal in each of the financial years since then is as follows:

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| *Year* | |
| 1997–98 | 0.100 |
| 1998–99 | 0.120 |
| 1999–2000 | 0.140 |
| 2000–01 | 0.160 |
| 2001–02 | [1]0.180 |

[1] Estimated

**Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the total cost of a cruise missile over the lifetime of its use. [21550]

**Mr. Hoon** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM) system is currently the only cruise missile in-service with UK armed forces. The estimated total cost of a TLAM missile over its in-service life is £1.4 million.

### Anti-ship Capability

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Merlin helicopter will be fitted with the Sea Shire missile; what other anti-ship capability it will have; and what anti-ship capability *(a)* Type 23 frigates and *(b)* Type 45 destroyers will have. [24024]

**Dr. Moonie:** I assume the hon. Member refers to the Sea Skua missile, currently fitted to the Royal Navy's Lynx helicopter. There are no plans to fit the Sea Skua to the Merlin helicopter. The helicopter has a state of the art, integrated mission system, and an extensive array of on-board sensors. These not only give Merlin an independent capability to search for, locate and attack submarine targets, but can also be used to detect ships and provide targeting information for attack by other units.

The Type 23 frigate's anti-ship capability is provided by the Harpoon anti-ship missile, the Sea Skua missile fitted to its Lynx helicopter, the 4.5" Mk8 gun, and twin 30mm guns. It is planned that the Type 45 destroyer's anti-ship capability will be provided by the Sea Skua missile, fitted to its Lynx helicopter, together with the ship's medium range gunnery system, the 4.5" Mk8 Mod 1 gun and twin 30mm guns. The Type 45 is being designed to facilitate the incremental incorporation of additional capabilities, and as such allows for the fitting of a surface to surface guided missile, should the requirement for one be demonstrated.

### Astute

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the research and development costs are of the Astute class; and what the estimated cost of construction is for each Astute class submarine. [23616]

**Dr. Moonie:** The cost of research and development of the Assessment Phase of Astute Class was £29 million. Subsequently the prime contract was placed in March 1997 for the design, build and initial support of three submarines. Unfortunately it is not possible to separate out the development costs in this phase, or the construction cost per boat, from the other costs in the overall price. This is because the contract is placed for a total price, with no itemisation against the categories of the hon. Member's request.

### HMS Ambush

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Ambush's keel will be laid. [23615]

**Dr. Moonie:** HMS Ambush is currently expected to be laid down during the second half of 2002.

### Base Dispositions

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies the NAO has made of the *(a)* closure, *(b)* partial sale and *(c)* move of military bases since 1997. [24055]

**Dr. Moonie:** On 17 June 1998, the National Audit Office published a report entitled "Identifying and Selling surplus Property" (HC 776), which considered (in Section 5), a number of individual property disposals of former Ministry of Defence (MOD) sites during the financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97, including that of the HM Naval Base, Rosyth. In addition, the National Audit Office in their report on "Training New Pilots" (HC 880 published on 14 September 2000) referred to the MOD's decision to concentrate flying training at fewer

locations resulting in the closure and disposal of surplus sites, although the report did not directly consider the disposals themselves.

### Casualty Ships

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place an order for primary casualty receiving ships; and if he will make a statement. [23620]

**Dr. Moonie:** We are continuing to define the requirement for a new primary Casualty Receiving Capability, to enhance afloat medical support. A range of different procurement options are under consideration, ranging from modules embarked as and when required on existing host vessels, to an integrally fitted vessel. An initial study contract for Assessment Phase work was placed on 21 December.

### HMS Triumph

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate has been made of the danger the *(a)* HMS Triumph and *(b)* crew of HMS Triumph were in as a result of the incident which led to the court martialling of Lieutenant Ian Tabberer and Lieutenant Ashley Philpott; and if he will make a statement. [23303]

**Mr. Ingram:** The damage to HMS Triumph was minor. She surfaced normally and proceeded to the nearest Naval Base without difficulty. Neither the ship's company nor HMS Triumph were at any risk as a result of the grounding.

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what opportunities for service are left in the Royal Navy for Lieutenant Ian Tabberer and Lieutenant Ashley Philpott; and if he will make a statement. [23304]

**Mr. Ingram:** Depending on the findings and sentence of the court-martial it is perfectly possible to continue a career in the Royal Navy. Any sentence would be taken into account, along with any other relevant factors, when considering aspects such as future appointments.

**Mrs. Ann Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the incident involving HMS Triumph which took place on 19 November 2000 and on the nature, time scale and cost of repair work required. [24914]

**Mr. Ingram:** On Sunday, 19 November 2000, HMS Triumph made glancing contact with soft sand and shells on a shelving seabed when under way submerged. An immediate inspection was undertaken following which the boat proceeded on the surface to Faslane, as programmed. The superficial damage identified was repaired in January 2001 during a period of planned maintenance, at a cost of approximately £6,000.

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action will be taken in regard to the Commanding Officer of HMS Triumph in relation to the events leading to the court martialling of Lieutenant Ashley Philpott and Lieutenant Ian Tabberer; and if he will make a statement. [23301]

**Mr. Ingram:** The Naval Prosecuting Authority, which is independent of the Chain of Command, considered all of the evidence of the Board of Inquiry following the grounding and specified, after careful consideration, those officers that were found to have committed offences that should be dealt with by way of court martial.

### Royal Ordnance Factories

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give guarantees on the security of supply of ammunition in the United Kingdom from Royal Ordnance factories. [23553]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ministry of Defence entered an innovative partnering agreement with Royal Ordnance Defence (ROD) in December 1999 to ensure security of supply of ammunition and related services while at the same time achieving best value for the taxpayers' money. We remain confident that ROD will continue to be a major supplier of munitions to the Ministry of Defence.

### Eurofighter

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what bids were submitted to provide maintenance and support services for the EJ200 engines for the Royal Air Force Eurofighters; what was the cost of these bids; what timescale was given; and if he will make a statement. [24155]

**Mr. Hoon:** The prime contract for initial maintenance and support of Royal Air Force EJ200 engines was awarded to Rolls-Royce in November 2001 following a non-competitive tender. The initial contract is valued at approximately £12 million and will run until December 2003. Long-term support will be the subject of a subsequent contract employing a number of 'Smart Acquisition' principles such as partnering and incentivisation to maximise through life value for money.

### Cannabis

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings he has had with Army officials about the implications for the armed forces of cannabis being reclassified as a class C drug. [24412]

**Mr. Ingram:** The misuse of drugs (whether Class A, B or C) is incompatible with service in the armed forces. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has discussed this subject generally with officials, including the Chief of the General Staff. He will, of course, consider the implications of any recommendation on cannabis reclassification that may be made in due course by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs.

### Tanks

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK tanks are based in each country *(a)* inside and *(b)* outside the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [24091]

**Mr. Ingram** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* Of the 355 UK Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks currently in service, 107 are in England, 216 are in Germany and 32 are in Batus.

### Recruitment

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* costs and *(b)* benefits are of recruiting soldiers from (i) Fiji and (ii) the British Isles. [24406]

**Mr. Ingram:** The Army accepts applications from Commonwealth citizens, including those from Fiji, but does not actively recruit from these countries. However, in response to the large number of applications received from Fiji, the Army sent a selection team to that country in late 1999 at a cost of some £97,000. These costs are not directly comparable with those for recruiting in the UK. The total budget for the UK recruiting operation in 1999–2000 was some £56.5 million.

We believe that the addition of the Fijians to its strength increases the diversity of the force, provides a positive image to other Fijians and other potential applicants from the Commonwealth, and further demonstrates that the Army is an equal opportunities employer. The selection visit to Fiji had the advantage of reducing nugatory costs to the individuals ensuring that all aspirants had the opportunity to apply.

### Operation Enduring Freedom

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what had been the cost on 31 December 2001 of Operation Enduring Freedom; and how much of the total cost has been met from pre-set departmental budgets. [24427]

**Mr. Hoon:** This information is not yet available. I will write to the hon. Member in due course. A copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Defence Procurement

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much outstanding offset there was for *(a)* the USA, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* France in each of the last 10 years. [25116]

**Mr. Hoon:** The current amount of outstanding offset (referred to in the UK as Industrial Participation) for the USA, Germany and France is, respectively: £2 billion, £137 million, and £314 million. German and French industries have had Industrial Participation obligations to UK Ministry of Defence only since 1996. Information relating to previous years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### QinetiQ

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been paid by his Department to *(a)* PricewaterhouseCoopers and UBS Warburg, *(b)* Simmonds & Simmonds, *(c)* Arthur Andersen and *(d)* Willis in connection with the proposed flotation of QinetiQ in each of the last two years. [24521]

**Dr. Moonie:** Payments to advisers in connection with the QinetiQ transaction are made under the terms of the relevant commercial contracts with these companies. I am withholding details of payments in accordance with Exemption 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much (1) QinetiQ has spent on advice with respect to its flotation in each of the last two years; [24520]

(2) his Department has spent on advice on the flotation of QinetiQ in each of the last two years. [24519]

**Dr. Moonie:** The total cost of advice the Ministry of Defence received in respect of QinetiQ was some £1.4 million in 2000 and £3.6 million in 2001. The total cost of advice received by QinetiQ was some £1.5 million in 2000 and £6.2 million in 2001. These figures cover the cost of advice on all aspects of the DERA PPP, as it is not possible to separate out that spent on advice relating specifically to the transaction. These costs have been scrutinised to ensure that the services of advisers offer value for money.

### Defence Aviation Repair Agency

**Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the annual cost was of inter-site travel by personnel of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01. [25131]

**Mr. Ingram:** The travelling expenses details for personnel travelling between the sites of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency are not recorded separately and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Government Defence Logistics

**David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed in Government defence logistics work in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Telford. [25108]

**Mr. Ingram:** As at 19 December 2001, the number of people employed in the Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) in the United Kingdom is 31,829. The number of people employed in the DLO in the Telford area is 2,544.

### Cluster Bombs

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 223W, on cluster bombs, if he will include unexploded ordnance clearance in the package of measures he supports aimed at minimising the risk to civilians; if he will support measures to restrict the targeting of cluster bombs so as to protect civilians; and if he will consult Landmine Action before finalising his policy towards discussions on a new protocol addressing explosive remnants of war. [24510]

**Mr. Ingram:** It is entirely appropriate that cluster bombs should be included in international discussions in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons aimed at minimising the hazard to civilians from explosive remnants of war. International law already exists to restrict the targeting of cluster bombs and other munitions so as to protect civilians, in the form of Article 51 of the First Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions, to which the United Kingdom is a State Party. The Ministry of Defence will consult widely in developing policy towards discussions on a new protocol addressing explosive remnants of war.

### Naval Vessels

**Mrs. Ann Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what means of inspection and deduction were used to determine the safety case for HMS Sovereign, HMS Superb, HMS Sceptre, HMS Spartan, HMS

Splendid, HMS Trafalgar, HMS Turbulent, HMS Tireless, HMS Torbay, HMS Trenchant, HMS Talent and HMS Triumph. [24912]

**Mr. Ingram:** The Reactor Plant Safety Justifications for Royal Navy submarines aims to demonstrate, through detailed calculation and reasoned argument, that the risks of operation are acceptable and as low as reasonably practicable. The large suite of documentation that forms the safety case is structured around a detailed and comprehensive set of Safety Principles and Safety Criteria. These prescribe the aspects to be considered and include such items as: the basis of design; use of proven engineering practice and technology; system integrity; maintenance and testing; reliability; inspection and results; human and equipment failures; and operation in conditions where a fault has occurred. A range of different tests and inspections are used to certify key components of the reactor plant.

### RAF Cottesmore (Joint Harrier Force)

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the percentage serviceability is of the joint Harrier force based at RAF Cottesmore. [24990]

**Mr. Ingram:** On 18 December 2001, 73 per cent. of the Harriers used in the three front line squadrons, including those for training at RAC Cottesmore, were fully serviceable, 6 per cent. were undergoing minor scheduled servicing and the remaining 21 per cent. were unserviceable with faults that could be resolved within the squadrons' own capability. All those aircraft not fully serviceable could have been made so within three days, if required.

### Brigade Reorganisation

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many extra deployable troops will result from his reorganisation of *(a)* 52 (Lowland) Brigade and *(b)* Headquarters 2 (South East) Brigade. [25100]

**Mr. Ingram:** The two light infantry brigade headquarters (52 Lowland) Brigade and 2 (South East) Brigade) are being re-roled from regional brigade headquarters to provide better command and control arrangements for the light infantry role battalions, all of which are currently deployable. Thus the reorganisation of the two brigades will not result in an increase in the number of deployable troops. The change will bring greater coherence to the way that these units prepare for operations, through improved co-ordination of training.

### Deployment

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce British forces in *(a)* Germany and *(b)* Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [25038]

**Mr. Ingram:** The Strategic Defence Review made it clear that the forward basing of ground forces in Germany would remain a key aspect of British defence policy. In order to create a better balance between 1 (UK) Armoured Division stationed in Germany and 3 (UK) Division based in the United Kingdom we decided to withdraw around 2,500 troops from Germany. Phase one of the withdrawal was completed at the end of 1999. The remaining elements will take some years to complete.

There are no immediate plans for troop reductions in Northern Ireland. The force levels within Northern Ireland are kept under constant review and are dependent on the Police Service of Northern Ireland's threat assessment and used for support. The Army's counter-terrorist and public order role in the Province will remain for as long as the police require military support to maintain law and order.

### Garrison Radio Stations

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to support garrison radio stations. [24991]

**Mr. Ingram:** On 1 July 2001, a two-year pilot project was initiated to provide Army radio broadcasting in Aldershot, Bulford/Tidworth, Catterick and Colchester. By 7 January 2002, all four garrison stations will be broadcasting full time and are funded to remain on air until 1 July 2003. The radio stations will be broadcast predominantly on AM with some trial broadcasts being made in FM in accordance with radio authority regulations.

Garrison Radio Ltd., the contracted radio service provider, is offering a comprehensive local communication and welfare radio service at the four locations. Gurkha language services are also broadcast in appropriate garrisons.

In addition to broadcasting around the clock, a variety of news and features packages concentrating on local garrison items are compiled on a daily and weekly basis and made available as an audio download package on the internet. All these news and features packages are accessible through the Army website at www.army.mod.uk.

### A400M

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on when the Government will sign the contract for the A400M. [24180]

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with partner countries on the announcement of the signing of the contract for the A400M. [24513]

**Mr. Hoon:** On 18 December 2001, I signed an inter-Governmental memorandum of Understanding to allow the A400M contract to be placed. The contract itself was signed on the same day by the Organisation for Joint Armaments Co-operation (OCCAR), on behalf of the partner nations, and by the contractor Airbus Military. It provides for the development and manufacture of 196 aircraft in a single launch order. The UK's share is 25 aircraft. OCCAR will manage the programme to standards agreed by the partner nations.

The A400M contract will enter into force once final Bundestag approval has been given to the German commitment. The agreement of other nations, including the UK, is subject to the German signature becoming effective. If this has not happened by the end of January 2002, these authorisations will lapse, providing a further opportunity to review the position.

I am content that the programme now agreed with Airbus Military satisfies the conditions that I set out in my announcement to the House on 16 May 2000 for our participation in the A400M programme. Specifically:

Programme commitments now total 196, well above the notional level of viability of 180 aircraft.

The price negotiated with Airbus Military is affordable and represents value for money.

Achievement of contract signature on 18 December is consistent with the UK's In-Service Date. This is planned to be 2010.

The commercial terms and conditions of the contract are acceptable.

### Depleted Uranium

**Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armour piercing and hard target penetrating warheads containing depleted uranium have been tested in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Dumfries and Galloway in each of the last 10 years. [18233]

**Dr. Moonie** *[holding answer 26 November 2001, pursuant to the reply, 5 December 2001, c. 342]:* With reference to the number of depleted uranium projectiles fired in Scotland in each of the last 10 years, it has been brought to our attention that there is a typographical error against the figure quoted for 1994. The correct figure should read 455 and not 4,555. All other information contained within my reply of this date is correct.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Staff Numbers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people were employed in her Department in each of the last four years. [23801]

**Ms Hewitt:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 256W.

### Correspondence

**David Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 15 November regarding fireworks. [24358]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** I replied to my hon. Friend on 19 December 2001.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the target on routine procurement of goods to be conducted electronically was achieved. [23157]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 597W.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the public service agreement target on the overall international ranking of the science and engineering company base in terms of quality, relevance and cost-efficiency. [23171]

**Ms Hewitt:** The most recent measurements of the international ranking of the Science and Engineering Base (SEB) in terms of quality, relevance and cost-effectiveness indicate that, the UK continues to maintain its position relative to other G7 nations. The details are as follows:

The quality of the science and engineering base is measured by the UK's world ranking in terms of citations of published papers. Over the period 1981–2000 the UK received a 9.1 per cent. share of the citations in the international Science Citation Index, second only to the US. The UK was second in 'citation shares' for 15 out of 20 scientific fields with the lowest placing being fifth.

One measure of relevance is the UK's world ranking in terms of the proportion of university research funding from non-governmental sources. For the latest year for which data are available (1997), the UK was again ranked first among the G7 countries.

Cost-effectiveness is measured by the UK's world ranking in terms of the number of papers published per £1 million of public expenditure on science. In 1990, 1993, 1996 and 1999, the UK was the leading country in the G7. For the latest year (2000) the UK was again ranked first.

These measures were put in place at the time of the Comprehensive Spending Review and were continued for the period of the 2000 Spending Review (2001–02 to 2003–04).

While the public service agreement targets described here provide a valuable indication of the strength of the UK science base relative to our competitors, other indications are also available. The results of the latest Research Assessment Exercise were published on 14 December and show that, since 1996 when the last study was carried out, many university research groups have significantly improved their performance.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Armed Theft (Belfast)

**Mr. Dodds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what assessment has been made of responsibility for the armed theft of electrical goods from a warehouse near Belfast on 21 November; [24141]

(2) what assessment has been made of responsibility for the armed robbery of cigarettes at Belfast docks in June. [24097]

**Jane Kennedy:** The police believe that the robberies involved well-organised criminal gangs with association to republican paramilitary groups.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress with the PSA target to limit the number of prison escapes. [24830]

**Jane Kennedy:** There have been no escapes from any Northern Ireland Prison Establishment during the period 1 April 2001–27 December 2001.

There have been three escapes involving medium/low risk prisoners during this period from external hospitals. To reduce the likelihood of further escapes the following action has been taken:

Trained prison staff are deployed to outside hospitals when it is necessary to produce prisoners for medical treatment. These staff are now given more detailed briefings.

The procedures relating to the escorting of prisoners at outside hospitals have been reviewed and the operating instructions to officers have been revised.

In consultation with the Commissioner for Nursing and Heads of Nursing in relevant hospitals we are carrying out a review to ensure that the maximum use of medical facilities in prisons is made and that hospital escorts are restricted to essential cases only.

Prison security managers and hospital staff are reviewing the physical security of wards used for accommodating prisoners.

The Key Target for high/top risk prisoners as set out in the Northern Ireland Prison Service Corporate and Business Plan is 100 per cent. security and this target is currently being met.

The Key Target for medium/low risk prisoners is 99.7 per cent. security and the current rate is 99.6 per cent. security, therefore the target is not currently being met.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target to increase overall confidence in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. [24833]

**Jane Kennedy:** The Public Service Agreement target requires that an annual survey measure the level of confidence of both main parts of the community in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. The Community Attitudes Survey, which is conducted independently of the Northern Ireland Office, will provide baseline figures during this year for both sections of the community's level of confidence in the Northern Ireland criminal justice system.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress with the PSA target to reduce the rate of increase of overall crime. [24831]

**Jane Kennedy:** Baselines to monitor the target of a reduction in the rate of increase in overall crime are currently being established. Recorded crime figures for the current year, 2001–02, will be included in the calculation of the baseline to monitor this target. This baseline will be the average annual increase in crime from 1997–98 to 2001–02.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target to secure ongoing efficiency savings in core departmental administration costs for each year of the planning period. [24829]

**Jane Kennedy:** The Northern Ireland Office's SR2000 PSA target 8 is:

"To secure ongoing efficiency savings of 3 per cent. in core departmental administration costs for each year of the planning period while maintaining levels of quality of service".

The Department is currently on course to meet this target.

## Anti-drugs Strategy

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the results of the use of the additional funding allocated in the 2001 Budget to tackle drug-related crime and drug abuse. [24835]

**Jane Kennedy:** The Chancellor awarded £9.347 million over three years to Northern Ireland in the 2001 Budget. Of this figure £6.23 million will be transferred to the NI Executive, the remainder being retained by the Northern Ireland Office. Both administrations are currently developing action plans to identify the key focus of the support programmes to tackle illicit drug use. It is too early to specify the impact of this additional funding.

## Visiting Heads of State

**Mr. Dodds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the protocol to be followed by visiting Heads of State to Northern Ireland in respect of *(a)* official visits and *(b)* private visits. [23567]

**Dr. John Reid:** When a Head of State makes an official visit to Northern Ireland full protocol is observed. The visitor is met by the lord-lieutenant of the county or county borough. The sheriff for the county or county borough, the mayor of the borough or chairman of the district council, the chief executive of the council and the Member of Parliament for the constituency are invited to take part in the presentation lines. Northern Ireland Office Ministers and devolved Ministers are also invited to take part in presentation lines as appropriate.

Where a visit is private, there is no requirement for protocol.

When a visit is classed as a working visit, a lord-lieutenant greets the Head of State. Members of Parliament, Northern Ireland Office Ministers and devolved Ministers are advised, for information only, of the Head of State's attendance at public venues within their constituency or areas of responsibility.

## Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

**Mrs. Iris Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the religious affiliation is of those employed in the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland; which groups were consulted prior to the creation of the Office; what the breakdown is by postcode of where complaints were made from since the creation of the Office; and what costs were incurred by the Office in the last year. [20371]

**Jane Kennedy:** The religious affiliation of the Police Ombudsman's office which currently employs 108 staff is 46.2 per cent. Protestant, 34.6 per cent. Catholic and 19.2 per cent. others.

Before the Office of the Police Ombudsman was set up, the Northern Ireland Office set up a steering group which was representative of all the main stakeholders, including the police, police staff associations and the Police Authority.

The costs incurred by the Police Ombudsman's Office January 2001 to October 2001 are £3.74 million.

The table shows the breakdown by postcode of complaints received to date:

| Postcode | Number of complaints |
|---|---|
| BT1 | 56 |
| BT2 | 1 |
| BT4 | 46 |
| BT5 | 86 |
| BT6 | 38 |
| BT7 | 90 |
| BT8 | 40 |
| BT8 | 92 |
| BT10 | 12 |
| BT11 | 85 |
| BT12 | 183 |
| BT13 | 130 |
| BT14 | 262 |
| BT15 | 169 |
| BT16 | 20 |
| BT17 | 80 |
| BT18 | 28 |
| BT19 | 66 |
| BT20 | 44 |
| BT21 | 8 |
| BT22 | 27 |
| BT23 | 100 |
| BT24 | 30 |
| BT25 | 9 |
| BT26 | 3 |
| BT27 | 23 |
| BT28 | 67 |
| BT29 | 13 |
| BT30 | 119 |
| BT31 | 7 |
| BT32 | 34 |
| BT33 | 20 |
| BT34 | 62 |
| BT35 | 39 |
| BT36 | 87 |
| BT37 | 36 |
| BT38 | 76 |
| BT39 | 25 |
| BT40 | 48 |
| BT41 | 80 |
| BT43 | 75 |
| BT44 | 19 |
| BT45 | 34 |
| BT46 | 8 |
| BT47 | 95 |
| BT48 | 128 |
| BT49 | 45 |
| BT51 | 38 |
| BT52 | 58 |
| BT53 | 18 |
| BT54 | 2 |
| BT55 | 7 |
| BT56 | 15 |
| BT57 | 2 |
| BT60 | 34 |
| BT61 | 38 |
| BT62 | 91 |
| BT63 | 34 |
| BT64 | 4 |
| BT65 | 42 |
| BT66 | 33 |
| BT67 | 24 |
| BT70 | 20 |
| BT71 | 42 |
| BT74 | 1 |
| BT75 | 3 |
| BT76 | 2 |
| BT77 | 56 |
| BT78 | 61 |
| BT79 | 63 |
| BT80 | 10 |
| BT81 | 87 |
| BT82 | 54 |
| BT92 | 18 |
| BT93 | 7 |
| BT94 | 21 |
| Outside Northern Ireland | 5 |
| Unknown | 220 |

## Police Service

**Mrs. Iris Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date new recruits to the reformed Police Service of Northern Ireland will complete their training in 2002. [22921]

**Jane Kennedy:** The first intake of new recruits to the Police Service of Northern Ireland will complete their initial training on 4 April 2002. Those that complete the training successfully will be attested as Constables on 5 April 2002, and will then undergo an eight week period of combined operational training. This will be followed by a period of 'tutorship' in District Command Units, beginning on 10 June 2002, before recruits are posted to their individual stations on 19 August 2002.

Further tranches of recruits will complete this training schedule approximately every five weeks thereafter.

# SOLICITOR-GENERAL

## Race Crime

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Solicitor-General how many cases of *(a)* incitement to race hatred and *(b)* racist violence have been brought before courts in England and Wales; and of these how many have been successful in each of the past three years. [25229]

**The Solicitor-General:** Records for prosecutions for incitement of racial hatred under part III of the Public Order Act 1986 have been kept since 1988. The records relate to the year that the application for consent to prosecute was dealt with and so it is not possible to state with any certainty how many prosecutions resulted in convictions in any given year. The number of applications for consent to prosecute for each year since 1999 and the number of convictions resulting from the prosecutions are summarised in the table.

*Consent applications and prosecutions since 1999 under part III of the Public Order Act 1986*

| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Attorney-General consent applications[1] | 4 | 5 | 8 |
| Withdrawn | — | — | — |
| Not granted | — | — | — |
| Prosecuted | 4 | 5 | 8 |
| Convicted[2] | 3 | [3]2 | [4]— |

[1] Per defendant.

[2] Not necessarily in same year.

[3] One result outstanding. One prosecution stayed on ill health grounds.

[4] Results awaited.

*Note:*
1. Data for prosecutions of racist violent offences are included in figures published annually by the Home Office. The offences covered are racially aggravated offences under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which came into force on 30 September 1998. The racially aggravated (RA) offences are:
(i) RA wounding or inflicting grievous bodily harm.
(ii) RA actual bodily harm.
(iii) RA common assault.
(iv) RA intentional harassment alarm or distress.
(v) RA offence of harassment.
(vi) RA putting people in fear of violence.

The figures supplied by the Home Office for 1999 and 2000 (data for 2001 not available) are given as follows on a principal offence basis.

| *Year* | *Prosecuted* | *Convicted* |
|---|---|---|
| 1999 | 1,330 | 451 |
| 2000[1] | 2,342 | 878 |

[1] Staffordshire police force was only able to submit sample data for persons dealt with at magistrates' courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.

## WALES

### Abandoned Vehicles

**Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the cost was to each county council in Wales of removing and disposing of abandoned vehicles in the last year. [25139]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** That is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

### Energy Efficiency

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what steps his Department is taking to ensure delivery of energy efficiency services to rural areas; [23948]

(2) what representations he has received concerning constraints on delivery of energy efficiency services to rural areas. [23951]

**Mr. Meacher:** I have been asked to reply.

General energy efficiency advice is available through Energy Efficiency Advice Centres (EEACs). A network of 52 centres around the country provides advice to all areas. In addition, the Environment and Energy Helpline is available for businesses, whatever their location, to provide guidance and advice.

The Government's main grant programme for improving the energy efficiency of private sector households is the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES). The two scheme managers—Eaga Partnerships Ltd. and TXU Warm Front Ltd.—are responsible for marketing the programme across the country. Both scheme managers provide regular progress reports on the effectiveness of these programmes.

They use a variety of methods including working with health professionals such as practice nurses and health visitors together with social workers and others involved in the health or welfare of vulnerable clients. The scheme managers also enter into partnerships with bodies such as travelling libraries, which visit rural communities on a regular basis, and Meals on Wheels. In addition, a travelling bus has been used as a focal point to reach those in outlying areas.

One of the five Warm Zones the Government are piloting has been set up in Northumberland to test an area, rather than a referral-based mechanism, for reaching the fuel poor. The purpose is to test whether this improves the take-up of the scheme in rural areas.

The Government are aware that the construction of some rural properties coupled with lack of access to the main gas network can make it difficult to make homes energy efficient. The Fuel Poverty Strategy sets out our intention to carry out large scale pilots using renewable energy sources and micro combined heat and power to explore how these technologies could be used to help the fuel poor.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Afghanistan

14. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on UK participation in peacekeeping activities in Afghanistan. [23008]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** As outlined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in a statement to this House on 19 November 2001, the United Kingdom has agreed to take on the lead nation role in the International Security Assistance Force. The core mission of the ISAF will be to assist in the maintenance of security in Kabul and the surrounding area so as to help in the establishment of the Interim Authority and the initial activities of the United Nations.

18. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the political settlement in Afghanistan and its impact on international terrorism. [23012]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said on 5 December,

> "The signing on 5 December of the Agreement on Afghanistan's future is a significant achievement. It is a victory for the coalition against terrorism. A stable Afghanistan, with a broad-based government, is as important to our own security as it is to the Afghan people."

The new interim administration has already indicated its willingness to co-operate with the UK on information-sharing on alleged terrorists.

36. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the President of Pakistan on the future Government of Afghanistan. [23031]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** During his visit to Pakistan on 22–23 November, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the situation in Afghanistan with President Musharraf. The Secretary of State expressed our continuing appreciation for President Musharraf's courageous decision to support the fight against terrorism and the practical assistance that Pakistan has provided. The Secretary of State also discussed the situation in Pakistan and sought President Musharraf's advice on how

best to achieve our shared objective of a broad-based multi-ethnic Government in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister also met President Musharraf on his visit to Pakistan on 7 January and paid tribute to President Musharraf's role in the international coalition.

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the level of the cultivation of heroin poppy crops in Afghanistan in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04; and what the level was in 2001–02. [24390]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** It is impossible to predict what level of opium cultivation there will be in Afghanistan in 2002–03 and 2003–04. We hope the economic reconstruction programme will develop alternative livelihoods for opium poppy farmers. Under the agreement reached in Bonn the Interim Administration would co-operate with the international community in the fight against drugs. We now look to the Interim Administration to live up to this commitment with the help of the international community.

The planting season for the 2001–02 opium poppy crop is now drawing to a close. No reliable estimate of the level of cultivation will be available until February 2002 when UNDCP propose to conduct a limited survey. The results of the comprehensive UNDCP survey will not be available until September 2002.

### EU Enlargement (Poland)

15. **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Polish Government on EU enlargement. [23009]

**Peter Hain:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Warsaw in October for talks with Foreign Minister Cimoszewicz. They discussed the importance of Poland making early progress in the negotiations in order to make the first wave of accession in 2004.

### Drug Trafficking

16. **Ann Keen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further measures he proposes to clamp down on international drug trafficking. [23010]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We will continue to work closely with the Governments and law enforcement agencies of the key countries on the main trafficking routes for illegal drugs to the UK. The heroin trade from Afghanistan remains a particular concern. We welcome the recent agreement in Bonn that the Interim Authority shall co-operate with the international community in the fight against terrorism, drugs and organised crime, and look forward to playing a key role in this process.

### Cuba

17. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Cuba; and if he will make a statement on the UK's relations with Cuba. [23011]

**Mr. MacShane:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no present plans to visit Cuba, but looks forward to further developing the good relationship following his successful meeting with the Cuban Foreign Minister in the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York in November 2001.

### Laeken Summit

19. **Ms Stuart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the conclusion of the Laeken Conference, with specific reference to the creation of a convention to discuss the future constitutional arrangement of the EU. [23013]

**Peter Hain:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David), on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 407–08.

### Anti-terrorism Campaign (Russia)

20. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of Russia in the campaign against terrorism. [23014]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Russia is an important partner in the international coalition against terrorism, as was demonstrated by the announcement of the UK/Russian Joint Working Group on International Terrorism on 21 December during President Putin's visit. This underlined our shared commitment to fighting terrorism by diplomatic, military and economic means.

### Lusaka Peace Process

21. **Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made with the Lusaka peace process in the Great Lakes region. [23015]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** A key element of the peace process, the Inter Congolese Dialogue, is due to start in South Africa at the end of this month. Foreign troops are being withdrawn and there has been some progress in the disarmament and demobilisation of rebels operating in the DRC. We hope that the Foreign Secretary's visit to the region with his French counterpart later this month will help push forward the process still further.

### Kazakhstan

23. **John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's relations with Kazakhstan. [23017]

**Peter Hain:** Our relations with Kazakhstan are excellent. We are developing bilateral co-operation over a wide area including the political, commercial, defence, cultural and educational fields.

### West Bank/Gaza

24. **Mr. Soames:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the Government of Israel and *(b)* the Palestinian Authority concerning population settlements in (i) the West Bank and (ii) Gaza. [23018]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Our view on Israeli settlement activity is clear, and has often been expressed to both the Israel Government and the Palestinian Authority. Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories are illegal, and an obstacle to peace.

### EU Enlargement

25. **Mr. Luke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role Britain is playing in helping to prepare those countries applying for accession to the EU. [23019]

**Peter Hain:** Since 1989, the UK has provided £350 million through the Know-How Fund to help the candidates prepare for accession. We have "Action Plans" with 11 of the 13 candidates, and will launch another soon. The plans bring together the UK's practical assistance to the candidates across a range of activities involving all Whitehall Departments.

Under the Commission's "Twinning" programme, over 40 British civil servants are seconded as long-term pre-accession advisers to Ministries in the candidate countries. Since 1998, the UK has won involvement in over 90 twinning projects—the third highest number of any member state—targeted on each candidate's priority areas for EU accession.

28. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards EU enlargement. [23022]

**Peter Hain:** The enlargement negotiations have made good progress under the Belgian presidency, in line with the roadmap (timetable) for negotiations agreed at Nice. The Laeken European Council (14–15 December) confirmed its objective to complete accession negotiations by the end of 2002 with those candidates that are ready, so they can participate in the 2004 European Parliament elections as members.

### Yemen

26. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent consultations he has had with the Government of Yemen about the international coalition against terrorism. [23020]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We are in regular contact with our many international partners in the coalition against terrorism. I met the Yemeni President's envoy, Dr. Iriyani, when he visited London in October 2001. We discussed the international coalition against terrorism and the Yemeni Government's views towards terrorism.

The Government of Yemen have Her Majesty's Government's support in their efforts to combat terrorism.

### Kyoto Protocol

27. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent discussions he has had with the United States on the ratification of the Kyoto protocol. [23021]

**Peter Hain:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has concentrated on the war against terrorism in his recent discussions with the US. Other senior members of this Government have continued to raise the importance of the Kyoto protocol at every appropriate opportunity. My right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have both recently visited the US, where they met senior US politicians. They emphasised the UK's commitment to ratifying Kyoto and encouraged the US to take domestic action to tackle climate change in the short term and to re-engage with the international process in the longer term.

### Middle East Peace Process

29. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on developments in the middle east peace process. [23023]

35. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in the middle east. [23030]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I refer my hon. Friends to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 397–98.

31. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the US Administration about their role in securing peace in the middle east. [R] [23025]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We have regular discussions with both the US and our EU partners on the subject of the middle east peace process. We stand ready to do all we can to help both parties return to negotiations, and particularly welcome the role of the US envoy to the region, General Zinni.

### EU Enlargement (Turkey)

30. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had regarding Turkey's candidacy for membership of the EU. [23024]

**Peter Hain:** During his visit to Turkey on 17–18 October where he met President Sezer, Prime Minister Ecevit and Foreign Minister Cem, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary welcomed Turkey's recent constitutional changes as progress towards meeting the Copenhagen criteria, and encouraged the Turkish Government to continue their efforts to reform. As the Laeken European Council of 14–15 December noted, this progress has brought forward the prospect of opening accession negotiations with Turkey.

### Colombia

32. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received on human rights in Colombia. [23026]

**Mr. MacShane:** We continue to receive numerous representations from Members of Parliament, leading UK non-governmental organisations such as ABColombia, CAFOD and Peace Brigades International, and members of the public about human rights in Colombia. Several UK trade unions have recently expressed their concerns. I met a number of peace activists and human rights NGOs

during my visit to Colombia in October 2001. We continue to make representations to the Colombian Government about human rights. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office co-sponsored a Forum on Human Rights in Colombia in London on 31 October 2001.

### Zimbabwe

33. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last had discussions with the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth about the situation in Zimbabwe. [23027]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The latest discussion on Zimbabwe with the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth took place at the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) meeting held on 20 December.

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK citizens will assist in ensuring that the Zimbabwe 2002 Presidential elections are free and fair. [23883]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We have not yet received an invitation from the Government of Zimbabwe to send observers to this year's Presidential election. It is therefore too early to say how many UK nationals may or may not be deployed as election observers.

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Libyan involvement in Zimbabwe. [24926]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Relations between Libya and Zimbabwe are a matter for those two countries. We have seen no evidence to support recent speculatory press articles on Libya's involvement in Zimbabwe.

**Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with Southern African Governments about the situation in Zimbabwe. [23006]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We are in regular dialogue with Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries about the situation in Zimbabwe.

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Abuja Agreement following recent events in Zimbabwe. [24940]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** At Abuja, Zimbabwe agreed that its land reform programme should be fair, just and sustainable and in the interest of all the people of Zimbabwe. It also committed itself to restore the rule of law to land reform and to respect the Harare Commonwealth Declaration. The Government of Zimbabwe's actions over the past few months show their scant regard for these commitments. They have seriously undermined the Abuja agreement.

### Cyprus

34. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Governments of Turkey and Greece regarding the future of Cyprus. [23028]

**Peter Hain:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discusses Cyprus regularly with Turkish Foreign Minister Cem. He visited Ankara 17–18 October and met Foreign Minister Cem at UN General Assembly on 12 November. The Foreign Secretary's last formal bilateral with Greek Foreign Minister Papandréou was on 4 October, at which Cyprus was discussed, but they also have discussions regularly in the margins of EU and other international meetings.

### Angola

37. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the situation in Angola. [23032]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We continue to be concerned by the human consequences of the civil war in Angola, which include widespread suffering, internal displacement and the violation of human rights.

We urge dialogue, involving all parties to the conflict, as an essential first step towards addressing these problems. We welcome the growing contribution of the churches and civil society to finding a sustainable solution.

### Terrorist Networks

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on diplomatic action he has taken to eliminate terrorist networks in countries other than Afghanistan. [23016]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Diplomatic action to eliminate terrorist networks is one of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's priorities. We regularly raise counter-terrorism issues with a wide range of Governments and in many international organisations and have an active programme of international co-operation in this area. This activity has increased significantly since 11 September. We consistently call for an end to state sponsorship and for firm action to root out terrorist networks on the part of Governments which unwillingly host terrorists.

### Arms Embargoes

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries are subject to *(a)* an EU arms embargo and *(b)* a UN arms embargo. [23685]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Countries subject to a United Nations arms embargo are Afghanistan (territory under Taliban control), Angola (UNITA), Iraq, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone (non-Government forces) and Somalia. There are also restrictions in place on Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania and Uganda where arms and related material are intended for use in Rwanda.

Countries that are not subject to a UN arms embargo that are subject to European Union restrictions are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burma, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya and Sudan.

A full account of the sanctions operated by the United Kingdom, including the United Nations and European Union measures, can be found on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website at http://files.fco.gov.uk/und/sanctions/list.pdf.

### Egypt

**Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Egypt. [23776]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We have a strong relationship with the Government of Egypt: interests in the region are often parallel and Egypt has, in particular, played an important role in the Middle East Peace Process. UK/Egypt trade relations are also very strong and continue to grow. We have concerns about individual cases of human rights abuse in Egypt. We shall continue to encourage the Egyptian authorities, both bilaterally and through the EU, to work towards improving their human rights record.

### Capital Assets

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 889W, on capital assets, if he will place in the Library information on the accounting treatment of the public private partnership projects relating to *(a)* the Berlin Embassy, *(b)* the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telecommunications Network, *(c)* GCHQ Building, *(d)* car leasing and *(e)* IT Registry (Minerva); and if he will make a statement. [24257]

**Mr. MacShane:** The accounting treatment of all public private partnership projects within the Department is in line with relevant generally accepted accounting practice, in particular FRS5 and also with specific HM Treasury guidance.

The GCHQ building is not funded by the FCO, all other projects listed are treated as operating leases and are, therefore, not included in the Department's balance sheet.

### Gibraltar

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Government will be responsible for *(a)* overseeing and *(b)* drafting the terms of a referendum of the people of Gibraltar on a change in sovereignty. [R] [24511]

**Peter Hain:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 853W.

Since any change to the Gibraltar constitution could trigger primary legislation in the UK, Her Majesty's Government would, in consultation with the Government of Gibraltar, expect to oversee the organisation and timing of any referendum of the people of Gibraltar on a change in sovereignty, and to propose and endorse the terms of any such referendum.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent developments in the sovereignty of Gibraltar. [23005]

**Peter Hain:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 187W.

**Dr. Stoate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent briefings have taken place with the *Financial Times* over the future of Gibraltar. [24978]

**Peter Hain:** There have been no recent briefings with the *Financial Times* over the future of Gibraltar.

**Dr. Stoate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place about using the model for Andorra as a model for joint sovereignty of Gibraltar. [24977]

**Peter Hain:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 187W. A copy of the joint press communiqué issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs when they met under the Brussels Process in Barcelona on 20 November has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The Ministers discussed the full range of issues set out in the November 1984 Brussels Communiqué. Their discussions did not include the Andorra model.

### Forced Labour

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Governments of *(a)* Bangladesh, *(b)* India and *(c)* Pakistan regarding forced labour in their countries. [24271]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We continue to raise human rights concerns, including bonded and forced labour, with the Bangladesh, Pakistan and Indian authorities. We remind the authorities of the need to uphold the basic rights of all people, particularly the poor and disadvantaged who are most vulnerable to forced/bonded labour. We welcome the three countries' ratification of International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions which encourage equal pay among men and women. We also welcome Bangladesh's and Pakistan's ratification of ILO conventions that protect the labour rights of children.

### President Mugabe

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to his Spanish counterpart over President Mugabe's recent medical treatment in that country. [24927]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** None.

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received on the meetings between President Mugabe and the Spanish Government during the President's recent trip to Spain. [24925]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Spanish Government have told us that there were no meetings between the Spanish Government and President Mugabe during his recent trip to Spain.

### Iraq

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the suspected activities at the Salman Pak training camp in Iraq. [24941]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Salman Pak "camp" is a group of facilities close to Baghdad. We are aware of press reports that claim Salman Pak is used as a terrorist training camp. We take these reports seriously, however, there is currently no direct evidence linking al-Qaeda to Salman Pak.

### Sierra Leone

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Sierra Leone and the progress of the British military mission. [24972]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Government's strategy towards Sierra Leone was set out in the Foreign Secretary's statement to the House on 6 June 2000. The effectiveness of that strategy has been demonstrated by the progress we have made towards peace and stability in Sierra Leone.

Since the beginning of 2001, over 40,000 former combatants have disarmed. They are now being reintegrated into society. A new, more effective and accountable Sierra Leone army, trained by UK forces, is deploying with civil administrators throughout the country. This has signalled the visible restoration of Government authority. Supported by the international community, the Government of Sierra Leone are preparing to hold elections in May 2002.

The situation in Sierra Leone will, however, continue to be fragile, at least until ordinary Sierra Leoneans are able to enjoy the benefits of peace. The Government of Sierra Leone need rapidly to mobilise substantial additional resources to rehabilitate the country's devastated communities, institutions and economy. As Sierra Leone's largest bilateral donor, the UK will continue to help the Government of Sierra Leone through a wide-ranging programme of assistance.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence indicated in a written statement to the House on 18 December, our military training and assistance programme continues to make good progress towards its goal of developing professional, accountable and effective Sierra Leone armed forces, better able to protect the security and integrity of Sierra Leone. The people of Sierra Leone are increasingly confident of the new Sierra Leone armed forces. We will, through the International Military Advisory and Training Team, continue to work to raise the standard and develop the capacity of the Sierra Leone armed forces.

## DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

### Non-departmental Public Bodies

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many NDPBs there were in the United Kingdom in 2001; and how many *(a)* paid and *(b)* unpaid quango appointees there were. [25118]

**Mr. Leslie:** Information on advisory and executive non-departmental public bodies, tribunals and other public bodies is published in the annual Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies". This includes the location of the bodies concerned, their terms of reference, expenditure, appointments and remuneration. The next edition of Public Bodies will be published shortly, and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House in the usual way.

### Civil Service Management Code

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Minister has responsibility for the Civil Service Management Code. [25011]

**Mr. Leslie:** The Civil Service Management Code is issued under the authority of the Civil Service Order in Council 1995 under which the Minister for the Civil Service has the power to make regulations and give instructions for the management of the Home Civil Service. This includes the power to prescribe the conditions of service of civil servants. The Prime Minister, as Minister for the Civil Service, delegates this power through Lord MacDonald of Tradeston to me.

### Inter-Ministerial Group on Ageing

**Ms Atherton:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many times the Inter-Ministerial Group on Ageing has met in this Session of Parliament. [23099]

**Mr. McCartney:** I have been asked to reply.

Under paragraph 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, information about Cabinet Committee business is not released.

## TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

### Departmental Consultants

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 390W, on consultants, if he will list for each of the consultants and advisers named *(a)* the length of their contract including start and finish dates, *(b)* whether they were appointed after open competition, *(c)* the job specification for their contract, *(d)* the cost to his Department of their contract, *(e)* other contracts which they have with his Department and *(f)* other contracts held with other Government Departments. [19781]

**Mr. Byers:** For *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)*, the information requested is as follows:

*AEA Technology Rail*

This contract, which related to rail passenger demand profiles and lasted for one month in July 2001, was let by the Association of Train Operating Companies.

*Allen and Overy*

*(a)* Four years three months from January 1998 to March 2002

*(b)* No

*(c)* Advice on the Channel Tunnel Concession Agreement

*AON*

This contract, which relates to insurance advice on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, was let by Schroder Salomon Smith Barney.

*Arthur Andersen*
*(a)* On-going from September 2001

*(b)* No

*(c)* Accountancy advice on matters relating to Railtrack

*Booz Allen and Hamilton*
This contract, which related to Eurostar passenger and revenue forecasts and lasted for 15 months from February 2000 to May 2001, was let by Mott Parsons Gibb.

*Clifford Chance*
*(a)* Two years from October 1999 to October 2001

*(b)* Yes

*(c)* Legal advice on the Transport Bill

*CMS Cameron McKenna*
*(a)* On-going from May 1996

*(b)* Yes

*(c)* Legal advice on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, extended to advice on matters relating to Railtrack in August 2001

*Deloitte and Touche*
This contract, which concerns accountancy advice on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, was let by Schroder Salomon Smith Barney.

*Ernst and Young*
*(a)* Six weeks from August to October 2001

*(b)* No

*(c)* Accountancy advice on matters relating to Railtrack and (as a contingency in the event of the Secretary of State refusing Railtrack plc's request for additional funding and of a railway administration order being made) on administration matters generally.

*Eversheds*
*(a)* Call-off contract on-going from October 1999

*(b)* Yes

*(c)* Advice on rail pension issues

*KPMG*
*(a)* On-going from June 1992

*(b)* Yes

*(c)* Accountancy and taxation advice on the implementation of rail privatisation; currently advising on post-privatisation, residual taxation matters

*MDS Transmodal*
*(a)* Six weeks from August to September 2001

*(b)* No

*(c)* Multi-modal freight forecasts

*Mercers Management Consulting*
*(a)* On-going from August 2001

*(b)* No

*(c)* Management consultancy advice on matters relating to Railtrack

*Mott Parsons Gibb*
*(a)* On-going from May 1996

*(b)* Yes

*(c)* Project representatives for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link

*NERA*
This contract, which concerns economic advice, was let by Mercers Management Consulting.

*Oscar Faber*
*(a)* On-going from April 2001

*(b)* Yes

*(c)* Development of a national rail model

*Peter Davidson Consultancy*
*(a)* On-going from July 2001

*(b)* No

*(c)* Updating of 1997 rail ticket sales data profiles

*PricewaterhouseCoopers*
This contract, which concerned a Freightliner grant application, finished in August 2000.

*Saunders and Dolleymore*
*(a)* Six years from April 1997 to March 2003

*(b)* Yes

*(c)* Trade mark services in connection with the "double arrows" logo

*Saxton Bampfylde Hever*
*(a)* Call-off contract; advice from June to October 2001

*(b)* Yes

*(c)* Advice on senior recruitment

*Schroder Salomon Smith Barney*
*(a)* On-going from June 1996

*(b)* Yes

*(c)* Financial advice on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link

*Schroder Salomon Smith Barney*
*(a)* On-going from August 2001

*(b)* No

*(c)* Financial advice on matters relating to Railtrack

*SEMA Group UK*
*(a)* On-going from July 2001

*(b)* No

*(c)* Provision of an extract of 2000 rail ticket sales data

*United Kingdom Accreditation Service*
*(a)* One year from November 2001 to October 2002

*(b)* No

*(c)* Development of an assessment regime for applicants for appointment as notified bodies for the High Speed Rail Interoperability Directive (Council Directive 96/48/EC).

For individual consultants and advisers, the information requested under *(d)* is commercially confidential but, for all of them together, just over £10 million has been spent in the last twelve months.

Information on *(e)* and *(f)* is not recorded centrally.

## London Underground

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant

to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 35W, on London Underground, what action has been taken against Westinghouse Rail Systems in response to the number of signal failures in the three years since that company introduced the new signalling system. [22753]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is a matter for London Underground who are wholly responsible for the management of contracts with their suppliers.

### Ferry Services

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the restoration of regular ferry services between Newhaven and Dieppe; and if he will make a statement. [22684]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The ferry service has been restored. The vessel concerned was withdrawn from service while serious safety deficiencies identified by the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency and its French counterpart were rectified. The safety of passengers is my paramount concern.

### Congestion Charging

**Mr. Mark Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whom he has met to discuss the implementation of the Mayor of London's proposed congestion charging scheme; and what was discussed at these meetings. [23139]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Ministers meet a variety of people to discuss a variety of issues including congestion charging. Any congestion charging scheme in London is a matter for the Mayor. The Government's involvement is with respect to exemptions policy and value for money in the use of the net proceeds.

**Mr. Mark Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many representations he has received on the Mayor of London's proposed congestion charging scheme. [23140]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Between May 2000 and 18 December 2001 we had received about 70 letters. However, the proposed congestion charging scheme for central London is a matter for the Mayor.

**Mr. Mark Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* responsibilities and *(b)* powers he has with respect to the implementation of a congestion charging scheme in London; and if he will make a statement. [24377]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Government's powers in relation to congestion charging in London extend to ensuring that the net revenues from any scheme are spent on value for money transport measures and to national exemptions policy.

I understand that the consultation period on the scheme does not close until the middle of January 2002 and that the Mayor is aiming to announce his decision in mid February. The Government will consider the final version of the spending plan once Transport for London has finished the consultation process.

Regarding exemptions policy, we have already announced that there will be England-wide exemptions from both road user charging and the workplace parking levy for ambulances and for police and fire emergency vehicles, and for at least some disabled people; and some form of England-wide exemption or concession from the workplace parking levy for NHS hospitals. We have no plans at present for any further England-wide concessions or exemptions.

It will be open to local authorities, including the Mayor in London, to grant additional concessions or exemptions in their schemes, if they judge it appropriate to do so.

### Staff Parking

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff parking places are provided in central London by his Department. [23137]

**Dr. Whitehead:** 49, across our six buildings in central London. It is our policy however to allow staff parking only for those with disabilities affecting their mobility, or for medical or exceptional operational requirements.

### Staff Numbers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people were employed in his Department in each of the last four years. [23795]

**Dr. Whitehead:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 256W.

### Local Government Finance (Devon)

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the value was of the Government's local government financial settlement for the *(a)* East Devon district council and *(b)* Devon county council in each year from 1978–79 to 2001–02; and what the percentage increase was on the previous year. [23753]

**Dr. Whitehead:** Information on allocations to individual authorities in years before 1990 is no longer held centrally. The table gives figures for Standard Spending Assessments (SSA) for the two authorities from 1990–91 to 2001–02, and the percentage increase in each year after adjusting for changes in function or funding responsibilities. Local government restructuring applied to Devon from 1998–99 so it is not possible to calculate a meaningful increase for the county in that year.

| *Year* | *SSA (£ million)* | *Percentage increase* |
|---|---|---|
| *Devon CC* | | |
| 1990–91 | 486.1 | — |
| 1991–92 | 573.4 | 17.9 |
| 1992–93 | 613.9 | 7.1 |
| 1993–94 | 590.8 | 3.8 |
| 1994–95 | 614.0 | 1.0 |
| 1995–96 | 592.0 | 1.7 |
| 1996–97 | 627.9 | 3.7 |
| 1997–98 | 646.3 | 2.4 |
| 1998–99 | 424.0 | — |

| Year | SSA (£ million) | Percentage increase |
|---|---|---|
| 1999–2000 | 448.2 | 3.2 |
| 2000–01 | 470.7 | 5.7 |
| 2001–02 | 493.0 | 5.0 |
| *East Devon DC* | | |
| 1990–91 | 6.9 | — |
| 1991–92 | 8.8 | 28.5 |
| 1992–93 | 9.4 | 6.5 |
| 1993–94 | 9.8 | 4.1 |
| 1994–95 | 10.6 | 8.2 |
| 1995–96 | 10.7 | 0.6 |
| 1996–97 | 10.5 | −1.3 |
| 1997–98 | 10.3 | −1.9 |
| 1998–99 | 10.2 | −1.0 |
| 1999–2000 | 10.7 | 4.3 |
| 2000–01 | 11.0 | 2.9 |
| 2001–02 | 11.6 | 5.0 |

## Objective 1 Funding

**Ms Atherton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of European funding available to *(a)* Cornwall, *(b)* South Yorkshire, *(c)* Merseyside and *(d)* West Wales and the Valleys under the Objective 1 Programme has been committed to projects in the respective areas. [24157]

**Ms Keeble:** The table gives the information requested for the three Objective 1 areas in England as at the 20 December 2001. The implementation of the Objective 1 programme in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly but I understand that as at the end of November, 23 per cent. of the funds available to the programme had been committed.

| | Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly | South Yorkshire | Merseyside |
|---|---|---|---|
| Commitments so far as a proportion of total allocation[1] | 20.9 | 24.2 | 15.9 |
| Value of grant committed so far[2] | 64.6 | 172.2 | 134.1 |

[1] Percentage
[2] £ million

## SRB Funding (Cornwall)

**Ms Atherton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much funding from the Single Regeneration Budget was granted to projects in Cornwall between 1997 and 2001. [24159]

**Ms Keeble:** The total grant from the Single Regeneration Budget between financial years 1996–97 and 2000–01 was £8,999,461.

**Ms Atherton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much funding from the Single Regeneration Budget was granted to projects in Cornwall between 1994 and 1997. [24160]

**Ms Keeble:** The total grant in financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97 was £1,271,805. The programme was then known as the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund and expenditure commenced in 1995–96.

## Motorcycles

**Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress towards better integration of motorcycles into overall transport planning. [24161]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Government recognise that motorcycles have a part to play in a national transport strategy. My Department is actively seeking to include them in all relevant transport planning and policy documents.

The Government's White Paper on the Future of Transport, "A New Deal for Transport: Better For Everyone", recognised that mopeds and motorcycles can provide an alternative means of transport for many trips. It acknowledged that where public transport is limited and walking unrealistic, motorcycling can provide an affordable alternative to the car, bring benefits to the individual and widen their employment opportunities.

Our Guidance on Full Local Transport Plans built on this. It stated that local authorities should take account of the contribution powered two wheelers can make in delivering integrated transport policies and should consider specific measures to assist motorcyclists in making integrated journeys. Indeed, it advised that all relevant aspects of LTPs—including road safety, planning and social policies—should take account of the needs of motorcyclists.

The Government's 10-Year Plan for transport highlighted advantages of motorcycles over cars and the Government's Planning Policy Guidance, which concerns planning as applied to land use and transport, also includes references to motorcycling. It recognises a role for motorcycles as an alternative to the car, particularly where public transport is limited and walking unrealistic, and advises local authorities to consider such measures as appropriate motorcycle parking and the inclusion of motorcycles in park and ride schemes.

**Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what progress he has made towards reducing the number of people killed and seriously injured in road accidents involving cars and motorcyclists over the past 12 months; [24162]

(2) what measures he is taking to ensure that local authorities introduce motorcycle safety programmes and car driver targeted motorcycle awareness campaigns in local authority areas. [24164]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The number of motorcyclists killed and seriously injured in accidents with cars rose from 4,195 in 1999 to 4,508 in 2000. We are seeking to address this at a local and national level. The Local Transport Plan process requires local authorities to produce a local road safety strategy. This should set out how authorities plan to tackle road traffic casualties in their area, including the current road accident casualty problem. Measures to be pursued will be for the local authority to determine in the light of local circumstances. The local safety strategy should also outline what education, training and publicity work will be undertaken by the authority.

At a national level our Road Safety Strategy includes a number of measures to improve motorcycle safety. We have already replaced the one-year ban for learners who do not pass the motorcycle test within two years with a further training requirement. We have introduced a training requirement for newly qualified drivers wishing to ride a moped and ended the exemption from the motorcycle theory test for those holding a full car licence. The theory test for drivers also now includes more questions about motorcyclists. We have also co-operated with industry in the production of codes of practice for motorcycle couriers and fast food delivery riders.

Other measures we are pursuing include issuing advice to car drivers and motorcyclists about the vulnerability of motorcyclists, improving training for all riders, establishing a register of accredited motorcycle instructors, and engineering and technical measures which may protect motorcyclists better.

**Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to publish guidance for local authorities about the installation of secure parking facilities for motorcycles in towns and cities. [24163]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Department is preparing a Traffic Advisory Leaflet setting out advice to local authorities and others on providing high quality, secure and accessible parking for motorcycles. This is planned for publication by Easter.

### Vehicle Lights

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many vehicles in the UK are fitted with daytime running lights; and what percentage this represents of the total vehicle fleet. [24292]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Such details are not held by central Government.

On the basis that only certain vehicle manufacturers have consistently fitted such lamps as a production feature, a motor industry estimate is that some 970,000 passenger cars fitted with daytime running lamps are currently registered in Great Britain. This represents approximately 3.5 per cent. of all passenger cars registered.

These figures do not include Northern Ireland where there are an estimated 10,500 such passenger cars currently registered. Northern Ireland statistics do not provide sufficient information to express this as a percentage of the total passenger cars registered.

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he had made of the impact on fuel consumption of the introduction of mandatory daytime running lights on all vehicles. [24295]

**Mr. Jamieson:** European Commission estimates suggest that mandatory use of daytime running lights could increase fuel consumption and $CO_2$ emissions by 0.21 per cent. to 1.38 per cent.

No separate UK assessment has been made.

### Bull Bars

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people have *(a)* died and *(b)* suffered injuries through accidents associated with vehicles fitted with bull bars in each year since 1995. [24288]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Figures for accidents associated with vehicles fitted with bull bars are not recorded separately. The Transport Research Laboratory carried out a special study of a sample of police reports of accidents involving bull bars and estimated that in 1994 there were around two additional deaths in Great Britain due to bull bars. However, TRL did not find any single case in the sample where a bull bar had definitely caused a death.

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many vehicles in the UK are fitted with bull bars; and what percentage this represents of the entire vehicle fleet. [24289]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The number of vehicles fitted with bull bars is not officially recorded. In 1997 we estimated that there were around 620,000 vehicles fitted with bull bars in Great Britain. This would have equated to 2.3 per cent. of total licensed vehicles.

### Pedestrian Safety

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many representations the Government have received on its consultation document on pedestrian safety; and if he will make a statement. [24278]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There were a total of 42 formal responses to our consultation exercise on pedestrian protection. A list of those who responded, together with a summary of the responses, has been placed in the Library. The full responses can be viewed, by prior appointment, at the DTLR Library, Ashdown House, 123 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6DE (telephone 020 7944 6107).

### Transport Projects (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much funding has been awarded to projects affecting the Buckingham constituency from the *(a)* Rural Transport Partnership, *(b)* Parish Transport Grant scheme, *(c)* Rural Bus Challenge Fund, *(d)* Rural Transport Development Fund, *(e)* Rural Bus Subsidy Grant and *(f)* Urban Bus Challenge fund in each year since their inception; and what the nature of the project and level of funding was in each case. [24844]

**Ms Keeble:** Of the funds mentioned, *(b)* the Parish Transport Fund and *(f)* the Urban Bus Challenge were launched in 2001 by the Countryside Agency and DTLR respectively. No funds have been awarded in Buckinghamshire by the Parish Transport Fund, and Buckinghamshire county council did not submit a bid for Urban Bus Challenge.

Details of awards within the county of Buckinghamshire for the other grants or funds mentioned are set out in the tables. Records are not kept of awards by individual parliamentary constituencies.

| Year | Amount (£) | Purpose |
|---|---|---|
| *(a) Rural Transport Partnership*[1] | | |
| 2000–01 | 31,448 | Establishment of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Rural Transport Partnership |
| 2001–02 | 27,562 | Support for the RTP for 2001–02 |
| | 25,990 | Dial-a-ride services |
| | 12,034 | Car sharing schemes |
| | 3,376 | Internet based alternative transport guide for socially excluded groups |
| | 10,000 | Delegated fund to support small-scale projects |
| *(c) Rural Bus Challenge*[2] | | |
| 1998–99 | 985,000 | County wide project to provide wheelchair accessible buses to operate new and enhanced services for the mobility impaired, school transport for children with disabilities and the general public, including dial-a-ride on Saturdays |
| 1999–2000 | 100,500 | Community minibus service for Winslow area |
| 2000–01 | 0 | No award to Buckinghamshire in 2000 |
| *(d) Rural Transport Development Fund* | | |
| 1999–2000 | 7,136 | Support for a community transport officer in Buckinghamshire |
| 2000–01 | 2,356 | Support for dial-a-ride services |

[1] The Rural Transport Development Fund was merged with the Rural Transport Partnership fund in April 2001
[2] The results of the 2001–02 Rural Bus Challenge will be announced shortly.

| | Amount (£) |
|---|---|
| *(e) Rural Bus Subsidy Grant*[1] | |
| 1998–99 | 561,112 |
| 1999–2000 | 561,112 |
| 2000–01 | 561,112 |
| 2001–02 | 716,497 |
| 2002–03 | 820,087 |

[1] RBSG is primarily for the support of new or enhanced rural bus services. In 2000–01 Buckinghamshire provided 28 services with the aid of the grant.

## Homelessness

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many night shelter beds were available in *(a)* London and *(b)* cities outside London in each of the last 10 years. [25013]

**Ms Keeble:** To date information on the number of hostel bedspaces in London and nationally has not been collated centrally. However, the DTLR has committed that the new Homelessness Directorate will collate information on hostel bedspaces.

Between 1999 and 2002, the Government's Rough Sleepers Unit provided over 1,000 additional hostel spaces in London specifically for rough sleepers.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what dates the Inter-Ministerial Group on Older People has discussed homelessness in the past 12 months. [24189]

**Ms Keeble** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* Under Exemption 2 of Part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, details of Cabinet Committee business is not released.

## Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, "Winning the Generation Game", *(a)* what progress his Department has made and *(b)* what future plans his Department has for acting on them; and if he will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24198]

**Ms Keeble** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 335W, by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office.

## Firemen (Attacks)

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many attacks there have been on firemen in the course of their duties in each year since 1997 in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the North East and *(c)* South Tyneside; and what plans he has to address this issue. [24411]

**Dr. Whitehead:** Statistics on attacks on firefighters in the course of their duties are not held centrally. The cost of obtaining them would be disproportionate. Attacks are rare and there are procedures in place to protect firefighters when they are carrying out their duties. We do not have any plans to change existing arrangements.

## Terminal 5

**Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many letters he has had from residents of the Battersea constituency about *(a)* Heathrow Terminal 5 and *(b)* nightflights. [24409]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This information is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

## Light Pollution

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement of his policy on light pollution and its control by the planning system. [24457]

**Ms Keeble:** Light pollution from development can be a material consideration in planning decisions. In recognition of this, the former Department of the

Environment published in 1997 "Lighting in the countryside: towards good practice". This guide was based on comprehensive research including a desk study of existing policies, controls, procedures, standards and advice, consultations and structured interviews with planning and highway authorities and a wide range of other interested parties. It provides a valuable reference source and tool for preventing and alleviating the adverse effects of poorly designed and installed lighting schemes on the English countryside. The good practice it sets out can, where appropriate, be material to individual planning decisions by local authorities, inspectors and the Secretary of State.

### Coalfields Regeneration Trust

**Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reasons and with what aims his Department decided to establish the Coalfields Regeneration Trust to support the regeneration of former coalfields areas. [24150]

**Ms Keeble** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The Coalfields Regeneration Trust is an independent, UK-wide, grant-making body launched in 1999 as part of the Government's response to the 1998 Coalfields Task Force report. The Task Force concluded that the problems of the coalfields were unique, due to a combination of factors that included concentrated joblessness, physical isolation, poor infrastructure and severe health problems. These factors, coupled with the speed of the collapse of the coal mining industry, meant that special measures were needed to bring about the physical, social, economic and environmental regeneration of these areas.

The Trust's remit is to support the range of community initiatives identified by the Task Force as being key to rebuilding healthy and prosperous communities. It also sponsors projects targeted on workers displaced from mining-related industries, who have been unemployed for a long time and who face particular disadvantages at getting back to work. In addition it has an important role to play in community capacity building, providing a forum for good regeneration practice to be exchanged across the coalfield communities.

### Disability Vehicle Stickers

**Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many local authorities provide a disability vehicle sticker for people with temporary disabilities; and what plans he has to encourage more authorities to provide such a service. [24739]

**Ms Keeble:** The Blue Badge scheme of parking concessions for disabled people is available only for people whose disability is long-term and substantial. Badges can be issued only for a minimum period of three years. Any stickers which local authorities issue for people with temporary disabilities are therefore outside the statutory scheme and no statistical records of their issue are kept by this Department. Extending the Blue Badge scheme to people with temporary disabilities is one of a number of possibilities currently being considered as part of a review of the scheme which the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) is co-ordinating on behalf of the Government.

### Vehicle Excise Duty

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many motorists bought a VED licence in the year starting July 2000 with a single payment. [24414]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The total number of annual licences taken out in the UK in July 2000 was some 1.8 million. Of this total, some 1.5 million were vehicles licensed in the Private Light Goods tax class (mainly private cars and light vans).

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations his Department has made to the Chancellor on rebates for vehicle excise duty under the Finance Act 2001. [24283]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The normal consultations took place prior to the Budget.

### Fatality Statistics

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people in the age groups *(a)* 0 to seven, *(b)* eight to 13 and *(c)* 14 to 18 years died as a result of fires in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [24560]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The table shows the number of children who have died in fires attended by local authority fire brigades in the United Kingdom from 1996 to 2000 in the following age groups: 0–7, 8–13 and 14–18.

| | *Age* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *0–7* | *8–13* | *14–18* |
| 1996 | 54 | 15 | 21 |
| 1997 | 49 | 10 | 28 |
| 1998 | 55 | 19 | 12 |
| 1999 | 36 | 7 | 10 |
| 2000[1] | 28 | 8 | 23 |

[1] 2000 data are estimated, and are subject to revision as later information from inquests and death certificates confirming cause of death is received

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people in the age groups *(a)* 0 to 7, *(b)* 8 to 13 and *(c)* 14 to 18 years died as a result of road crashes in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [24559]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The table shows the number of young people killed in road accidents.

*Fatalities in road accidents: Great Britain*

| | *Accident year* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Age of casualty* | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* |
| 0 to 7 | 78 | 71 | 70 | 68 | 59 |
| 8 to 13 | 101 | 125 | 91 | 97 | 83 |
| 14 to 18 | 405 | 354 | 286 | 310 | 298 |

### Council Housing

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what

changes he proposes in the borrowing arrangements for English local authorities to enable the construction of new council housing; and if he will make a statement. [25233]

**Ms Keeble:** The current arrangement whereby central Government approval is required for borrowing will be replaced, for local authorities in England, by a system where authorities are free to determine the amount of borrowing they undertake, subject to having the necessary resources to meet the costs of the borrowing. The change requires primary legislation and we are aiming to implement the new system by April 2004, or earlier if possible.

It is a matter for local authorities to decide how these and other capital resources are used, based on the needs of the area. However, we expect the provision of new social housing to be provided through Registered Social Landlords rather than by the council itself as this provides a greater number of units from the available resources and increases choice and competition between social sector landlords.

### Council Tenants

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council tenants in each English local authority have been evicted for racist behaviour in each of the last three years. [25230]

**Ms Keeble:** This information is not collected centrally.

### Road Safety (Drugs)

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of causal links discovered in studies in the United Kingdom and elsewhere between the use of *(a)* cannabis, *(b)* alcohol, *(c)* amphetamines and *(d)* anti-histamines and the incidence of road accidents. [24999]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The causal link between alcohol and road accidents has long been established through research and evidence. The impairing effects of drugs, whether medicinal or illegal, on road accidents are not so well understood. Research demonstrates that cannabis affects driving but the effects may not be as severe as for alcohol. Amphetamines act as a stimulant but their effect may be very unpredictable, and repeated use can lead to fatigue. Anti-histamines can cause sedation and thus driver drowsiness.

The issue for road safety is the impairment that drugs may cause to drivers. That is why the Department has supported the police in the training of officers to recognise the outward signs of drug consumption and in using field impairment tests to help them judge whether a driver may be impaired due to drugs.

### Air Traffic Charges

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what legal basis NATS charges private aircraft weighing less than 100 tonnes for night and IFR flights outside controlled airspace. [25164]

**Mr. Jamieson:** In accordance with section 73 of the Transport Act 2000, the Civil Aviation Authority specifies the charges which are to be paid by users of air traffic services. These charges are published in the London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazettes, and are to be paid to Eurocontrol or to National Air Traffic Services Ltd. (NATS), depending on where the flight to which they relate took place. The Eurocontrol route charges system, of which the UK is a member, exempts flights performed by aircraft of which the Maximum Take-Off Weight Authorised is less than two metric tonnes, but provides that flights made under Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) shall be subject to charges. Member states of the Eurocontrol route charges system have discretion as to whether to exempt flights made under Visual Flight Rules (VFR) and the UK does exempt these flights where they are undertaken by aircraft of which the maximum total weight authorised is 5.7 metric tonnes or less. This has been UK practice for many years.

### Local Government Finance

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much was top sliced from funds allocated to the local transport plans for inclusion in the discretionary element of the Single Capital Pot. [24515]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The total Transport provision for local authority basic credit approvals (BCAs) for 2002–03 is £1,064 million. Of this, 5 per cent. (£53 million) has been top sliced to form part of the discretionary element of the single capital pot.

The discretionary element has been allocated to local authorities on the basis of performance following assessment of their plans for transport, housing and education and their capital investment and corporate asset management plans.

### Drink Driving

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of *(a)* the maximum permitted blood alcohol level for driving on public roads and *(b)* the penalties for breach thereof in each of the 15 EU member states; and what proposals for changes in either *(a)* or *(b)* have been made by (i) the Commission affecting all EU member states, (ii) the United Kingdom Government affecting the United Kingdom only and (iii) other national Governments affecting their individual countries. [24984]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Government have been keeping the blood alcohol content (BAC) limit under consideration but have not made any proposals to change it. The Review of Road Traffic Penalties consultation contained some proposals to increase penalties for drink driving offences but no final decisions have yet been made on these.

In the European Union three member states in addition to the United Kingdom have a BAC limit of 80mg alcohol per 100ml of blood; these are Luxembourg, Ireland and Italy. We do not have a systematic comparison of anti-drink-driving enforcement measures in other countries. Member states have tended to develop different alcohol detection procedure, penalty regimes and approaches to publicity, education and rehabilitation. These reflect their

own national legislation and the capacity of the police and medical authorities in each country to conduct alcohol tests.

The European Commission adopted a recommendation on 17 January 2001 which proposed harmonisation of the BAC level at 50mg or below, as well as other aspects of control but not penalties. Such a measure is not binding on the member states.

I am not currently aware of proposals for changes in other member states but some countries have been considering measures such as lower limits for younger drivers.

### Planning Applications

**Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many Article 14 notices have been issued on planning applications before Wandsworth borough council in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001. [25847]

**Ms Keeble:** I regret that comprehensive information prior to April 1999 is not available. No Article 14 directions were issued to the London borough of Wandsworth between April and December 1999. Three Article 14 directions were issued in 2000 and five were issued in 2001.

### Taxis

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce *(a)* a minimum age for applicants for a taxi driver's licence and *(b)* a minimum period of years in which an applicant for a taxi driver's licence has to have held a driving licence. [25122]

**Ms Keeble:** In England (outside London) and Wales, the legislation governing taxi licensing does not stipulate a minimum age which applicants must have reached in order to be granted a taxi driver licence. We do not have any plans to introduce a minimum age limit. Such an applicant must, however, have held a full driver licence for at least 12 months.

### Landing Slots

**Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department will announce a determination on the application for a Public Service Obligation protection for the slots used for air services between Inverness and Gatwick. [24396]

**Mr. Jamieson:** We are continuing to analyse the application for a Public Service Obligation (PSO) for the Inverness—Gatwick route within a more general review of policy on the protection of London airport slots for regional services. We will announce the decision on the PSO application as soon as practicable.

### Traffic Wardens

**Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives to local authorities on the employment of traffic wardens. [25142]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Local authorities are responsible for the employment and conduct of their staff, including parking attendants whose sole role is to enforce parking restrictions in contrast to police traffic wardens who may undertake other traffic management duties as well. For authorities adopting decriminalised parking enforcement (DPE) powers under the Road Traffic Act 1991, Local Authority Circular 1/95 (Welsh Office Circular 26/95) "Guidance on Decriminalised Parking Enforcement Outside London" includes a section dealing with the duties, conduct and training of parking attendants. The employment by an authority adopting DPE powers of former police traffic wardens is a matter for settlement between the local authority, the police and the employees concerned and will be covered by Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations. Guidance on parking in London is now the responsibility of the Mayor.

### Community Strategies

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what steps he has taken to require community strategies prepared by local authorities under section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000 to be amended; and which strategies were affected and for what reason; [24922]

(2) how many community strategies are expected to be prepared by local authorities, pursuant to section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000; and how many have been approved and adopted; [24920]

(3) what procedures he has set in place for monitoring progress on the completion of community strategies, pursuant to section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000; [24919]

(4) what plans he has to publish a timetable for the completion by local authorities of their community strategies, pursuant to section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000. [24921]

**Dr. Whitehead:** Every principal local authority is under the duty to prepare a community strategy. The Government's statutory guidance on "Preparing Community Strategies" (DETR December 2000) explains that the timetable for the development of the community strategy and its contents are at the discretion of each local authority in consultation with its partners and local people. Through discussion with the local community, they will be best placed to prioritise local needs and devise the most effective means of delivering them. Accordingly, the Government will not be imposing a timetable for preparing strategies nor do the Government intend to vet them or require councils to amend them. Proposals for a revised Best Value Performance Indicator on community strategies for 2002–03 were set out in a recent consultation paper "Best Value Performance Indicators 2002–03: Consultation"—DTLR November 2001. Local authorities' performance against these indicators are published. The Government will announce their conclusions on the consultation soon.

### Multi-Modal Studies

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he

will list by location the number of Multi-Modal Studies commissioned by his Department; and what the anticipated timescale for their completion is. [24924]

**Mr. Jamieson:** A list of the Multi-Modal Studies and when they are expected to report to the respective Regional Planning Bodies are set out in the table.

*Tranche 1 contains 11 studies which commenced in 1999–2000*

| *Multi-modal study* | *Date expected to report* |
|---|---|
| Access to Hastings | Reported December 2000 |
| Cambridge to Huntingdon (A14) | Decision announced in July 2001 |
| South East Manchester (Stockport, Manchester airport Link West, Poynton) | Reported 20 August 2001<br>Decision announced in December 2001 |
| West Midlands Area (M5/M6 and M42 between M40 and M6) | Reported September 2001 |
| West Midlands to North West (M6) | Reported October 2001 |
| A453 (M1 to J24 (Nottingham) | Early 2002 |
| Tyneside Area (A1/A19) | Early 2002 |
| South and West Yorkshire Motorway Box (M1 J30 to A1 West Yorks/M18/M62 and A1(M) | Early 2002 |
| North/South Movements in East Midlands (M1 Junctions 21 to 30) | Early 2002 |
| London to South West and South Wales (A303, M4) | Spring 2002 |
| ORBIT- Transport Solutions around London (M25) | Spring/summer 2002<br>Summer/autumn 2002 |

*Tranche 2 contains eight studies which commenced in 2000–01*

| *Multi-modal study* | *Date expected to report* |
|---|---|
| Hull (East/West) Corridor (A63 and A1033 to Port of Hull) | Spring 2002 |
| A1 (North of Newcastle) | Spring 2002 |
| London to Ipswich (A12) | Spring 2002 |
| South Coast (Southampton to Folkestone Coastal Corridor)—(M27, A27 and A259) | Spring/summer 2002 |
| M60 Junction 12–18 (West to North Manchester) | Summer 2002 |
| London to South Midlands (A1, M1, M11, A5 and A421) | Autumn 2002 |
| London to Reading (M4) | Autumn 2002 |
| West Midlands to East Midlands (A42/M42 to M6 Corridor and M69 and A38) | April 2003 |

Tranche 3 contain three studies (Norwich to Peterborough (A47)), A34 North from Southampton and A52 Corridor (Clifton Bridge to A1 (Bingham)). We expect these to commence in 2001–02 and they are expected to report in 2004.

### Sub-regional Studies

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list by location the number of sub-regional studies he has authorised; and what the expected timescale is of each of the studies. [24923]

**Dr. Whitehead:** This question is broad in scope and therefore covers a very large number of pieces of work, across the whole of the range of the Department's responsibilities. Information on these is not collated centrally.

### Nuclear Transportation

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what modes of transport are used to transport radioactive materials; and what is provided for in terms of *(a)* security and *(b)* safety. [25250]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Radioactive material is transported by air, sea, rail and road. Such transport is permitted subject to safety regulations which are based upon the standards recommended by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and implemented internationally by the appropriate modal authorities. These standards are reviewed and, when necessary, revised on a regular basis to ensure an acceptable level of control of hazard to persons, property and the environment.

The security of radioactive material in transport is ensured through a range of measures and checks appropriate to the nature and quantity of material and the mode of transport.

### Novice Drivers

**Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to consult on measures to improve the safety of novice drivers. [25254]

**Mr. Jamieson:** As stated in the Government's Road Safety Strategy "Tomorrow's Roads—Safer for Everyone", we want to ensure that new drivers have a broader and more extensive experience of driving conditions before they take the practical driving test. We therefore plan to consult soon on options for improving the safety of novice drivers.

### Rail Franchises

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is his latest estimate of the completion date for the new franchise agreements for *(a)* Chiltern, *(b)* South West Trains and *(c)* South Central. [21852]

**Mr. Jamieson:** It is not generally helpful to speculate about franchise completion dates as this may constrain the Strategic Rail Authority in negotiations with train operators and thus make it more difficult to achieve best value for public money.

### Railway Services

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what

assessment has been made by his Department of the progress made by the Strategic Rail Authority since April 1999 to *(a)* protect the interests of users of railway services, *(b)* contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, *(c)* promote efficiency and economy on the part of persons providing rail services, *(d)* promote measures to facilitate journeys involving the use of services of more than one passenger service operator, including through ticketing, *(e)* impose on the operators of railway services the minimum restrictions which are consistent with the performance of the Authority's functions, and *(f)* enable persons providing railway services to plan the future of their business with a reasonable degree of assurance; if he will place copies of reports published in the Library; and if he will make a statement; [23150]

(2) what steps his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to (i) protect the interests of users of railway services, (ii) contribute to the achievement of sustainable developments, (iii) promote efficiency and economy on the part of persons providing rail services, (iv) promote measures to facilitate journeys involving the use of services of more than one passenger service operator, including through ticketing, (v) impose on the operators of railway services the minimum restrictions which are consistent with the performance of the authority's functions and (vi) enable persons providing railway services to plan the future of their businesses with a reasonable degree of assurance; and if he will make a statement; [23192]

(3) what steps his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to review the performance of the Strategic Rail Authority against the directions and guidance provided by his Department in (i) September 1999 and (ii) July 2001; if he will provide details of the conclusions of the reviews which have taken place; and if he will make a statement. [23517]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Railways Act 1993, as amended by the Transport Act 2000, requires the Strategic Rail Authority to make to the Secretary of State an annual report on its activities and the Secretary of State to lay a copy of every such report before Parliament. The Authority's first overall strategy, due to be published on 14 January 2002, will set out its future plans. A corporate plan for 2002–3 will also be published in due course.

The Secretary of State may give directions and guidance to the Authority in relation to its strategies and as to the manner in which it is to exercise its functions. A draft was issued for consultation on 29 June 2001. We are currently considering the responses received.

### Train Punctuality

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he received between June and December relating to the publication of monthly train punctuality statistics from *(a)* train operating companies, *(b)* Railtrack, *(c)* the Rail Passenger Council, *(d)* rail passenger committees and *(e)* others; and if he will make a statement. [23521]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I am not aware of any such representations.

### Railways (Overcrowding)

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations his Department has received from, and what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* train operating companies, *(b)* Railtrack, *(c)* the Rail Passenger Council, *(d)* rail passenger committees, *(e)* the Strategic Rail Authority and *(f)* others on the measure of overcrowding levels of rail passenger services used by the Strategic Rail Authority; and if he will make a statement. [23505]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This issue was raised in a number of responses to our consultation on draft Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority. We will respond to the consultation in due course.

### Rail Delays

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many delays on the rail network there were in the three months *(a)* before and *(b)* after the Hatfield crash. [23413]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The figures are contained in the Strategic Rail Authority's National Rail Trends published 13 December.

### Automatic Train Protection

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the automatic train protection scheme will come into effect throughout the system. [23612]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Health and Safety Commission will advise the Government next spring on the recommendations on train protection systems arising from the public inquiry chaired by Lord Cullen and Professor Uff.

### Railtrack

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many managerial grade employees of Railtrack have tendered their resignation since 7 October. [24171]

**Mr. Jamieson:** My Department does not hold this information. Following the entry of Railtrack plc into administration, staffing is a matter for the administrator. I understand that turnover remains at its normal level.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 1015W, what variations in budget have been recorded in management accounts provided by Railtrack under section 8.1.6.(a). [24252]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I am advised that this information is market sensitive.

### European Rail Research Advisory Council

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on UK involvement in the European Rail Research Advisory Council. [24123]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The European Commission has established the European Rail Research Advisory Council to improve synergy between European Union national and private rail research, to serve better society's needs, to lead to sustainable transport and to strengthen the competitive leadership of the European rail industry. The first meeting of the council was held in Cologne on 26 November 2001. The United Kingdom's designated member is the Technical Director of the Strategic Rail Authority. In addition, Roger Goodall, Professor of Control Systems, Loughborough University has been nominated as one of the two Council members from academia.

### Train Operating Companies

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which senior executives of train operating companies he has held discussions with since 7 October. [24170]

**Mr. Jamieson:** My right hon. Friend maintains regular contact with representatives of the Train Operating Companies, including the Association of Train Operating Companies.

### COTIF

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on UK involvement in COTIF. [24124]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The UK is one of 40 signatory states to COTIF—the convention concerning international carriage by rail. Rail passengers and freight shippers therefore benefit from a uniform set of rules for international rail journeys, including conditions of carriage and compensation in the event of loss or damage. The UK is a member of the Administrative Committee of OTIF (the intergovernmental organisation comprising the COTIF signatory states) for the period 2001–05.

A new protocol amending the COTIF convention was agreed by the member states in 1999. This protocol is not yet in force and cannot be until it has been ratified by two thirds of the member states. New primary legislation is needed before the UK can ratify this protocol and we expect to seek these powers in due course.

### Rail Safety

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who has responsibility for ensuring that the gap between platform edge and carriage running board at Lymington Town station is safe. [24873]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Responsibility for the day to day safety, welfare and convenience of passengers using Lymington Town station rests with Railtrack and South West Trains.

### Railways (Electrification)

**David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the costs of electrifying the rail link between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury. [25110]

**Mr. Jamieson:** No such assessment has been made. Any proposal for investment in infrastructure would need to be justified in terms of economic benefit. The Strategic Rail Authority will set out the priorities for investment in railways in the Strategic Plan it intends to publish on 14 January.

### Housing Benefit

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if, under current regulations, business loans from banks or charities preclude people from claiming *(a)* council tax rebates and *(b)* housing benefit. [18256]

**Malcolm Wicks:** I have been asked to reply.

To ensure equity of treatment between people claiming income-related benefits, all capital is subject to the same rules, regardless of how it has been acquired. No benefit is payable if capital exceeds the higher capital limit, which is currently £16,000 for council tax benefit and housing benefit.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Joint Residence Orders

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment she has made of *(a)* the use and *(b)* the effectiveness of joint residence orders. [24517]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** Joint residence orders are rare because, if parents are able to agree a regime of shared care, a court order is unlikely to be necessary. However, in "Re: D (Shared Residence Order) 2000" the Court of Appeal decided that, in this case, it was in the child's best interests for the court to recognise the living arrangements brought about by a shared parenting regime. Although no formal assessment has been undertaken, the courts have found that shared residence arrangements can be problematic, especially if parents find it difficult to agree matters between themselves. Shared residence can sometimes be disruptive to children's educational and social development, particularly if parents live some distance apart.

### Access of Justice Act

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what has been the saving to public funds so far from the implementation of the Access to Justice Act 1999; and if she will provide a breakdown of that saving. [25256]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** The Access to Justice Act 1999 brought about reform over a wide range of publicly funded services, amendments to the law of legal aid in Scotland, provision about appeals, courts, judges and court proceedings. The Act also amended the law concerning magistrates and magistrates courts proceedings, and made provision for immunity from action and costs and indemnities for certain officials exercising judicial functions. As such it is not possible to quantify the savings to public funds from its implementation.

### Access to Public Records

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, for what reason the Public Record Office has not released files (a) CO 733, vol. 495, (b) CO 926 vol. 2084, (c) FO 492 vol. 11, (d) FO 487 vol. 11, (e) DEFE 7/389, (f) CO 537/3848, (g) CO 537/3851 and (h) CO 537/3854 for public access; and if she will make a statement. [25520]

**Ms Rosie Winterton:** All the files listed are open to inspection at the Public Record Office except FO 492/11 and FO 487/11, which were not selected for permanent preservation.

Researchers who require access to records held by the PRO and catalogued as closed, or to historical records held by Departments, should first ask the PRO to check their status. If the records are closed or retained, researchers can apply for a review of access restrictions. They should write to the Departmental Record Officer of the Department that created the records (or its successor) quoting the PRO reference where this is known. Such requests are handled in the order in which they are received except where information is urgently required for legal purposes.

### Judge Hutton

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, when the report the Lord Chancellor has requested into the halting of a trial presided over by Judge Gabriel Hutton will be produced; if it will be made publicly available; and if he will make a statement. [25706]

**Mr. Wills:** An initial report is currently being prepared by officials for the Lord Chancellor's consideration. It brings together statements from a range of people who were present in court at the point when Judge Hutton is alleged to have fallen asleep, including the Judge himself. The Lord Chancellor would not normally publish the contents of such a report. However, he will make public his final decision about the Judge's conduct once he is satisfied that the matter has been fully investigated and he has been able to consider all the relevant facts and considerations.

## HEALTH

### Research and Development

**Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many research and development projects will be affected by changes in regional funding for research and development in England; [9057]

(2) which research and development projects will be affected by changes in regional funding for research and development in the South-west. [9062]

**Mr. Hutton:** Changes made to regional research and development schemes will not affect the current funding of research projects already supported through those schemes. New research projects will continue to be commissioned through the national health service research programmes, which are open to all.

### Diabetes

**Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many new patients have been diagnosed with diabetes in the East Gloucestershire NHS Trust area in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; [16151]

(2) what has been the cost to the NHS of treatment of diabetes in the East Gloucestershire NHS Trust area in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; [16150]

(3) how many diabetic patients have died from heart-related conditions in the East Gloucestershire NHS Trust area in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [16152]

**Ms Blears:** The information requested is not collected centrally.

### Waiting Lists

**Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting in accident and emergency units in the South Cheshire health authority in October *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [16533]

**Ms Blears:** It is not possible to record data on patients waiting in accident and emergency units as it is a constantly changing situation. However data are collected on the number of patients admitted via accident and emergency units in South Cheshire health authority, which are shown in the table.

*Emergency admissions via A&E*

| | Qtr 2 | |
|---|---|---|
| | *1997–98* | *2001–02* |
| Number of patients admitted via A&E in Quarter | 6,823 | 8,837 |
| Number of patients admitted to a ward within two hours | 6,637 | 7,697 |
| Number of patients admitted to a ward within two to four hours | 167 | 838 |
| Number of patients not admitted to a ward within four hours | 19 | 302 |

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients (1) were waiting *(a)* between 13 and 25 and *(b)* over 26 weeks for appointments in the Portsmouth Hospital Trust area; [22213]

(2) were waiting for in-patient treatment in each quarter of *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 in Portsmouth Hospital Trust area. [22214]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* In the second quarter (July-September) of 2001–02, 4,231 patients had been waiting between 13–25 weeks and 1,249 had been waiting over 26 weeks for out-patients appointments at Portsmouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust. Information on the numbers of patients waiting for in-patient treatment is in the table.

*Total number of patients on in-patient waiting list at Portsmouth Hospital/NHS Trust 1999–2000 to 2001–02*

| | *Number of waiting list* |
|---|---|
| *1999–2000* | |
| Q1 | 7,984 |
| Q2 | 7,771 |
| Q3 | 8,152 |
| Q4 | 8,442 |
| *2000–01* | |
| Q1 | 8,957 |
| Q2 | 8,882 |
| Q3 | 10,246 |
| Q4 | 10,307 |
| *2001–02* | |
| Q1 | 11,587 |
| Q2 | 11,409 |

*Source:*
KH07

### Departmental Staff

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many employees of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* agencies sponsored by his Department work in (i) London, (ii) areas benefiting from EU Objective 1 status, (iii) areas with Objective 2 status and (iv) other areas. [16106]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* Answers to (i) and (iv) for the Department and its agencies are shown in the table.

| | *London* | *Other* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *(a)* Department of Health[1] | 1,983 | 1,652 | 3,635 |
| *(b)* Medical Devices Agency | 129 | 8 | 137 |
| *(b)* Medical Controls Agency | 432 | 23 | 455 |
| *(b)* NHS Estates | 20 | 303 | 323 |
| *(b)* NHS Purchasing and Supplies Agency | 0 | 292 | 292 |
| *(b)* NHS Pension Agency | 0 | 445 | 445 |
| Total | 2,564 | 2,723 | 5,287 |

[1] Excluding agencies
*Source:*
Departmental statistical return to Cabinet Office 1 April 2001

Answers for (ii) and (iii) cannot be provided. The Department of Health, like other Departments, collects data by Government Official Regions. These are not in the same detailed level as areas for EU Objective 1 and Objective 2.

### Food Poisoning (Deaths)

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the annual number of deaths in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the European Union and *(c)* the United States of America per 100,000 people from food poisoning in the last 12 months. [16746]

**Ms Blears:** The table sets out the annual number of reported deaths from food poisoning per 100,000 people in the year 2000 for the United Kingdom and for the United States. The United Kingdom figure is based on the annual corrected notifications of deaths attributed to food poisoning organisms reported to the Office for National Statistics in England and Wales and the General Register Offices for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

The United States figure is based on deaths reported to the Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet) within the United States of America.

Figures for the European Union are not available in the form requested as the data gathering process varies between member states.

*Annual number of reported deaths from food poisoning in 2000*

| *Country* | *Deaths per 100,000 people* |
|---|---|
| United Kingdom | 0.05 |
| United States | 0.18 |
| European Union | Not available |

*Notes:*
The UK and USA figures are not directly comparable because of differences in the surveillance systems.
The figures for both the UK and US underestimate deaths associated with food poisoning. A larger number of deaths are categorised as infectious intestinal disease (IID) and a proportion of these will result from food poisoning. The UK figure for deaths for IID was 0.99 per 100,000 persons in 2000. Comparable figures for IID in the US are not available.
*Sources:*
England and Wales: Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Scotland: General Register Office Scotland (GROS)
Northern Ireland: General Register Office Northern Ireland (GRONI)
US: Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet)

## NHS Dentistry

**Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average level of remuneration for NHS dentists. [18478]

**Ms Blears:** Salaried national health service dentists are paid according to set salary scales. Information on individual salaries is not available.

Dentists providing general dental services (GDS) are remunerated on the basis of fees set out in the statement of dental remuneration. Under their terms of service, GDS dentists are not required to work a set number of hours and information is not collected on the average number of hours they work in the GDS.

However, a survey carried out by the Office of Manpower Economics in March 2000 provides some limited data on this area. The survey reported:

the average number of hours worked for single handed dentists at 43.1 hours per week.

full time practitioners wholly committed to the GDS reported total gross fee earnings averaging £163,900 in the most recently completed financial year. These figures are affected by transfers of payments from associate dentists to practice owners.

Average net income for all dentists wholly committed to the GDS in the latest 12 months would be about £65,000 after allowing for an average of £2,600 for other payments to dentists, an average expenses ratio for all dental work of 54.1 per cent., subsequent fee increases and the introduction of the dentists' commitment payments scheme.

**Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of NHS dentists due to retire over the next 10 years. [19945]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* A review of the dental workforce is under way and due to report to Ministers in spring 2002.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the availability of NHS dentistry in Fareham; [22378]

(2) how many NHS dental practices there were in Fareham in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000. [22379]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* One practice in Fareham is currently taking national health service patients. The others have closed their NHS lists temporarily but will be opening them again in the new year. NHS Direct is working closely with the dental access centre in Fareham to ensure patients are able to access NHS treatment.

The number of dental practices in the Fareham constituency, for the years requested, is not available centrally.

**Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists are in practice in the town of Workington; and if he will make a statement. [23102]

**Ms Blears:** There are currently 12 dentists, in four practices, in Workington providing full national health service services.

## Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many formal notices his Department has received in the last year from the Parliamentary Ombudsman expressing an intention to carry out an investigation; and in respect of each notice how long it took to respond. [18768]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* Information on the outcome of statutory investigations which were concluded during 2000–01 is set out in the Parliamentary Ombudsman's annual report for 2000–01, copies of which are available in the Library, or on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk/pca/document/para01/index.htm. Between 1 April and 31 October, the Department has received two new statutory statement of complaint from the Parliamentary Ombudsman. Replies were sent in 13 and 15 working days.

## Salt Consumption

**Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's policy with regard to the health *(a)* risks and *(b)* benefits of salt consumption. [18860]

**Ms Blears:** Salt is the main source of sodium in the diet. Scientific evidence suggests that sodium is one of the important determinants of blood pressure which is a risk factor for heart disease and stroke. National surveys

show that the average intake of salt in the United Kingdom is more than twice the amount that is needed on health grounds. 75 per cent. of salt in the diet is obtained from processed foods.

Our policy is to seek reductions in the salt content of processed foods where it is present beyond technical, safety and palatability needs. Our commitment to working with industry to reduce the salt content of the diet was outlined in "Our Healthier Nation" (1999) and the "NHS Plan" (2000). The Department of Health, jointly with the Food Standards Agency, is in discussions with industry about reducing the salt content of these foods.

## Prescriptions

**Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to *(a)* alter and *(b)* review the list of exempted conditions for prescription charges. [18891]

**Ms Blears:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 228W.

**Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will request the Prescription Pricing Authority to enable pharmacists to be informed of the specific reasons for transferring individual prescription items from exempt to chargeable groups without requiring them to travel to health authority premises to obtain the information. [19809]

**Ms Blears:** The monthly payment statement which the Prescription Pricing Authority (PPA) sends to community pharmacies provides summary information on the number of prescriptions transferred from exempt to chargeable (and vice versa) and the reason in broad groups. It is not practicable for the PPA to provide routinely details of individual prescriptions switched. Community pharmacists can, however, ring the PPA's helpline to discuss forms that have been switched. In many cases this resolves the problem without any need for the pharmacist to inspect the forms.

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the fee paid for dispensing NHS prescriptions has been changed; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the change upon the provision of community pharmacy services. [20282]

**Ms Blears:** The fee paid to pharmacies in England and Wales for dispensing national health service prescriptions has been changed as a consequence of the recent decision to set the Global Sum for 2001–02 at £806.6 million (an increase of 3.7 per cent. over the previous year). The Global Sum is the amount to be paid to pharmacies overall for the NHS pharmaceutical services they provide each year. The dispensing fee is one of a number of fees and allowances by which the Global Sum is distributed between pharmacies. Such fees are reviewed each time the annual Global Sum is set. Our assessment of the effect of the settlement for this year is that it appropriately remunerates community pharmacies for the service they provide.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the most recent review of the prescription system that he has carried out. [20860]

**Ms Blears:** "Pharmacy in the Future—Implementing the NHS Plan", published in September 2000, set out our proposals for changes to the prescription system. These include:

better access to medicines out of hours;

the introduction of repeat dispensing, beginning next year;

the introduction of electronic prescriptions with the vast majority of prescriptions being electronic by 2008;

schemes across the country by 2004 under which people will get more help from pharmacists in using their medicines, and

extending prescribing responsibilities to new groups of health professionals.

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the *(a)* projected percentage volume change in prescriptions to be issued in 2001–02 and *(b)* the percentage change in the fee per prescription payable to pharmacy contractors in 2001–02 after allowing for clawback of payments related to 2000–01 activity; and if he will make a statement; [21081]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to a pharmacy contractor of supplying a prescription. [21079]

**Ms Blears:** We forecast that the number of national health service prescription items dispensed by community pharmacies in England and Wales in 2001–02 will be 6 per cent. higher than in 2000–01.

The fees paid to pharmacy contractors vary according to the item prescribed. However, the majority of prescriptions attract a basic dispensing fee. From July 1999 to October 2001 that fee was 97.5p. From November 2001 to March 2002 it will be 87.4p. We therefore forecast that the average value of the basic dispensing fees paid to pharmacy contractors for prescriptions dispensed in 2001–02 will be 93.2p, a reduction of 4.4 per cent. compared with 2000–01.

The basic dispensing fee is one of a number of fees and allowances by which the global sum for community pharmacies is distributed between pharmacy contractors. The global sum is the amount to be paid to contractors overall in the year in question. The global sum for 2001–02 for England and Wales is £806.6 million, an increase of 3.7 per cent. over 2000–01.

If remuneration is expressed as the global sum divided by the number of prescription items dispensed, then the remuneration per prescription in 2001–02 is forecast to be 135.4p, a reduction of 2.2 per cent. compared with 2000–01.

Actual payments will be different because there was an overpayment of £8.1 million in respect of 2000–01, which is to be recovered by reducing this year's payments. Taking that overpayment and recovery into account the actual payment per prescription item for 2001–02 is forecast to be 134.1p, a reduction of 4 per cent. compared with the actual payment per prescription in 2000–01.

While we take information and arguments about pharmacy contractors' costs into account when setting remuneration, we have made no assessment of the cost to a pharmacy contractor of supplying each individual prescription.

### Haemoglobinopathies

**Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people in the Wycombe constituency are affected by *(a)* sickle cell, *(b)* thalassaemia and *(c)* other haemoglobinopathies; [18890]

(2) what partners in the community and voluntary sector are working with his Department on the neonatal screening programme for haemoglobinopathies in the Wycombe constituency. [19104]

**Ms Blears:** The Department's hospital episodes statistics provide information on hospital treatment of beta thalassaemia and sickle-cell anaemia with crisis. No other information on haemoglobinopathies, including the information requested on screening, is held centrally.

Information on the number of finished consultant episodes (FCE) for patients resident in the Wycombe local authority area, treated in national health service hospitals in England during 2000–01, indicates 90 episodes of beta thalassaemia and seven of sickle-cell anaemia with crisis. Information is not available by constituency area.

The NHS plan sets out our commitment to introduce by 2004 a new and effective screening programme for women and children including a new national linked antenatal and neonatal programme for haemoglobinopathies. In order to ensure close involvement of voluntary sectors NHS Haemoglobinopathy Steering Group has representatives from the Sickle Cell Society and the United Kingdom Thalassaemia Society. These national support groups have membership at local, national and international level.

*Notes:*

i. An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

ii. The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

iii. Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

### Lost Medical Notes

**Mr. Lilley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action is being taken to reduce the incidence of patients' medical notes being mislaid. [19182]

**Ms Blears:** The NHS Plan, "Information for Health" and "Building the Information Core" made a clear commitment to providing electronic records for everyone in England, the aim being that, over time, on-line patient records will be accessible by all members of the national health service family such as family doctors, hospitals, NHS Direct, the ambulance service and patients. Electronic records play a crucial role in underpinning modern person based services.

"Information for Health" set out a number of local and national targets around the development of electronic records (Electronic Patient Records (EPRs) and Electronic Health Records (EHRs)). The development of organisational based EPRs will ensure all healthcare professionals involved in the provision of care for an individual have secure access to his/her full electronic medical record. This means that data will be entered once and available to all professionals in a format that best suits their practice. The record will minimise repeated collection of the same information, eradicate illegible writing, and most important of all avoid records being misplaced or lost. Similar electronic records are being implemented in primary and community care.

The successful implementation of EPRs in acute, primary care and social care environments will be a pre-requirement to successful implementation of the first generation EHR by the end of 2005. The EHR will be a summary of the data contained in the numerous organisational-based EPRs (hospitals, primary care, community, etc.).

### Cloned Human Embryos

**Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what techniques are available to distinguish between a blastocyst stage cloned human embryo and a blastocyst stage embryo created by fertilisation in *(a)* the petri dish, *(b)* the cryopresentation facility and *(c)* the womb of a woman. [19753]

**Ms Blears:** The Department has, in its evidence to the High Court in the judicial review proceedings brought by ProLife Alliance, provided expert evidence that human embryos created by cell nuclear replacement (cloning) would be morphologically and physiologically indistinguishable from those created by fertilisation.

### Chiropody

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of chiropody services in Buckinghamshire. [19802]

**Ms Blears:** Provision of chiropody services in Buckinghamshire is the responsibility of the local health authority.

The NHS Plan contains the commitment to increase staff in the Allied Health Professions (AHP), including Chiropodists and Podiatrists. £3 million was earmarked this year to modernise AHP education and training programmes. Chiropody and podiatry were among the first group of specialities to addressed.

### Deaf Patients

**Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to ensure that deaf patients who seek treatment with an NHS dentist have access to an interpreter. [19415]

**Ms Blears:** Provision of interpreter services is commissioned locally through health authorities. To assess the availability of interpreter services, we commissioned a survey 'An Integrated Strategy for Language and Communication Support' in January 2001 and the final report has now been completed. Commissioning of interpreter services will be included in the remit of primary care trusts when they take over the responsibilities of health authorities, and they will be able to draw on the analysis of the national survey when planning communication strategies as part of their health improvement and modernisation programmes.

### Fast Food and Drink Machines

**Mrs. Calton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of fast food and drinks machines in school corridors. [19537]

**Ms Blears:** It is for schools to determine for themselves whether or not there should be any provision for fast food and drinks machines in school corridors. The Department has no authority over what is sold in these machines. It would however encourage all schools to follow healthy eating principles and to ensure consistency of messages within the school about nutrition and food. We are working with the Department for Education and Skills, within the Food in Schools programme, on a number of issues, including vending machines.

## Abortion

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on those health authorities which offer a choice between early medical and surgical abortion. [19454]

**Jacqui Smith:** This information is not collected centrally at present. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists clinical guideline "Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion" recommends that, ideally, abortion services must be able to offer a choice of recommended methods for relevant gestation bands. The sexual health and HIV strategy, which is currently out for consultation, recommends that services should be developed to provide national health service funded abortions in line with the Royal College's recommendations. Following the consultation, we will decide an implementation plan for the Strategy, including the arrangements for monitoring progress towards the new targets and other commitments made by the strategy.

## Strategic Health Authorities

**Matthew Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the appointment process for the senior positions on the new strategic health authorities was started; and which stages have been completed. [19576]

**Ms Blears:** A national advertisement for chief executives of the new merged health authorities which will be created in April 2002 (and subject to legislation will become strategic health authorities in October 2002) was placed in September. Following assessment against criteria, individuals have been placed on a national shortlist. No appointments can be made until decisions are made on boundaries and chairs have been appointed. Once chief executives have been appointed, the process of appointment of their senior teams can start.

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many shortlists have been drawn up for Chair (designate) and Chief Executive (designate) for the proposed strategic health authorities in England. [20013]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* Following a process of open competition, a national shortlist of candidates who meet the criteria for new chief executive posts has been drawn up. Following advertisement, the National Health Service Appointments Commission has provisionally identified candidates for each of the geographical areas covered by the proposed health authorities. No appointments will be made until decisions on boundaries have been made. Initially appointments will be to the new larger health authorities which will come into existence in April and will then, subject to legislation, become strategic health authorities in October.

## Residential Treatment Courses

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the percentage of dropouts from residential treatment courses in *(a)* the first week of treatment, *(b)* the first month of treatment and *(c)* in subsequent weeks. [19713]

**Ms Blears:** The periodic information requested is not held centrally. However, the latest report of the National Treatment Outcome Research Study (NTORS) showed that after a year from entering a residential treatment programme over half of the sample of clients was abstinent from all types of illicit opiates.

NTORS is a research project set up by the Department in 1995 which was established with the aim of gathering information about the treatment outcomes of a large sample of drug misusers who had been through a treatment programme.

## Drugs

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the calculated weekly cost of drug treatment programmes, using *(a)* injectable heroin, *(b)* oral heroin, *(c)* injectable methadone and *(d)* oral methadone. [19715]

**Ms Blears:** The information requested is not available centrally. However, the table gives all prices for the various methadone and heroin products that appear in the drug tariff and which may be used in drug treatment programmes.

*Prices for methadone and diamorphine products used to price prescriptions dispensed in November 2001*

| | *Generic-Drug tariff* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Product* | *Pack size* | *Price of pack (£)* | *Brand Physeptone (£)* |
| Methadone hydrochloride BP | 2g | 9.61 | — |
| Methadone inj BP 10mg/ml 1ml ampoule | 10 | 8.59 | 8.58 |
| Methadone inj BP 10mg/ml 1ml ampoule | 100 | — | 82.16 |
| Methadone inj BP 10mg/ml 2ml ampoule | 10 | 14.5 | 14.78 |
| Methadone inj BP 10mg/ml 3.5ml ampoule | 10 | 17.83 | 17.03 |
| Methadone inj BP 10mg/ml 5ml ampoule | 10 | 19.23 | 18.37 |
| Methadone linctus BP | 500ml | 5.25 | — |
| Methadone mixt 1mg/1ml | 100ml | 1.45 | 1.45 |
| Methadone mixt 1mg/1ml | 50ml | 0.73 | 0.73 |
| Methadone mixt 1mg/1ml | 30ml | 0.44 | 0.44 |
| Methadone mixt 1mg/1ml | 500ml | 7.59 | 7.25 |
| Methadone mixt 1mg/1ml sugar free | 30ml | 0.44 | 0.44 |
| Methadone mixt 1mg/1ml sugar free | 50ml | 0.73 | 0.73 |
| Methadone mixt 1mg/1ml sugar free | 100ml | 1.45 | 1.45 |

*Prices for methadone and diamorphine products used to price prescriptions dispensed in November 2001*

| Product | Generic-Drug tariff | | Brand Physeptone (£) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Pack size | Price of pack (£) | |
| Methadone mixt 1mg/1ml sugar free | 500ml | 7.25 | 7.25 |
| Methadone tab BP 5mg | 50 | 2.97 | 2.97 |

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the use of naltrexone in drug treatment programmes for heroin addicts. [19714]

**Ms Blears:** The expert group that produced the Department's guidelines "Drug misuse and dependence—guidelines on clinical management" (1999) reviewed the evidence for the use of naltrexone in drug treatment programmes for heroin addicts. The group concluded that because of the uncomfortable or severe opiate withdrawal symptoms if taken by an individual dependent on an opiate, naltrexone-assisted relapse prevention should be initiated only by specialists and specialised generalists experienced in this technique. More work needs to be undertaken before firm conclusions can be reached regarding how appropriate it is to use naltrexone within a community setting.

## Health Bodies

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the *(a)* membership and *(b)* remit of the National Co-ordinating Centre for Health Technology Assessment. [19925]

**Ms Blears:** The Department holds a contract with the University of Southampton to provide a National Co-ordinating Centre for Health Technology Assessment (NCCHTA) which gives expert research management and scientific secretariat support to the health technology assessment (HTA) programme. NCCHTA staff are employed through the University. It has no membership. The membership of the HTA prioritisation and commissioning groups can be found on the NCCHTA website (www.ncchta.org) along with details of its remit and the research management processes employed.

## Mixed Sex Wards

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress he has made to eradicate mixed sex wards in the hospitals which serve Stourbridge constituents. [20369]

**Ms Blears:** We have set three specific objectives to meet our manifesto commitment to eliminate mixed sex accommodation in 95 per cent. of health authorities by the end of 2002:

1) Ensuring that appropriate organisational arrangements are in place to secure good standards of privacy and dignity for hospital patients;

2) Achieving fully the Patient's Charter standard for segregating washing and toilet facilities across the NHS; and

3) Providing safe facilities for patients in hospital who are mentally ill which safeguard their privacy and dignity.

I am informed that the Dudley Group of Hospitals National Health Service Trust, which serves the majority of Stourbridge constituents, has achieved objectives 1 and 3 and will achieve objective 2 by the end of December 2001.

## Accident and Emergency Ambulances/Units

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many accident and emergency ambulances/units are available broken down by *(a)* county and *(b)* London boroughs; [20619]

(2) how many of the total number of accident and emergency ambulances/units are in active service; [20620]

(3) how many ambulances were in road accidents while on operational duty in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996, *(d)* 1997, *(e)* 1998, *(f)* 1999 and *(g)* 2000; and if he will make a statement; [20622]

(4) how many of the available accident and emergency ambulances/units are *(a)* less than one, *(b)* one to three, *(c)* three to five and *(d)* over five years old; and if he will make a statement. [20618]

**Ms Blears:** There are around 5,500 ambulance vehicles currently in service in the National Health Service. Information on the number of ambulance vehicles broken down by county, London boroughs and age and details of how many ambulance vehicles have been involved in road accidents is not collected centrally by the Department.

## London Ambulance Service

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times the London Ambulance Service called on the services of the *(a)* St. John Ambulance and *(b)* British Red Cross Society to assist in (i) 1994, (ii) 1995, (iii) 1996, (iv) 1997, (v) 1998, (vi) 1999 and (vii) 2000; and if he will make a statement. [20621]

**Ms Blears:** Figures are not held for the number of times the London Ambulance Service have called upon the individual services of St. John's Ambulance and the British Red Cross Society between 1994 and 2000.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to evaluate the pilot of body armour being conducted by the London Ambulance Service. [20833]

**Ms Blears:** The pilot of body armour for London Ambulance Service frontline staff was completed during the summer and the results have been evaluated by the national health service trust. The evaluation shows that the majority of staff feel more confident in dealing with volatile incidents when wearing the garments, and that wearing stab vests does not hinder staff's ability to provide clinical care. The London Ambulance Service had pledged to provide stab vests to all frontline staff.

## Rural Health Care

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the Rural White Paper, how many

*(a)* primary care one-stop or mobile units and *(b)* intermediate care beds have been made available in 2001–02; and how many will be made available in each financial year until 2004. [20031]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Data on the number of rural one-stop centres and mobile service units will be collected from next year.

A recent survey indicates growth of around 1,000 national health service intermediate care beds during the course of this year. Further growth of 1,300 beds is planned in each of the next two years in order to meet the NHS Plan target of an extra 5,000 intermediate care beds by 2003–04, compared to the 1999–2000 baseline.

### Endometriosis Treatment

**Mrs. Brooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many endometriosis patients from Dorset were referred out of county for laser treatment during the data years *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 1997–98. [19992]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Information from the Health Episode Statistics database shows that no patients from Dorset were referred out of the health authority area for laser treatment for endometriosis in 1998–99 and 1997–98.

**Mrs. Brooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many endometriosis patients received laser treatment at Princess Anne's Hospital, Southampton during the data years *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1997–98. [19994]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

### Accident Victims

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the cost of health care of accident victims other than road accidents in circumstances where the accident is likely to be covered by third party insurance; [20850]

(2) what assessment he has made of the cost of hospital health care of road accident victims since the recoupment scheme commenced; [20849]

(3) how much has been recovered from insurance companies in respect of repayment of health care costs of road accident victims in each year since the commencement of the recoupment scheme; [20847]

(5) what plans he has *(a)* to review the maximum charges recoverable from drivers in respect of road accident victims and *(b)* to extend the scheme to other types of accident; and if he will make a statement. [20851]

**Ms Blears:** From 5 April 1999 a new system of centralised collection of national health service charges following road traffic accidents was introduced. The system is administered by the Compensation Recovery Unit, (CRU) which is part of the Department for Work and Pensions, on behalf of the Department of Health.

In the first year of operation the CRU recovered and paid NHS trusts in England a total of £26.4 million. The following year (2000–01) £67 million was recovered for NHS trusts in England. The total amount collected from April to November 2002 is £58.9 million

There has been no increase in the tariff or ceiling of charges since the scheme commenced nearly three years ago. However the Department is planning to increase the tariff in line with hospital and community health services (HCHS) inflation and increase the ceiling of charges early in the new year. This means that the charge for treatment without admission will rise from £354 to £402 and the daily rate charge for treatment with admission will rise from £435 to £494 per day. In addition the ceiling of charges will rise from £10,000 to £30,000.

Information on the total cost to the NHS of treating all road traffic accident victims, including those who do not subsequently receive personal injury compensation, is not held centrally.

In 1999 the Law Commission recommended that the NHS should have the right to recover its costs in all cases where a payment of personal injury compensation was made. The Department is considering the Law Commission's proposal and is currently assessing the cost of treating victims of accidents other than road traffic accidents that are likely to result in personal injury compensation and plans to publish these costs in a public consultation document in the new year.

### Patients Forums

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients forums he expects to be created under the NHS Reform Bill. [20894]

**Ms Blears:** The National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professionals Bill provides for a Patients Forum to be established for every NHS trust and primary care trust.

We feel that it is important that local patients and users have the ability to directly influence local NHS services.

### Dispensing

**Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to amend arrangements for original pack dispensing to bring England into line with the 1994 EU Directive. [R] [20786]

**Ms Blears:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) on 3 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 125–26W.

### Residential Special School Inspections

**Miss Kirkbride:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which care standards will be used for welfare inspections in residential special schools operating 52 weeks a year. [20686]

**Jacqui Smith:** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The Care Standards Act 2000 provides that when boarding schools (including residential special schools) provide accommodation for more than 295 days a year, then they are required to register as children's homes. Thus, the Children's Homes National Minimum Standards will apply.

While we cannot change the provision in the Care Standards Act 2000, there are various issues, arising from the recent consultation process, about the suitability of some standards which are to be used in both School and Children's Homes settings. We are conscious of the practical difficulties involved and we are, therefore, reviewing the comments made by respondents and, where appropriate, will revise the standards.

### Health Care (Isle of Wight)

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients on the Isle of Wight waited over *(a)* one year and *(b)* three months for an operation in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001; and what percentage each figure constituted of the number of operations in each year. [20382]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Information on waiting times for all operations (in-patient, day case and out-patients) is not collected centrally. The table shows information on in-patient waiting lists for patients in the Isle of Wight health authority area for each quarter between March 1997 and March 2001 and the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority area for quarters ending June and September 2001.

| *Quarter* | *Total in-patient waiting list* | *3+ month waiters* | *Percentage of total waiting list* | *12+ month waiters* | *Percentage of total waiting list* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Isle of Wight HA* | | | | | |
| March 1997 | 4,229 | 2,585 | 61.1 | 277 | 6.6 |
| June 1997 | 4,343 | 2,534 | 58.3 | 337 | 7.8 |
| September 1997 | 4,289 | 2,590 | 60.4 | 455 | 10.6 |
| December 1997 | 4,546 | 2,657 | 58.4 | 428 | 9.4 |
| March 1998 | 3,864 | 2,307 | 59.7 | 178 | 4.6 |
| June 1998 | 3,844 | 2,089 | 54.3 | 145 | 3.8 |
| September 1998 | 3,911 | 1,884 | 48.2 | 116 | 3.0 |
| December 1998 | 4,264 | 2,250 | 52.8 | 147 | 3.4 |
| March 1999 | 3,552 | 1,584 | 44.6 | 104 | 2.9 |
| June 1999 | 3,912 | 1,724 | 44.1 | 130 | 3.3 |
| September 1999 | 3,714 | 1,861 | 50.1 | 153 | 4.1 |
| December 1999 | 3,670 | 1,744 | 47.5 | 105 | 2.9 |
| March 2000 | 3,522 | 1,703 | 48.4 | 143 | 4.1 |
| June 2000 | 3,223 | 1,850 | 57.4 | 200 | 6.2 |
| September 2000 | 3,372 | 1,656 | 49.1 | 196 | 5.8 |
| December 2000 | 3,449 | 1,822 | 52.8 | 155 | 4.5 |
| March 2001 | 3,392 | 1,764 | 52.0 | 192 | 5.7 |
| *Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Hampshire HA* | | | | | |
| June 2001 | 14,932 | 7,585 | 50.8 | 1,046 | 7.0 |
| September 2001 | 14,876 | 7,761 | 52.2 | 977 | 6.6 |

*Notes:*
In April 2001 Isle of Wight HA (QD4) merged with Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA (QD2) to form Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Hampshire HA (QEV).
Data for 2001–02 are therefore presented for Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Hampshire HA (QEV).
*Source:*
QF01 Quarterly Return

### GP Vacancies (Isle of Wight)

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many unfilled GP posts on the Isle of Wight there were in November *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001; and what proportion each figure represents of GP posts on the island. [20381]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

### New Deal (Young People)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21274]

**Ms Blears:** The Department's most recent statistics on new deal staff covered the period 2 July to 1 October. During this period four staff were employed by the Department and its agencies under the new deal for young people at an annual salary cost of £41,300. This excludes any training and development that may have been needed.

A further four new deal recruits came into the Department through generalist entry routes, costs for these cannot be identified.

### External Consultants

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was to his Department of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [21262]

**Ms Blears:** Expenditure by the Department on external consultants is as follows:

*£ million*

| | *Cost* |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 11.848 |
| 1998–99 | 7.181 |
| 1999–2000 | 7.991 |
| 2000–01 | 6.531 |

### Departmental Sickness

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21340]

**Ms Blears:** The information requested is shown in the table.

| Year | Average[1] days lost per employee through sickness (per staff year) |
|---|---|
| 1997 | 7.8 |
| 1998 | [2]9.2 |
| 1999 | 6.6 |
| 2000 | [3]— |

[1] Working days absences exclude weekends and bank holidays for staff working a "Monday to Friday" week.
[2] Based on pre-audit data and methodology. In 1998 civil service Departments and agencies undertook an audit of their monitoring systems following the "Working Well Together" report. The reworked figures were not submitted in time for publication of the 1998 report and unadjusted figures were published in this year.
[3] Not yet published.
*Source:*
Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service BMI Health Services report (1997 Table I, 1998 Table K) and Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service BIOSS report Table H (1999)

The Department is committed to meeting its Public Service Agreement targets for reducing sickness absence and will be conducting a review of its guidance for both long-term and short-term sickness absence management.

### Alpha-1-antitrypsin

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* creation and *(b)* use of alpha-1-antitrypsin; and what Government research has been conducted into the effect of humans using the compounds. [20918]

**Ms Blears:** There are two sources of alpha-1-antitrypsin (AAT) that have been used for therapeutic purposes. Partially purified AAT may be manufactured from pooled human plasma. Recently, AAT has been synthesised with the use of recombinant technology.

Clinical trials have been undertaken in North America and Europe to evaluate the safety and efficacy of therapy with partially purified human AAT given by intravenous infusion in patients with emphysema.

More recently clinical trials of partially purified human or recombinant AAT administered by aerosol therapy to the lungs have been undertaken.

Details of these trials may be found on the websites www.aventisbehring.com/aventisbehring/newsandevents/alphaclintrial. asp. and www.ppl-therapeutics.com/Welcome/Products/Product1/bodyproduct1.html.

There have been several trials in national health service hospitals on various aspects of the use of AAT. Details of projects, completed and ongoing, can be found on the National Research Register, which is available on the internet at http://www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm.

### Medical Staff (Assaults)

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many assaults there have been on *(a)* ambulance staff/paramedics and *(b)* clinical staff in accident and emergency departments in hospitals in each year since 1997. [20832]

**Mr. Denis Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* health service staff working in accident and emergency departments and *(b)* ambulance staff have suffered (i) verbal and (ii) physical abuse while carrying out their duties in each of the last five years. [21467]

**Ms Blears:** Information on the levels of verbal and physical abuse by individual staff group is not collected centrally, but may be held at a local level by national health service employers. Data on violent incidents involving all staff in the NHS were not collected centrally for 1996–97 or 1997–98.

The Department conducted a survey of NHS trusts in England in 1998–99. The survey found that, on average, seven violent incidents were recorded each month per 1,000 staff. This is equivalent to approximately 65,000 violent incidents against NHS trust staff each year. Details of the survey can be found in Health Service Circular 1999/229: "Managing Violence, Accidents and Sickness Absence in the NHS", a copy of which is in the Library.

Figures for recorded violent incidents in 2000–01 are currently being analysed by the Department.

### Pharmacy Staff

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received concerning the availability of *(a)* trained pharmacists and *(b)* other staff within pharmacy. [21080]

**Ms Blears:** The Department has received a number of representations from organisations with an interest in pharmacy.

We recognise that, in spite of increasing training places and introducing recruitment and retention initiatives, there have been problems in recruiting pharmacists particularly over the last year. This is a result of the switch from a three to a four-year undergraduate pharmacy course in 1997 and growing demand for pharmacists, particularly in primary care. Skill mix initiatives have increased the demand for other staff within pharmacy leading to shortages in some areas.

The increases in pharmacy student intakes—27 per cent. more new students started training in 2000 than in 1993—point to a significant medium term-growth in the pharmacy workforce despite the change to a four-year undergraduate course. Workforce modelling undertaken by the Department suggests that there will be a 12 per cent. increase in the pharmacy workforce across the national health service and private sector between 1998 and 2003.

### Food Supplements

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the prospect of securing an extension to the deadline proposed in the forthcoming European Directive on Food Supplements for the submission of detailed safety dossiers to the Scientific Committee for Foods in relation to safe nutrients which are available in the United Kingdom but which are not provided for in the proposed Directive. [21695]

**Ms Blears:** The Food Standards Agency, which is responsible for negotiating this Directive on behalf of the Government, has been unable to secure an extension of this deadline.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what position his Department has taken in relation to amendments to European medicines directives that would require food supplements to be considered to be medicines; and if he will make a statement. [21696]

**Ms Blears:** The European Commission sent their proposals to amend the European medicines legislation to the European Parliament and to the Council of Ministers on 26 November 2001, formally launching the legislative process. The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) will be leading for the United Kingdom Government in the forthcoming negotiations on the European Commission's proposals. The MCA is currently considering the implications of the European Commission's proposals, and is consulting other Government Departments with an interest in the proposal to amend Article 2.2 of the Human Medicines Code. The MCA will also be undertaking a wide-ranging public consultation on the proposals in the new year.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to meet *(a)* Consumers of Health Choice, *(b)* the National Association of Health Stores and *(c)* the Health Food Manufacturers Association to discuss the implications of the proposed EU Food Supplements Directive for United Kingdom (i) consumers, (ii) retailers and (iii) manufacturers. [21682]

**Ms Blears:** None. Officials from the Food Standards Agency, which is responsible for negotiating this Directive on the Government's behalf, are in regular contact with all interested parties to discuss progress on and interpretation and implications of the proposed Directive.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to ask the European Commission to indicate the way in which it intends to interpret Article 5 of the proposed European Directive on Food Supplements; [21722]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the forthcoming EU Food Supplements Directive would *(a)* permit and *(b)* require the setting of maximum permitted levels for vitamins and minerals at or close to the upper safe level for such nutrients; [21693]

(3) what assessment he has made of the meaning and practical implications of the requirement in Article 5 of the proposed European Directive on Food Supplements to take account of specified factors. [21721]

**Ms Blears:** Article 5 of the Directive, which lists a number of matters which need to be considered when setting maximum limits, would permit but not require maximum limits to be set at levels close to the upper safe level. Upper safe levels are listed as the first consideration, but it is not clear to what extent other factors, like measures of supposed need, will influence the Commission's proposals. We currently have no plans to press for clarification of this point. The Food Standards Agency, which is responsible for negotiating this Directive on the Government's behalf, has sought clarification without success, and is now concentrating on pressing the Commission to base its proposals on thorough scientific risk assessments, and arguing this case with other member states.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed EU Food Supplements Directive on the United Kingdom specialist food supplement *(a)* market and *(b)* consumers; and if he will make a statement. [21686]

**Ms Blears:** The Food Standards Agency, which is responsible for negotiating this Directive on the Government's behalf, has consulted widely on its likely impact. There would be labelling costs falling on manufacturers of all food supplements, but these would be substantially offset by a two-year transitional period. For the specialist food supplement sector and consumers of these products any additional impact would depend on future developments on lists of permitted nutrients and maximum limits.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the timetable for the publication of the proposed *(a)* draft and *(b)* final versions of the forthcoming report from the Ad Hoc Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals; what the scope is of that report; and what steps he is planning to take to promote its findings to (i) the European Commission, (ii) the European Union's Scientific Committee for Food and (iii) other member states of the European Union. [21694]

**Ms Blears:** The risk assessments for vitamins and minerals being undertaken by the Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals will be issued for public consultation in early 2002, with a view to publishing the final report in the spring. There is cross-membership between the Expert Group and the Scientific Committee on Food which has already received all papers prepared for consideration by the Expert Group. The European Commission, EU member states and the Scientific Committee on Food will be sent copies of the report at both stages. The final report will inform the United Kingdom position in respect of the EU Directive on Food Supplements.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nutrients and *(b)* nutrient sources would be permitted under the forthcoming European Directive on Food Supplements; what steps he is taking to identify safe nutrients which are available on the United Kingdom market but are not on the lists in the Directive; and how he plans to ensure that United Kingdom (i) manufacturers, (ii) retailers and (iii) consumers may use these nutrients once the Directive is implemented. [21691]

**Ms Blears:** The Directive lists nutrients and nutrient sources permitted for use in food supplements; the lists currently include 28 nutrients and 112 nutrient sources. We are aware that many nutrients used in the United Kingdom are not on the lists and plan to allow additional substances to be used by all parties during the optional seven year transitional period which was written into the Directive at our request. We have no plans to prepare a list of these substances; manufacturers and retailers are understood to be compiling such lists and co-operating over submission of dossiers supporting addition of these substances to the 'permitted' lists. These substances would then be available for use throughout the European Union.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on protecting the existing United Kingdom market in safe higher potency vitamins and minerals in negotiations on the interpretation of Article 5 of the forthcoming proposed European Directive on Food Supplements. [22368]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* We oppose any unnecessary restrictions on the range of products available to consumers. We are therefore pressing the European Commission to propose maximum limits for vitamins and minerals in food supplements which are close to the upper safe levels.

### A and E Statistics

**Mr. Denis Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients received treatment in the accident and emergency departments of UK hospitals in each of the last five years. [21468]

**Ms Blears:** Information on the number of patients receiving treatment in accident and emergency departments is not collected centrally. Quarterly figures for the number of accident and emergency attendances in England for each of the last five years are shown in the table.

| *Quarter* | *Year* | *Accident and emergency first attendances* |
|---|---|---|
| Q1 | 1996–97 | 3,083,523 |
| Q2 | 1996–97 | 3,210,720 |
| Q3 | 1996–97 | 3,067,462 |
| Q4 | 1996–97 | 2,954,319 |
| Q1 | 1997–98 | 3,226,753 |
| Q2 | 1997–98 | 3,294,802 |
| Q3 | 1997–98 | 3,108,151 |
| Q4 | 1997–98 | 3,036,088 |
| Q1 | 1998–99 | 3,233,468 |
| Q2 | 1998–99 | 3,339,658 |
| Q3 | 1998–99 | 3,133,095 |
| Q4 | 1998–99 | 3,071,753 |
| Q1 | 1999–2000 | 3,281,133 |
| Q2 | 1999–2000 | 3,391,828 |
| Q3 | 1999–2000 | 3,216,036 |
| Q4 | 1999–2000 | 3,140,760 |
| Q1 | 2000–01 | 3,310,133 |
| Q2 | 2000–01 | 3,320,537 |
| Q3 | 2000–01 | 3,181,424 |
| Q4 | 2000–01 | 3,072,924 |
| Q1 | 2001–02 | 3,296,833 |
| Q2 | 2001–02 | 3,340,808 |

*Note:*
Previous years figures have been adjusted to allow direct comparison with 2001–02 data.
*Source:*
Common Information Core

### Dental Access Centre, Kington

**Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government are taking in relation to progress with the development of the dental access centre in Kington, Herefordshire. [21004]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* We have made it mandatory for all health authorities to produce a dental action plan to ensure access to national health service dentistry for everyone within the local community.

The first phase of Herefordshire health authority's dental action plan is complete. This includes the provision of nine dental access centres throughout Herefordshire, including two in Leominster.

In addition, the development of the new community hospital in Kington will include access to dental services and from the new year dental services will be available to Kington residents, provided from a mobile unit until the new hospital development is complete.

### Long-term Care

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance he has given to community health councils to assist them in advising self-funders in nursing homes of the decision in Coughlan *v.* North Devon health authority, C.A. 1999; [21392]

(2) when community health councils were given the information about Coughlan *v.* North Devon health authority, C.A. 1999 contained in circular HSC 1999/180: LAC (99) 30 of 11 August 1999; [21395]

(3) if health authorities pass confidential medical information to social services about potential self-funders before any decision accepted by the patient has been taken to withdraw free continuing care; [21394]

(4) if health authorities obtain the consent in writing of patients to become self-funders before free continuing care as defined by Coughlan *v.* North Devon health authority is withdrawn; [21396]

(5) if he will list the health authorities which have sought his Department's advice over applications for refunds made by self-funders since the decision in Coughlan *v.* North Devon health authority, C.A. 1999. [21391]

**Jacqui Smith:** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Guidance regarding continuing care "Ex parte Coughlan: Follow up action", Health Service Circular 1999/180: Local Authority Circular (99) 30, was issued on 11 August 1999. Further guidance "Continuing Care: NHS and Local Councils' responsibilities" HSC 2001/015:LAC (2001)18 was issued on 28 June 2001. Guidance on "Free Nursing Care in Nursing Homes" HSC 2001/17: LAC(2001)26 was issued on 25 September 2001. Copies of all sets of guidance were sent routinely to community health councils' chief officers. No other guidance or advice has been has been specifically issued to CHCs.

It is for individual health authorities to ensure that their criteria for continuing national health service health care comply with guidance issued by the Department and to obtain their own legal advice where necessary. Since August 1999, only two health authorities have sought the Department's advice on the issue of 'refunds' for self funders: West Surrey health authority and South Essex health authority.

The determinations of any individual's requirement for continuing NHS health care or free nursing care are made on the basis of an assessment to determine individual needs. The introduction of free nursing care may lead to the identification of individuals with exceptional health needs who may now qualify for continuing NHS health care.

Health authorities neither obtain consent in writing, nor do they pass confidential medical information to social services before 'withdrawing' continuing care; it is not envisaged, nor has it ever been brought to the Department's attention, that any health authority has behaved in the way described in the two questions. Once provided, continuing health care should continue to be provided unless and until the individual's healthcare needs change.

### Departmental Staff (Home Working)

**Mr. Challen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21830]

**Ms Blears:** The Department has for some time had a flexible working patterns policy and actively encourages and supports its staff and managers to work flexibly. A range of flexible working patterns including part time working, job sharing and home working is available to staff by arrangement with their management.

The Department recognises the advantages that home working offers such as retention of valued and skilled staff who have domestic commitments, and a saving on travelling time and costs, and provides appropriate information technology equipment and a supportive personnel and management structure to enable staff to work from home.

The Department also sponsors a home working staff support group which comprises home workers and their managers.

As home working is an arrangement that staff and managers make locally we do not centrally record information on the numbers of staff that home work on a regular basis.

### NHS Reform and Health Care Profession Bill

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances he will alter the name of a strategic health authority created under the NHS Reform Bill. [22328]

**Mr. Hutton:** Among the circumstances in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State might consider exercising his powers to change the name of a strategic health authority created under the National Health Service Reform Bill are:

where the boundary of the strategic health authority changes substantially due to reconfiguration or merger;

where the name of a coterminous local authority changes; and

at the request of key local stakeholders.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what increase in volunteer input he expects to occur as a result of the NHS Reform Bill; what form it will take; and what *(a)* financial value and *(b)* financial savings he expects. [22366]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* Subject to parliamentary approval, the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Profession Bill will enable us to set up a patients forum in every national health service trust and primary care trust as independent statutory bodies. It is expected that the members of the forums will be volunteers drawn from patients, carers, and from local voluntary organisations. As members of the patients forums, they will represent the views of local communities to trusts about the quality and configuration of health services; monitor the delivery of services from the patients perspective; and inspect every aspect of NHS care from the perspective of the patients experience of the service.

Voluntary participation in the patients forum is not intended as a means of producing financial savings. The main benefit to the NHS is that local people will be able to make a difference to the services provided and ensure that local services are more responsive to the needs of patients. The volunteers will benefit from knowing that they are making an important and worthwhile contribution to the service; they will also have the opportunity to acquire new skills which may benefit them in their employment or other aspects of their lives.

### Nursing Vacancies (Hampshire)

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of nursing posts are vacant in the Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire health authority; and if he will make a statement. [21797]

**Jacqui Smith:** The Department of Health Vacancy Survey, March 2001, indicated a three month vacancy rate of 3.4 per cent. That equates to 60 vacant posts across the health authority area. We have introduced a number of initiatives to increase the number of nurses in the national health service, most recently funding for additional nurses in accident and emergency.

### Emergency Healthcare

**Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reform emergency healthcare. [22301]

**Ms Blears:** On 25 October 2001, we announced the "Reforming Emergency Care" Strategy which provides the first steps to a new approach to reform emergency care services in the national health service.

It is supported by £68 million investment, £40 million of which will be used to fund an additional 600 accident and emergency nursing posts, £10 million to pay for local emergency care leaders to properly coordinate emergency care at local level, and an additional £18 million capital investment to begin implementing new rapid assessment systems.

The "Reforming Emergency Care Strategy" is available on the internet at www.doh.gov.uk/capacityplanning.

### Pharmaceutical Advertising

**Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what her policy is on direct pharmaceutical advertising. [21861]

**Ms Blears:** The Medicines (Advertising) Regulations 1994, with the Medicines (Monitoring of Advertising) Regulations 1994 (Statutory Instrument 1994/1932–3, as amended), implement European Directive 92/28/EEC and regulate the advertising of all medicines in the United Kingdom. Medicines classified for supply over-the-counter may be advertised to the public although the regulations prohibit advertisements to the public in respect

of certain diseases. Medicines available only on prescription may not be advertised to the public. We support the provision of factual information about medicines to patients and the public within the legal framework, in order to encourage safe and correct use.

Recent proposals to amend European law relating to the advertising of medicines are being carefully scrutinised. We do not support lifting the prohibition on advertising prescription only medicines to the public.

### Teenage Pregnancies

**Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the extra funding under the Winter Supplementary Estimates to the Supply Estimates 2001–02 for the Department of Health Teenage Pregnancy Unit is to be spent. [22248]

**Ms Blears:** Funding totalling £4 million has been allocated through health authorities to support implementation of local teenage pregnancy strategies. Local teenage pregnancy partnerships, which include leads from health and local authority and other relevant agencies, will agree the most effective use of this additional funding.

A further £1 million is being invested in work at national level to support implementation of both the prevention and support aspects of the teenage pregnancy strategy including the national media campaign for young people.

### Cirencester Hospital

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will reply to the petition presented on 13 November from the vendors of the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard regarding Cirencester hospital. [22266]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The level of provision of health services at Cirencester hospital is a matter for the local national health service bodies to determine.

### NHS Appointments Commission

**Mr. Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of appointments by the NHS Appointments Commission have been of disabled persons; [22206]

(2) how many and what percentage of the appointments made by the NHS Appointments Commission came from *(a)* business, *(b)* voluntary local organisations, *(c)* professions and *(d)* trade unions; [22207]

(3) how many NHS appointments since the Appointments Commission became responsible have become due; and how many have been made; [22208]

(4) what percentage of NHS appointments made by the Appointments Commission have gone to *(a)* women and *(b)* black and Asian candidates; [22209]

(5) how many of the people appointed by the NHS Appointments Commission have declared a party political connection; and what parties they are connected with. [22211]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The National Health Service Appointments Commission has been operational since 2 July 2001. Since then it has made 597 appointments, of which 464 related to appointments which had come to an end. The remaining 137 are appointments to new NHS trusts and primary care trusts.

Of those appointed 45.9 per cent. (274) were women, 9.4 per cent. (56) from the black and minority ethnic communities and 4.2 per cent. (25) declared that they had a disability.

35.8 per cent. (214) of those appointed had declared political activity. A breakdown is given in the table.

| | *Percentage* | *Number* |
|---|---|---|
| Conservative | 5 | 30 |
| Independent | 1.5 | 9 |
| Labour | 23.4 | 140 |
| Liberal Democrat | 5.4 | 32 |
| Other | 0.5 | 3 |

Details of the information recorded by the NHS Appointments Commission about the primary background of those it has appointed is given in the table.

| *Background* | *Percentage* | *Number* |
|---|---|---|
| Manager and administrator | 26.8 | 160 |
| Other professional | 20.3 | 121 |
| Health professional | 3.2 | 19 |
| Teaching professional | 9.7 | 58 |
| Science and engineering | 0.8 | 5 |
| Associate professional | 4.5 | 27 |
| Clerical and secretarial | 0.7 | 4 |
| Craft and related | 0.2 | 1 |
| Personal and protective | 0.5 | 3 |
| Other | 0.2 | 1 |
| Retired health professional | 2.2 | 13 |
| Retired—other | 12.4 | 74 |
| User/carer/voluntary sector | 18.8 | 112 |

**Mr. Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many members of the NHS Appointments Commission are *(a)* women and *(b)* black or Asian. [22210]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The National Health Service Appointments Commission has four members who are women and none from the black or Asian communities.

**Mr. Norman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Chairman of the NHS Appointments Commission *(a)* is and *(b)* has in the past (i) been a member of a political party and (ii) made a party political donation in the last three years. [23813]

**Ms Blears:** Applicants for posts on national health service boards are asked to declare any political activity in the last five years. Such political activity is defined by the Commissioner for Public Appointments and does not include membership of a political party. It does include information on political donations.

The chair of the NHS Appointments Commission declared in his application for the post that he had not been politically active, nor had he made any party political donations, in the previous five years.

### Pseudoephedrine Hydrochloride

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what reports he has received on reactions to over-the-counter drugs containing pseudoephedrine hydrochloride; [22471]

(2) what plans he has to issue revised guidance to patients from manufacturers on over-the-counter drugs containing pseudoephedrine hydrochloride. [22472]

**Ms Blears:** Pseudoephedrine hydrochloride (a decongestant) has been an ingredient of many over-the-counter (OTC) cold and flu remedies for many decades. There have been 757 suspected adverse drug reactions (ADRs) reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) through the yellow card scheme in association with pseudoephrine containing products since 1965.

The most commonly reported suspected ADRs with pseudoephedrine hydrochloride are allergic reactions (skin rash, facial swelling), cardiovascular reactions (increased or irregular heart rate), psychiatric reactions (depression and hallucinations), difficulty in passing urine, headache, insomnia, nightmares, nausea and vomiting. It is important to note that a report of a suspected ADR does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the drug and underlying conditions or concomitant medications may be implicated.

Guidance on the use and side effects of medicines is provided to patients in the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) which accompanies the medicine. The Medicines Control Agency and the CSM continually monitor the safety of all medicines to ensure that the product information contains appropriate and up-to-date guidance on safe, correct use at the recommended dose and warnings about side effects.

### Viagra

**Mr. Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects NICE to consider Viagra and its availability by NHS prescription. [22764]

**Ms Blears:** We have no plans to refer impotence treatments, including Viagra, to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. We recently announced that arrangements introduced in 1999 restricting the eligibility for these treatments on the national health service will continue. The extra cost of allowing unrestricted prescribing is likely to involve diversion of funds from other NHS priorities.

### Meat Industry

**Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the UK's progress towards meeting the EU's meat hygiene legislation with particular reference to the levels of *(a)* veterinary controls and *(b)* supervisory measures implemented. [22669]

**Ms Blears:** In 1998, following infraction proceedings against the United Kingdom by the European Commission, we agreed to bring veterinary supervision levels in licensed meat plants in Great Britain into line with the requirements of European Union meat hygiene rules, namely the Fresh Meat (64/433/EEC) and Poultry Meat (71/118/EEC) Directives. It was not possible to secure immediate compliance largely because of a shortage of veterinarians in Great Britain willing to undertake meat hygiene work. The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), which provides veterinary inspection and supervision services in GB on behalf of the Government, therefore had to put in place a concerted and long-term campaign to recruit and train the required additional veterinarians. The aim was to achieve full compliance by 1 April 2001. During the next three years the MHS increased veterinary supervision in plants in a risk-based and staged process with incremental increases being introduced as and when additional veterinary resources became available.

The MHS was well on course to meet the deadline when the foot and mouth outbreak occurred at the beginning of this year. This led to an unprecedented demand for veterinarians to assist in combating the disease and many practices which had contracted to supply additional resources to the MHS found themselves losing staff to the fight against the epidemic. These losses severely jeopardised the ability of the MHS to ensure full-time Official Veterinarian Surgeon supervision in all full-throughput slaughterhouses by the target date. Even so, the MHS was successful in arranging the required supervision in all but nine of the 305 full-throughput slaughterhouses operating in Great Britain as at 1 April 2001. Since then MHS has continued to introduce full-time supervision where possible, and full compliance was achieved in full-throughput slaughterhouses and cutting premises by November of this year. This achievement is due in no small part to the intensive and successful efforts of the MHS to recruit additional veterinarians.

The UK authorities have notified the Commission of this position. The extensive, prescriptive and detailed inspection and supervisory measures required by the Directives are enshrined in national legislation, namely the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 (as amended) and the Poultry Meat, Farmed Game Bird Meat and Rabbit Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 1995 (as amended).

### Social Services Tribunals

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has taken advice on the composition and independence of social services tribunals in the light of Beesson *v.* Dorset county council QB, 30 November; and what plans he has to issue a circular to local authorities on the matter. [22915]

**Jacqui Smith:** As part of the judgment in this case, the court decided that the system used by the council in determining the question of deprivation under regulation 25 of the National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Regulations 1992 did not comply with article 6(1) of the European Convention on Human Rights. The court held that the system failed because the panel established under the social services complaints procedure did not amount to an independent review of the facts, and because there was no such review, judicial review was not an adequate means of appeal. But the judge made it clear that the statutory scheme was not incompatible with human rights.

The judge granted leave to appeal on the article 6(1) point. The Department is currently considering making an appeal. We will consider whether revised guidance to local authorities is required.

### Pharmacies

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many community pharmacists there were in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* at the latest date for which figures are available; [22099]

(2) what assessment he has made of the number of community pharmacists who will leave the profession in the next financial year. [22092]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* We do not collect information on the number of community pharmacists. However, the number of community pharmacies in England providing NHS pharmaceutical services during the years 1997 to 2001 is shown in the table.

We do not expect the number of community pharmacies to change significantly in the year ending 31 March 2002.

| *As at 31 March* | *Number of community pharmacies* |
|---|---|
| 1997 | 9,775 |
| 1998 | 9,781 |
| 1999 | 9,785 |
| 2000 | 9,775 |
| 2001 | 9,774 |

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many small pharmacies have *(a)* closed and *(b)* opened in each of the last four years in England. [23396]

**Ms Blears:** Figures for the number of pharmacies dispensing national health service prescriptions which have opened and closed in the last four years are in the table. We do not collect information on the size of these pharmacies.

| *Year* | *Number of pharmacies opening* | *Number of pharmacies closing* |
|---|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 46 | 42 |
| 1998–99 | 46 | 51 |
| 1999–2000 | 23 | 33 |
| 2000–01 | 36 | 37 |

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pharmacies dispensing NHS prescriptions there were in Dorset in 1997; and how many there are now. [23395]

**Ms Blears:** At 31 March 1997 there were 139 pharmacies dispensing national health service prescriptions in Dorset. There are now 136.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the price per script paid to NHS pharmacy contractors for the first 1,700 items dispensed each month in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* October 2001 and *(c)* now. [23397]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* Between January and October 1992, the remuneration paid to pharmacy contractors in England for dispensing the first 1,700 prescriptions each month consisted of a fee of 151.2 pence for each of the first 1,500 prescriptions and 71.5 pence for each of the remainder. In addition, pharmacies were paid an on-cost of 5 per cent. of the basic price of the items dispensed.

In November and December 1992, the equivalent fee for each of the first 1,700 prescriptions was 159 pence, and the on-cost was 2.5 per cent.

In October 2001, the fee for each prescription dispensed was 97.5 pence. There was no on-cost, but the large majority of pharmacies dispensing 1,600 or more prescriptions in any month were eligible for a professional allowance of £1,460 per month.

The equivalent fee is now 87.4 pence. The professional allowance has not changed.

In each case, these figures exclude fees and allowances paid only for certain types of prescription.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy that the NHS should pay pharmacy contractors within 30 days of receipt of claims for the supply of drugs; and if he will make a statement. [23398]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* We have no plans to alter the current timetable for paying pharmacy contractors in England for the national health service prescriptions they dispense.

### Medicines Control Agency

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* strengthened warnings, *(b)* restrictions on the terms of marketing authorisations and *(c)* revocations of medicines have been issued by the Medicines Control Agency in the current financial year. [22086]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* In the current financial year (1 April 2001 to 10 December 2001), there have been 1,083 changes to individual sections of the summary of product characteristics to strengthen safety warnings and to restrict the conditions of their use; these relate to 805 licensed medicinal products. Of these, 595 amendments were initiated by the Medicines Control Agency while 488 were initiated by the marketing authorisation holder. In addition, five licences for two nationally authorised products, amfepramone and phentermine, and two products authorised through the European centralised procedure, Trovan and Turvel, have been revoked. Specific details of this large number of regulatory actions can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### 999 Emergency Calls

**Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the change in the number of 999 emergency calls received by each NHS ambulance trust in the latest 12 months for which figures are available. [22877]

**Ms Blears:** Information about the number of emergency calls for all NHS ambulance trusts are contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin

"Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy is in the Library and the bulletin is available at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

### Depleted Uranium

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has conducted in the last 10 years into illnesses caused by exposure to depleted uranium; what assessment has been made of the risks to health from exposure to depleted uranium used in munitions and military equipment; and if he will make a statement. [22314]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The Department is advised on matters of radiation risk by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). NRPB has not carried out any research specifically into illnesses caused by exposure to depleted uranium. However, NRPB has carried out research that is relevant to the assessment of the risks to health from such exposures. In particular NRPB has carried out extensive research into the distribution of uranium between body organs, its retention and excretion, following inhalation of a wide range of uranium compounds. It has also developed computer models that enable the concentration of uranium in the various organs and resulting radiation doses to be calculated. Depleted uranium is mildly radioactive, and NRPB's research programme on the effects of ionising radiation in general is therefore relevant to assessment of the radiological risks from exposure to depleted uranium.

NRPB staff have also contributed to studies of the risks to health from exposure to depleted uranium carried out by working groups set up by the European Commission, the Royal Society, and the World Health Organisation. Reports from each have been published during 2001.

The Department also knows of four academic groups which have been active in reviewing the risks from depleted uranium; they are the Royal Society Depleted Uranium Working Group, the British Geological Survey, the University of Bristol Department of Earth Sciences and the Southampton Oceanic Centre.

### Social Care

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide additional financial support for social care for vulnerable people in Somerset; and if he will make a statement. [22444]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The Department is planning to provide significant additional financial support for social care for the vulnerable people in Somerset. In 2002–03, Somerset County Council's social services standard spending assessment is set to increase to just over £77 million, this represents a 5.9 per cent. cash increase over 2001–02. In addition, they will receive increases in the overall level of the grants paid directly by this Department next year. This follows on from a 5.7 per cent. increase in their total social services resources in 2001–02.

### NHS Charges

**Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to remove charges on those NHS *(a)* treatments, *(b)* services and *(c)* prescriptions for which a charge is payable by the patient at the point of use; [22238]

(2) if he will list the NHS *(a)* treatments, *(b)* services and *(c)* prescriptions for which a charge is levied on the patient at the point of use. [22239]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* A charge is made for dental treatment provided through general or personal dental services, and for some appliances provided to hospital outpatients, to patients who are not exempt from these charges.

A prescription charge is made for most drugs and listed appliances supplied to outpatients, or in the community, to patients who are not exempt from these charges. 85 per cent. of items are dispensed free of charge.

A charge is made for wigs and fabric supports supplied to outpatients who are not exempt from these charges.

Patients who are not residents of the United Kingdom may be asked to pay for some NHS hospital treatment. Full details of the treatments and services subject to such charges are contained in the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989, as amended.

We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Items which are considered additional to an individual's necessary care plan may be provided for a fee by a national health service trust using its income generation powers. There is no information held centrally on charges made in these circumstances.

### Patient Services (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the patient advocacy and liaison services that exist in the Buckingham constituency. [23718]

**Ms Blears:** There is a Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) at the Vale of Aylesbury Primary Care Trust. PALS have also been established at Buckinghamshire Mental Health National Health Service Trust, Milton Keynes General NHS Trust, Milton Keynes Primary Care Trust and South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust.

### Homelessness

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* targets, *(b)* guidelines and *(c)* financial assistance his Department will provide to ensure health authorities under the single assessment process address the risk of homelessness and the health and social care needs of homeless people. [23289]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* Guidance on the single assessment process sets targets for implementation which will raise the standard of assessment for all older people, wherever they present for treatment or help. There will be no specific targets in the guidance relating to homeless older people, but by providing a more standardised co-ordinated approach it should better address the needs of those who do not have consistent and regular access to health and social care facilities.

## NHS Complaints

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints have been made by NHS patients in Surrey in each of the past five years. [23409]

**Ms Blears:** The information requested is contained in "Handling Complaints: Monitoring the NHS Complaints Procedures" statistical report. Copies are available in the Library.

## Private Care Homes

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds there were in the private care home sector in Surrey in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [23421]

**Jacqui Smith:** The table shows the number of registered beds in voluntary and private sector residential and nursing care homes in Surrey as at 31 March 1997 and 2001.

*Private sector care home beds—at 31 March*

*Number*

| *Year* | *Total private sector[1] care beds in the private sector* | *Private sector[1] residential care beds* | *Registered nursing care beds[2]* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1997[3] | 8,941 | 5,547 | 3,394 |
| 2001 | 10,923 | 6,111 | 4,812 |

[1] Residential places in voluntary, private and small homes (with less than four places), including dual registered homes.
[2] All registered nursing beds in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics are in the private sector. Figures shown are for the health authorities of East Surrey and West Surrey.
[3] Information on nursing beds relates to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.
*Source:*
Department of Health annual returns

## Food Standards Agency

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department was informed *(a)* that the Food Standards Agency planned to make its statement regarding sodium in bread on 29 November and *(b)* of the contents of the statement ahead of its release. [23881]

**Yvette Cooper:** The Department was aware that the Food Standards Agency had commissioned the survey on sodium in bread, and received prior notice of the FSA's intention to make a statement and its contents.

## Social Services Staff

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of those working in social services hold a listed qualification in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* each region. [23976]

**Jacqui Smith:** In England we have not been collecting data about the qualifications of all social services staff on a regular basis. There is an annual social services work force analysis report which has been considering the work force in local councils only.

The information about staff qualifications in this report has varied from year to year, looking at staff dealing with different client groups each year. The latest published report is for 1999, the report for 2000 will be published in January 2002. A copy of the 1999 report can be found on the Employers Organisation website at: http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk/documents/esru/sswmain99.pdf.

The report contains the following data about qualifications:

| *Description of work undertaken* | *Percentage of staff with a qualification* |
|---|---|
| Occupational Therapists | 98 |
| Community Workers | 38 |
| *Day centres* | |
| Mainly for Elderly People and Elderly Mentally Infirm People[1] | 39 |
| Mainly for People under 65 with Physical Disabilities[1] | 41 |
| Mainly for Adults with Learning Disabilities[1] | 35 |
| Mixed Client Groups[1] | 31 |
| Community Homes for Children Looked After[1] | 37 |

[1] The percentage relates to all care staff that are working in that day centre/home

Data about the social care work force in the independent and voluntary sectors have been obtained through "ad-hoc" surveys which have concentrated on particular client group areas. However, from this year data will be collected from social care employers in the independent sector as part of the annual social services work force analysis report.

Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved Assemblies.

## Agency Nurses

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS spent on agency nursing staff in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* each component nation in the last year for which figures are available. [23979]

**Mr. Hutton:** The current provisional figure for expenditure on non-national health service staffing in England in 2000–01, including the cost of nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, is £447 million. It is not possible to identify separately, the cost of agency nursing staff with this total.

The figures for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved Administrations.

## Traditional Medicines Directive

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the adoption of the proposed Traditional Medicines Directive on the future availability of products currently on sale in the UK. [23285]

**Ms Blears:** The European Commission has indicated that it plans to bring forward formal legislative proposals shortly. Once we receive these proposals we will need to consider them carefully. However, on the basis of an assessment of early informal drafts of the proposals, our provisional view is that a wide range of herbal remedies of the kind currently sold legally under Section 12(2) of the Medicines Act 1968 would continue to be available.

### NHS Training

**Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much it costs to train *(a)* a nurse and *(b)* a doctor. [23895]

**Mr. Hutton:** The latest year for which figures are available show that in 2000–01 the national average estimated cost of training a nurse was £13,000 per annum. These costs are inclusive of tuition, bursary and salary support costs. Most courses are of three years duration.

In the period between entry to medical school and full registration, it is estimated that training a doctor costs between £200,000 and £250,000. Doctors generally continue training after full registration. As the duration and nature of post-registration training varies greatly and as service and training costs are closely related it is not possible to provide a meaningful estimate of the total cost of training.

### Ring-fenced Funds

**Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds allocated by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its executive agencies are ring-fenced for specific purposes; and if he will list the allocations of funds involved. [22954]

**Jacqui Smith:** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Bournewood Community and Mental Health NHS Trust

**Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long the Bournewood Community and Mental Health NHS Trust will remain in existence; and what will be the cost of *(a)* consulting on and *(b)* implementing a change of name. [23331]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The trust, to be named North West Surrey Mental Health Partnership Trust from 1 April 2002, will remain in existence for a minimum of one year. Between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003 the new strategic health authority will conduct a review of mental health services across West Surrey and will consult on the proposed changes.

Information on the costs incurred from the change of name is not available centrally.

### National Care Standards Commission

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* health authority and *(b)* local authority inspection officers there are and how many of them have been matched to area manager positions in the National Care Standards Commission. [24185]

**Jacqui Smith:** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The number of inspectors who have been identified as eligible to transfer to the National Care Standards Commission is 1,192, of which 931 are from local authority units and 261 are from health authority units. No inspection officers were matched to area manager positions in the National Care Standards Commission. The area manager position is a new level of post, with no comparable equivalent in local authorities or health authorities. Posts were filled through a competitive recruitment exercise, with applications ringfenced to managers in the current 74 health authority, 123 local authority and 17 joint local and health authority registration and inspection units in England. 161 applications were received: 45 from health authority managers, 107 from local authority managers, and nine from managers of joint units. 15 applicants from health authority units were successful, compared with 54 from local authority units, and seven from joint health/local authority units.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* consultation has been undertaken by and *(b)* formal guidance and information his Department and the National Care Standards Commission have provided to health authorities and local authorities regarding the implementation of arrangements for the transfer of staff to the NCSC. [24182]

**Jacqui Smith:** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The Department and the National Care Standards Commission have consulted widely over the summer of 2001 with staff in local authorities and health authorities who are eligible to transfer to the National Care Standards Commission, on the terms and conditions of employment, pay arrangements, and arrangements for assigning transferring staff to posts. Discussions have been held regularly with the trade unions (Royal College of Nursing, Unison, MSF, GMB), who have also consulted their members on proposals. Staff were invited to respond to the consultation exercises through a dedicated staff helpline, attendance at regional roadshows in July, or by correspondence directly to the Department or National Care Standards Commission. All staff eligible to transfer were issued with guidance on the assignment process on 24 August 2001.

The Department has issued guidance on the transitional arrangements, including movement of staff into National Care Standards Commission offices, in Health Service Circular HSC 2001/011: Local Authority Circular LAC (2001)16 "Transition Arrangements for the Creation of the National Care Standards Commission", issued on 15 May 2001.

### Re-admissions

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1036W, what the four main medical reasons for re-admission as emergency within 28 days for those over 75 years of age were *(a)* in numbers re-admitted and *(b)* as a percentage in (1) Q3 2000–01, (ii) Q4 2000–01 and (iii) Q1 2001–02, by (A) region and (B) health authority. [24044]

**Jacqui Smith:** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

### Care Home Places

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what exemption in the Ministerial Code on Access to Information he declined to publish the results of the survey of local authorities undertaken by his Department in autumn 2000 to determine the available supply of care home places. [24184]

**Jacqui Smith:** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The information related to incomplete statistics, where disclosure could be misleading (exemption 11(a)). The latest complete and validated data on the supply of care home places were published on 29 November in "Community Care Statistics 2001: Residential Personal Social Services for Adults, England", copies of which are available in the Library.

### NHS University

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to apply for the Royal Charter for the NHS University. [24440]

**Mr. Hutton:** Our aim is to create a university with award granting powers and a Royal Charter, with the same status as existing universities. Before a university can be created and awarded a Royal Charter, the Department for Education and Skills applies very rigorous processes and standards. It is recognised that this will take time. As the institution grows, we believe we can meet the required standards and at such time an application for a Royal Charter will be made.

### Kent Ambulance NHS Trust

**Hugh Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce the results of the review into the Kent Ambulance NHS Trust. [20410]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The decision on the review will be announced shortly.

### Haemophilia Drugs

**Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures he has collated on the price paid in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* each other EU country, *(c)* the USA and *(d)* Japan for rcFVIII for the treatment of haemophiliacs. [22326]

**Yvette Cooper:** The current average price for a unit of Recombinant Factor 8 in England is approximately 58 pence, including value added tax. The approximate number of units used in the UK is estimated to be 110 million.

Information is not available regarding other European Union countries, the United States of America or Japan.

**Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many overseas patients in the UK *(a)* under and *(b)* over 16 years of age are being treated with rcFVIII products. [22276]

**Yvette Cooper:** The information requested is not collected centrally.

### NHS Staff

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of total NHS spending on personnel expenditure on non-national health service nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff represented in the financial years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [23661]

**Mr. Hutton:** The table shows the hospital and community health services expenditure on non-NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff as a percentage of total revenue expenditure on salaries and wages in England, for the financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01. The non-NHS staff figures include all nurses, midwives and health visiting staff not directly employed by the NHS. The 2000–01 figures are the latest available and are provisional.

*Analysis of non-NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff expenditure as a percentage of total revenue expenditure on salaries and wages 1997–98 to 2000–01*

| | *Non-NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff expenditure (£)* | *Total revenue expenditure on salaries and wages (£)* | *Non-NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff expenditure as a percentage of total revenue expenditure on salaries and wages (%)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 216,338,567 | 16,098,946,553 | 1.34 |
| 1998–99 | 272,225,162 | 17,081,105,039 | 1.59 |
| 1999–2000 | 361,656,683 | 18,708,225,971 | 1.93 |
| 2000–01 | 434,390,608 | 20,481,862,060 | 2.12 |

*Note:*
2000–01 data are provisional.
*Sources:*
1. Annual financial returns of NHS trusts, 1997–98 to 2000–01
2. Annual financial returns of health authorities, 1997–98 to 2000–01
3. Annual financial returns of primary care trusts, 2000–01

### British Overseas Territories

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on responsibility for health in British Overseas Territories. [24439]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I have been asked to reply.

Health services are the responsibility of all the locally elected Governments in the territories. Some have entered into reciprocal Health Agreements with the United Kingdom for referrals of serious cases where inadequate facilities exist. These are: Gibraltar, Falkland Islands, Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, Montserrat and St. Helena.

### International Recruitment

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health who has *(a)* ministerial and *(b)* operational responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the Code of Practice for Employers involved in the international recruitment of healthcare professionals; how implementation of the Code is being monitored; who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Code by NHS trusts; and if he will publish details of *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* nursing agencies which do not confirm to the Code. [24033]

**Mr. Hutton** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* I have responsibility for international recruitment. I expect all national health service employers to adhere to the code of practice. A director of international recruitment and regional international recruitment co-ordinators have been appointed to work closely with the employers in their area to ensure that they are recruiting within the principles of the code, including how they are working with commercial recruitment agencies.

### Nutrition

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations *(a)* by region and *(b)* by health

authority were (i) cancelled and (ii) re-scheduled due to poor nutritional status of patients in the age ranges *(a)* 0–15 years, *(b)* 16–59 years, *(c)* 60–75 years and *(d)* 75 years over in each quarter of the last five years for which figures are available. [24035]

**Mr. Hutton:** Data on the number of operations cancelled at the last minute and on the number of patients not admitted within one month of their cancellation, by region and health authority, for the time periods requested, are available in the Library.

Data are not collected on the reasons for last minute cancellations, or on the age range of patients cancelled.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 682–83W, on nutrition, what *(a)* targets, *(b)* guidelines and *(c)* financial assistance he will provide to ensure health authorities address issues of malnutrition under the single assessment process. [24041]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* Guidance on the single assessment process sets targets for implementation which will raise the standard of assessment for all older people. Nutrition and diet are specified as one of the domains of need that are covered in the overview type of assessment, and which may go on to be explored in more detail in a specialist assessment. It is anticipated that resources for the implementation of the single assessment process will be found within existing budgets.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department has given to the Department for Education and Skills regarding promoting nutrition in schools. [24671]

**Yvette Cooper:** The Department works closely with the Department for Education and Skills on promoting nutrition in schools, principally through the Food in Schools programme. This aims to bring together all food related initiatives in schools and after-school clubs to improve both health and learning, and ensure consistent messages are being given about health and nutrition.

In addition, the Healthy Schools Programme is a joint initiative between the Department and the Department for Education and Skills. This includes healthy eating as part of the National Healthy School Standard. To meet the standard schools need to present consistent messages about healthy eating, promote the consumption of healthier foods at lunch and breaktimes and include education on healthy eating in the taught curriculum.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to increase the number of nutritionists in the NHS. [24303]

**Mr. Hutton:** The Department does not collect data on the number of nutritionists employed in the national health service and has not set a target for increasing the number to be employed.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 682–83W, on nutrition, *(a)* how many and *(b)* which of the six key targets under the Better Hospital Food Programme by (i) region and (ii) health authority will be fully delivered by the end of December. [24040]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The information available, though not in the precise format requested, is shown in the table.

The better hospital food programme forms part of the NHS Plan, and is a long-term programme designed to raise standards across the national health service, backed by the provision of an additional £38.5 million over four years. Much has been achieved since the publication of the programme in May 2001. Since hospitals started from different points, some have made faster progress than others, but the NHS has responded positively and will continue to work to implement the better hospital food programme for the benefit of all patients.

*Numbers of hospitals in the acute and non-acute sectors, by region where the six elements of the Better Hospital Food programme will be in place by 31 December 2001*

| | Region | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Element* | *South West* | *London* | *Eastern* | *South East* | *Northern and Yorkshire* | *Northwestern* | *Trent* | *West Midlands* |
| *Acute* | | | | | | | | |
| Number of acute hospitals/region | 41 | 46 | 35 | 63 | 52 | 46 | 26 | 36 |
| Snack boxes | 20 | 25 | 15 | 33 | 28 | 28 | 20 | 20 |
| Ward kitchens | 22 | 24 | 14 | 38 | 31 | 26 | 22 | 24 |
| Move main meal | 16 | 34 | 7 | 31 | 34 | 24 | 17 | 21 |
| Menu format | 11 | 19 | 5 | 10 | 22 | 16 | 6 | 19 |
| Leading chef | 16 | 27 | 16 | 21 | 29 | 26 | 18 | 17 |
| Additional snacks | 15 | 29 | 19 | 37 | 23 | 26 | 21 | 25 |
| *Non-acute and PCT* | | | | | | | | |
| Number of non-acute hospitals/region | 117 | 69 | 62 | 105 | 67 | 56 | 62 | 63 |
| Snack boxes | 71 | 16 | 31 | 33 | 28 | 27 | 11 | 20 |
| Ward kitchens | 100 | 50 | 53 | 73 | 40 | 38 | 30 | 51 |
| Move main meal | 51 | 34 | 23 | 23 | 35 | 18 | 22 | 29 |
| Menu format | 56 | 18 | 15 | 45 | 28 | 4 | 20 | 38 |
| Leading chef | 71 | 35 | 35 | 55 | 45 | 27 | 37 | 33 |
| Additional snacks | 89 | 56 | 42 | 70 | 42 | 14 | 55 | 58 |

*Note:*

Certain non-acute hospitals have been given flexibility to vary the requirements of the programme to reflect the specific needs of elderly mentally ill, adult mental health and learning disabilities clients.

## GPs

**Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to the NHS (General Medical Services) Amendment (No. 4) Regulations (SI No. 3742) and the NHS (General Medical Services Supplementary List) Regulations 2001 (SI No. 3740), whether it is his policy that there should be a requirement on health authorities to provide information to general practitioners to support the allegations being made against them. [23821]

**Mr. Hutton** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* Before a health authority decides to remove a doctor from either the medical or supplementary list under discretionary powers the regulations require it to:

(i) give the doctor notice in writing of any allegation against him;

(ii) give the doctor notice of what action the health authority is considering and on what grounds;

(iii) give him the opportunity to make written representations to the health authority;

(iv) give him the opportunity to put his case at an oral hearing before the health authority.

These matters are addressed more fully in advice, prepared in consultation with key stakeholders, including the British Medical Association. This advice was made available to health authorities on 30 November 2001 and explains that the doctor should be sent full details, including any written evidence, of the case against him no less than 14 calendar days prior to the date set for the panel.

This advice is available on the Department's website.

**Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to Regulation 6(2)(a) of the NHS (General Medical Services Supplementary List) Regulations 2001 (SI No. 3740), whether it is his policy to require a general practitioner, in order to gain access to a health authority's supplementary list, to provide evidence that he or she has performed general medical services for three out of the last six months; and what assessment he has made of whether this would disadvantage doctors who have not worked for three out of six months previously owing to *(a)* ill health, *(b)* maternity or paternity leave and *(c)* other valid reasons. [23823]

**Mr. Hutton** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The regulations are intended to ensure that general practitioners who work as non-principals (for example, locums, assistants and salaried general practitioners) are picked up by a supplementary list based in the area in which they intend to work. They get onto that list, in part, by either demonstrating that they have worked in the area or by showing that they intend to work in that area. These arrangements are therefore not discriminatory.

These matters are addressed more fully in advice to the national health service, prepared in consultation with key stakeholders, including the British Medical Association. This advice was made available to health authorities on 30 November 2001 and explains that satisfactory evidence of an intention to work in a particular area could include membership of the local medical committee or a written commitment from the practitioner that he or she intends to work locally coupled with any other matter which links them with the area such as a home within the health authority's area.

This advice is available on the Department's website.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs he estimates will be 60 or above in each of the next five years. [24429]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*Headcount*

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| All Practitioners[1] | 31,369 |
| *of which aged:* | |
| 54 | 822 |
| 55 | 716 |
| 56 | 764 |
| 57 | 606 |
| 58 | 532 |
| 59 | 449 |
| Total aged 54 to 59 | 3,889 |
| Total aged 60 and over | 1,938 |
| All UPEs[2] | 27,704 |
| *of which aged:* | |
| 54 | 802 |
| 55 | 696 |
| 56 | 741 |
| 57 | 585 |
| 58 | 514 |
| 59 | 435 |
| Total aged 54 to 59 | 3,773 |
| Total aged 60 and over | 1,764 |

[1] Practitioners include UPEs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA), PMS Other and GP Retainers.

[2] Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs) includes GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.

*Source:*

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham will receive a reply to his letter of 15 November, to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), regarding the exclusion of Worthing from his scheme to incentivise general practitioner recruitment. [24678]

**Mr. Hutton:** A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 19 December 2001.

## Surgical Instruments

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce standardised, mandatory training for *(a)* doctors and *(b)* surgeons in the use of re-usable surgical instruments. [24634]

**Mr. Hutton:** The Specialist Training Authority (STA) of the medical Royal Colleges is the competent authority responsible for specialist medical training within the United Kingdom. Working with the individual medical Royal Colleges, the STA approves the curriculum for training in each specialty.

## Hodgkin's Disease

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women suffer from Hodgkin's disease in England. [24694]

**Yvette Cooper:** Recent information on prevalence of Hodgkin's disease is not available. The number of registrations of newly diagnosed cases of Hodgkin's disease in England in 1998 (the latest year for which figures are available) were 675 in males and 512 in females.

## Nurses

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many practice nurses are employed by general practitioners in *(a)* England, *(b)* West Midlands and *(c)* the Dudley area. [23704]

**Yvette Cooper:** The data for 2000 are shown in the table. The 2001 census will be published in February 2002.

*Practice nurses employed by unrestricted principals and equivalents (PEs)[1] in England and West Midlands regional office as at 30 September 2000*

| | *Headcount* |
|---|---|
| England | 19,200 |
| *of which:* | |
| *West Midlands RO* | |
| Birmingham HA | 426 |
| Coventry HA | 142 |
| Dudley HA | 100 |
| Herefordshire HA | 67 |
| North Staffordshire HA | 196 |
| Sandwell HA | 122 |
| Shropshire HA | 155 |
| Solihull HA | 77 |
| South Staffordshire HA | 261 |
| Walsall HA | 101 |
| Warwickshire HA | 144 |
| Wolverhampton HA | 113 |
| Worcestershire HA | 200 |
| West Midland total | 2,104 |

[1] UPEs include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.

*Source:*
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics—February 2002.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses recruited into the NHS in each of the last three years have come from overseas. [24658]

**Mr. Hutton:** The Department's non-medical work force census does not record how many nurses were trained overseas.

In order to work in the United Kingdom foreign nurses have to be registered with the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC). The UKCC register differentiates between nurses trained in the European Community and those trained elsewhere. Data for the last three years where analysis have been published are in the table.

Nurses registered with the UKCC do not necessarily work in the NHS.

| | *Year to 31 March 1998* | *Year to 31 March 1999* | *Year to 31 March 2000* |
|---|---|---|---|
| EC initial entrants | 1,439 | 1,412 | 1,416 |
| Overseas initial entrants | 2,861 | 3,568 | 5,967 |
| Total | 4,300 | 4,980 | 7,404 |

*Source:*
UKCC statistical analysis of the professional register

## Cot Death

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what systems and services are in place to help parents of cot death babies; [24657]

(2) what services are available for families affected by sudden infant death syndrome; [24653]

(3) what plans he has to ensure that all post-mortems on cot death babies are conducted by a paediatric pathologist. [24654]

**Yvette Cooper:** Families affected by the tragedy of cot death, also known as sudden infant death syndrome, receive help from a range of health and social care professionals. We are looking at ways in which a uniform approach to offering support, incorporating the best elements of current practice, can be further developed. As a part of this process we have invested £28 million over the last three years to modernise pathology services, also we are committed to increasing the number of pathologists, including those within paediatric pathology.

## Delayed Discharges

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds in NHS hospitals in Greater London were occupied by delayed discharge patients at the latest available date. [24632]

**Jacqui Smith:** Information collected in Quarter 2 of 2001–02 (September 2001) showed a rate of delayed discharge of 6.5 per cent. (proportion of beds occupied by patients whose discharge is delayed) in the London Region.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent of bed blocking in *(a)* the south- east and *(b)* other regions in the United Kingdom. [24673]

**Jacqui Smith:** The table shows the rate of delayed discharge in each national health service region for quarter 2 of 2001–02:

*Delayed discharge rate for all ages per region for Q2 2001–02*

| | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| Northern and Yorkshire | 5.6 |
| Trent | 3.3 |
| West Midlands | 7.7 |
| North-west | 4.1 |
| Eastern | 7.6 |
| London | 6.5 |
| South-east | 10.3 |
| South-west | 7.1 |

We are investing an additional £300 million over this year and next as part of a radical 'cash for change' programme. This is aimed at further reducing delayed discharges and targeted on the areas with the most serious problems.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many delayed discharges there were in the Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and South East Hampshire NHS Trusts in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000. [22377]

**Ms Blears** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* Information collected centrally on delayed discharges for the years 1997–2000 in the Isle of Wight health authority and Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority areas has been placed in the Library. Information is also available for Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority, which was formed in April 2001.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1036W, what the five predominant reasons for delayed discharge of those over 75 years of age were *(a)* in number of cases for each reason and *(b)* as a percentage for (i) Q3 2000–01, (ii) Q4 2000–01 and (iii) Q1 2000–02, by (A) region and (B) health authority. [24045]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library. This does not include information requested on quarter 1 2001–02 figures for those over 75 years of age, since from April 2001 figures on reasons for delay are only collected on the basis of patients of all ages. The information has been supplied for patients of all ages in quarter 1 2001–02.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1036W, what the average length of delay for those over 75 years of age was in *(a)* Q3 2000–01, *(b)* Q4 2000–01 and *(c)* Q1 2001–02, by (i) region and (ii) health authority. [24043]

**Jacqui Smith:** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* No information was collected centrally about the length of delay for patients with delayed discharge until the first quarter of 2001–02. The information on the breakdown in length of delay for patients of all ages in quarter 1 of 2001–02 has been placed in the Library.

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1036W, on delayed discharges, if he will set out *(a)* by region and *(b)* by health authority the mortality rate for those readmitted over 75 years of age (i) in re-admission and (ii) within 30 days of readmission in (A) Q3 2000–01, (B) Q4 2000–01, and (C) Q1 2001–02. [24046]

**Jacqui Smith:** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

## Bed Blocking

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the last two years in reducing incidents of bed blocking in the NHS. [23965]

**Jacqui Smith:** In September 1999 the rate of delayed discharge for patients over 75 was 12.8 per cent., while in September 2001 the comparable figure was 12.1 per cent. To increase the reduction further we are investing an additional £300 million over this year and next as part of a radical 'cash for change' programme in England. This is aimed at further reducing delayed discharges and targeted on the areas with the most serious problems.

## Chronic Respiratory Disease

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the ratio of respiratory specialists in England to people suffering from a chronic respiratory disease; [24705]

(2) how many respiratory specialists are practising in England. [24706]

**Mr. Hutton:** As at 30 September 2000, there were 950 hospital medical staff within the respiratory medicine speciality in England, of which 440 were consultants.

Our projections show that there will be an increase of around 150 trained specialists in respiratory medicine available to take up consultant posts by 2004.

Information is not collected centrally about the number of people suffering from chronic respiratory disease, so we are unable to provide the ratio requested.

## HIV/AIDS

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates his Department has made of the number of people in England who will be *(a)* HIV positive and *(b)* suffering from AIDS in (i) 2008, (ii) 2012 and (iii) 2018. [24702]

**Yvette Cooper:** The information requested is not available. Estimates of the projected prevalence of diagnosed HIV infection in England and Wales for the next four years are currently being made and will be published in the next few months.

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in England are HIV positive; and how many were HIV positive in (i) 2000, (ii) 1999, (iii) 1998 and (iv) 1997; [24703]

(2) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in England suffer from AIDS; and how many suffered from AIDS in each year since 1997. [24704]

**Yvette Cooper:** The information requested is shown in the table. The latest complete year's data available are for 2000.

*Individuals with diagnosed HIV infection seen for related treatment and care who are resident in England*

| | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *HIV* | | | | |
| Male | 14,273 | 13,035 | 14,389 | 15,826 |
| Female | 3,294 | 3,266 | 3,991 | 5,025 |
| Total[1] | 17,639 | 16,306 | 18,392 | 20,855 |
| Adjusted total[2] | 20,091 | 18,931 | 21,114 | 23,962 |
| *AIDS* | | | | |
| Male | 3,545 | 3,830 | 4,010 | 4,152 |
| Female | 779 | 842 | 967 | 1,138 |
| Total[1] | 4,331 | 4,672 | 4,977 | 5,290 |

[1] Includes reports with sex not known
[2] The adjusted total allows for estimated under-reporting and the fact that some patients do not attend for care in a given year
*Source:*
Public Health Laboratory Service

## Breast Cancer

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the possible use of aromatase inhibitors in the treatment of post-menopausal women suffering from breast cancer; and if he will make a statement. [24720]

**Yvette Cooper:** Aromatase inhibitors (eg Arimidex, Femera) are licensed for use in the United Kingdom for the treatment of advanced breast cancer in post menopausal women and so can be prescribed for use in the national health service for patients who meet the licensed criteria.

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of men who suffer from breast cancer in England. [24701]

**Yvette Cooper:** Breast cancer in men is very rare. Latest figures indicate 269 men were diagnosed with the disease in 1998.

## Waiting Lists

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the last two months for which figures are available the number of people in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area waiting *(a)* for hospital treatment and *(b)* more than 12 months for hospital treatment. [24711]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*Total number of patients waiting and the number of patients waiting over 12 months for hospital treatment at Mid-Essex Hospital Services national health service trust in October 2001*

| Month | Total waiting | Number waiting over 12 months |
|---|---|---|
| September 2001 | 8,968 | 683 |
| October 2001 | 8,657 | 627 |

*Source:*
Monthly waiting list return

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area were waiting more than 13 weeks to see a consultant in each of the last two quarters for which figures are available. [24647]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*Total number of patients waiting 13 weeks or more for an outpatient appointment at Mid-Essex hospital services national health service trust in Quarter 1 2001–02 and Quarter 2 2001–02*

| | Number of patients waiting over 13 weeks |
|---|---|
| Quarter 1 2001/02 | 2,146 |
| Quarter 2 2001/02 | 2,439 |

*Source:*
QM08 returns

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each month since June the number of people in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area waiting up to *(a)* six, *(b)* 12, *(c)* 15 and *(d)* 18 months for hospital treatment. [24633]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*The number of patients waiting more than 18 months, up to 18 months, up to 15 months, and up to 12 months for in-patient treatment at Mid-Essex hospital services national health service trust from June until the latest available monthly figures.*

| | June 2001 | July 2001 | August 2001 | September 2001 | October 2001 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number waiting less than 18 months for in-patient treatment | 8,850 | 8,898 | 8,917 | 8,968 | 8,657 |
| Number waiting less than 15 months for in-patient treatment | 8,674 | 8,723 | 8,733 | 8,828 | 8,520 |
| Number waiting less than 12 months for in-patient treatment | 8,150 | 8,184 | 8,202 | 8,285 | 8,030 |
| Number waiting less than 6 months for in-patient treatment | 5,942 | 6,001 | 5,975 | 6,113 | 5,997 |

These data are nationally published data, taken from Regional Offices Data Systems.

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each month since June how many people in Greater London were waiting up to *(a)* six months, *(b)* 12, *(c)* 15 months and *(d)* 18 months for hospital treatment. [24643]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*In-patient data for London regional office (trust based)*

| Month | Total in-patient waiting list | Of those waiting, number who have waited: Less than six months | Less than 12 months | Less than 15 months | Less than 18 months | Greater than 18 months |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| June 2001 | 160,591 | 114,215 | 150,431 | 157,960 | 160,572 | 19 |
| July 2001 | 160,865 | 115,493 | 151,134 | 158,578 | 160,840 | 25 |
| August 2001 | 161,446 | 115,640 | 151,772 | 159,072 | 161,425 | 21 |
| September 2001 | 159,094 | 113,224 | 149,597 | 156,727 | 159,067 | 27 |
| October 2001 | 156,720 | 114,018 | 148,275 | 154,840 | 156,692 | 28 |

*Source:*
KH07 quarterly return/monthly waiting times returns

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish for the last two quarters for which figures are available the number of people in Greater London waiting more than 13 weeks to see a consultant. [24652]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*Out-patient data for London regional office (trust based)*

| *Quarter* | *Number of patients still waiting over 13 weeks* |
|---|---|
| June 2001 | 62,575 |
| September 2001 | 72,193 |

*Note:*
Data are number of patients still waiting over 13 weeks at quarter end for a first out-patient appointment following GP referral
*Source:*
QM08 quarterly return

## Surgeons

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the estimated number of consultant surgeons needed in the NHS in England by June 2002; [24718]

(2) how many consultant surgeons he estimates will be practising in the NHS by June 2002; [24719]

(3) what is the projected figure for the number of consultant surgeons due to finish training by 2009–10; [24716]

(4) what is the estimated number of consultant surgeons needed in the NHS in England by 2009–10. [24715]

**Mr. Hutton:** The NHS Plan sets a target of 7,500 additional consultants by 2004, over the 1999 baseline, needed to deliver the service targets set out in the Plan. The NHS is currently identifying locally what consultants it needs to deliver the NHS Plan by 2004. We anticipate that by 2002 there will be an increase of around 340 trained specialists in the surgical specialties, over the 2000 baseline.

The Department's demand analysis suggests that by 2009–10 there could be a need for around 3,000 (headcount) additional consultant surgeons in the NHS in England, over the 2000 baseline. Around a further 1,320 trained specialists are expected to be available to take up surgical consultant posts by 2009–10, over the 2000 baseline.

We continually review future requirements for trained specialists as part of the NHS's new multi-disciplinary work force planning processes. These will look at the requirements for doctors alongside other staff focusing on the potential for new ways of working and developing new roles.

Projections of need will change as modernisation of the work force progresses. Supply projections will also change as numbers in training are varied in response to identified need.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prospective surgeons are undergoing training in the United Kingdom. [24349]

**Mr. Hutton:** On 30 September 2000, the last available date for which data are currently available, there were 7,740 doctors training in the surgical group of specialties within the national health service.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the target is for recruitment of new surgeons in England and Wales for each year up to and including 2009. [24348]

**Mr. Hutton:** We do not have targets for the recruitment of consultants in individual specialty groups. The NHS Plan sets a target of 7,500 additional consultants by 2004 over the 1999 baseline, needed to deliver the service targets set out in the Plan.

When retirements are taken into account, around a further 1,320 trained specialists are expected to be available to take up surgical consultant posts by 2009, over the 2000 baseline.

We continually review future requirements for trained specialists as part of the national health service's new multi-disciplinary work force planning processes. These will look at the requirements for doctors alongside other staff focusing on the potential for new ways of working and developing new roles.

Projections of need will change as modernisation of the work force progresses. Supply projections will also change as numbers in training are varied in response to identified need.

The information relating to Wales is a matter for the devolved Administration.

## Dialysis

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England need treatment involving a dialysis machine; and what is the ratio of patients to machines. [24651]

**Jacqui Smith:** Information from the 1998 renal survey, commissioned by the Department, is set out in the table.

| | *Adult patients* | *Stations* |
|---|---|---|
| Centre based haemodialysis | 7,788 | 1,890 |
| Home haemodialysis | 516 | 516 |

The centre-based patients have dialysis on average three times a week.

In addition there were 5,101 patients receiving peritoneal dialysis, an unknown number of whom use automated peritoneal dialysis delivered by a machine. Furthermore, a number of kidney patients will require post-transplant haemofiltration and other patients admitted with acute renal failure, often associated with major trauma, will also need haemodialysis.

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dialysis machines are operational in England. [24650]

**Jacqui Smith:** The latest information available is from the Renal Survey, commissioned by the Department, which shows that there were 2,406 dialysis stations operational in England at the end of 1998. Of these 1,021

were situated in main renal units, 761 were located in satellite renal units, 516 in patients' homes and there were 108 temporary stations.

## Care Homes

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential and nursing home beds are available in each social service area in England; and how many were available in 1997. [24626]

**Jacqui Smith:** Information on the total number of residential care in 1997 and 2001 is shown by local authority in table 1. Information on the total number of nursing care beds for the same years is shown in table 2.

*Table 1: Number of residential care places in England by local authority at 31 March*

| *Local authority* | *1997* | *2001* |
|---|---|---|
| England | 338,052 | 341,175 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 688 | 618 |
| Barnet | 2,124 | 2,346 |
| Barnsley | 1,215 | 1,758 |
| Bath and North East Somerset | 1,218 | 1,267 |
| Bedfordshire[1] | 2,923 | 2,056 |
| Berkshire | 3,944 | [2]— |
| Bexley | 716 | 914 |
| Birmingham | 5,540 | 5,503 |
| Blackburn with Darwen | [2]— | 1,329 |
| Blackpool | [2]— | 2,068 |
| Bolton | 1,171 | 1,583 |
| Bournemouth | [2]— | 2,520 |
| Bracknell Forest | [2]— | 433 |
| Bradford | 3,188 | 3,183 |
| Brent | 762 | 758 |
| Brighton and Hove | [2]— | 2,195 |
| Bristol | 2,582 | 2,568 |
| Bromley | 1,314 | 1,568 |
| Buckinghamshire | 2,438 | 2,603 |
| Bury | 1,582 | 1,796 |
| Calderdale | 1,257 | 1,207 |
| Cambridgeshire[1] | 3,629 | 2,869 |
| Camden | 937 | 803 |
| Cheshire[1] | 5,088 | 3,827 |
| City of London | 0 | 0 |
| Cornwall | 3,441 | 4,762 |
| Coventry | 2,283 | 1,875 |
| Croydon | 1,832 | 2,065 |
| Cumbria | 3,937 | 3,803 |
| Darlington | [2]— | 813 |
| Derby | [2]— | 1,439 |
| Derbyshire[1] | 6,246 | 4,868 |
| Devon[1] | 16,006 | 8,486 |
| Doncaster | 1,882 | 1,861 |
| Dorset[1] | 9,242 | 3,073 |
| Dudley | 1,633 | 1,914 |
| Durham[1] | 4,469 | 4,269 |
| Ealing | 1,316 | 1,083 |
| East Riding | 3,786 | 4,230 |
| East Sussex[1] | 10,774 | 7,078 |
| Enfield | 1,422 | 1,541 |
| Essex[1] | 10,296 | 8,221 |
| Gateshead | 1,405 | 1,525 |
| Gloucestershire | 3,737 | 4,241 |
| Greenwich | 719 | 613 |
| Hackney | 569 | 616 |
| Halton | [2]— | 830 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 490 | 336 |
| Hampshire[1] | 11,926 | 7,986 |
| Haringey | 1,001 | 1,003 |
| Harrow | 959 | 864 |
| Hartlepool | 652 | 716 |
| Havering | 1,150 | 1,077 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 5,552 | [2]— |
| Herefordshire | [2]— | 1,550 |
| Hertfordshire | 4,653 | [3]— |
| Hillingdon | 881 | 915 |
| Hounslow | 584 | 547 |
| Isle of Wight | 2,115 | 2,010 |
| Isles of Scilly | 21 | 22 |
| Islington | 680 | 484 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 557 | 357 |
| Kent[1] | 16,009 | 14,597 |
| Kingston-upon-Hull | 2,382 | 2,250 |
| Kingston-upon-Thames | 762 | 715 |
| Kirklees | 2,193 | 2,488 |
| Knowsley | 640 | 693 |
| Lambeth | 1,355 | 1,031 |
| Lancashire[1] | 15,072 | 11,638 |
| Leeds | 3,753 | 3,951 |
| Leicester | [2]— | 2,370 |
| Leicestershire[1] | 5,960 | 3,995 |
| Lewisham | 1,027 | 948 |
| Lincolnshire | 5,049 | 5,425 |
| Liverpool | 1,888 | 2,693 |
| Luton | [2]— | 863 |
| Manchester | 2,493 | 2,417 |
| Medway Towns | [2]— | 1,331 |
| Merton | 620 | 607 |
| Middlesbrough | 808 | 1,014 |
| Milton Keynes | [2]— | 823 |
| Newcastle-upon-Tyne | 1,545 | 1,714 |
| Newham | 584 | 581 |
| Norfolk | 7,057 | 7,476 |
| North East Lincolnshire | 1,436 | 1,469 |
| North Lincolnshire | 1,347 | 1,295 |
| North Somerset | 2,232 | 2,173 |
| North Tyneside | 1,771 | 1,777 |
| North Yorkshire | 5,617 | 5,093 |
| Northamptonshire | 4,534 | 4,387 |
| Northumberland | 2,626 | 2,845 |
| Nottingham | [2]— | 2,022 |
| Nottinghamshire[1] | 6,432 | 5,573 |
| Oldham | 1,385 | 1,466 |
| Oxfordshire | 2,832 | 2,721 |
| Peterborough | [2]— | 709 |
| Plymouth | [2]— | 2,500 |
| Poole | [2]— | 1,049 |
| Portsmouth | [2]— | 1,596 |
| Reading | [2]— | 777 |
| Redbridge | 1,024 | 1,054 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 1,173 | 1,172 |
| Richmond-upon-Thames | 909 | 902 |
| Rochdale | 1,157 | 1,304 |
| Rotherham | 1,369 | 1,673 |
| Rutland | [2]— | 275 |
| Salford | 1,324 | 1,290 |
| Sandwell | 1,120 | 1,239 |
| Sefton | 3,389 | 3,132 |
| Sheffield | 2,788 | 3,173 |
| Shropshire[1] | 3,085 | 2,734 |
| Slough | [2]— | 310 |
| Solihull | 764 | 926 |
| Somerset | 3,380 | 4,101 |
| South Gloucestershire | 1,224 | 1,332 |
| South Tyneside | 1,282 | 1,205 |
| Southampton | [2]— | 1,527 |
| Southend | [2]— | 2,059 |
| Southwark | 694 | 701 |
| St. Helens | 750 | 804 |
| Staffordshire[1] | 8,202 | 4,825 |
| Stockport | 1,387 | 1,756 |
| Stockton-on-Tees | 961 | 969 |
| Stoke-on-Trent | [2]— | 1,991 |

*Table 1: Number of residential care places in England by local authority at 31 March*

| *Local authority* | *1997* | *2001* |
|---|---|---|
| Suffolk | 4,355 | 4,462 |
| Sunderland | 1,525 | 1,878 |
| Surrey | 7,305 | 6,628 |
| Sutton | 866 | 851 |
| Swindon | [2]— | 930 |
| Tameside | 1,209 | 1,195 |
| Telford and Wrekin | [2]— | 697 |
| Thurrock | [2]— | 499 |
| Torbay | [2]— | 2,706 |
| Tower Hamlets | 585 | 468 |
| Trafford | 1,002 | 1,286 |
| Wakefield | 1,312 | 1,940 |
| Walsall | 848 | 1,388 |
| Waltham Forest | 1,114 | 1,261 |
| Wandsworth | 1,224 | 1,156 |
| Warrington | [2]— | 876 |
| Warwickshire | 2,741 | 2,797 |
| West Berkshire | [2]— | 630 |
| West Sussex | 8,234 | 8,247 |
| Westminster | 597 | 559 |
| Wigan | 1,456 | 1,380 |
| Wiltshire | 4,513 | 3,061 |
| Windsor and Maidenhead | [2]— | 596 |
| Wirral | 2,748 | 2,596 |
| Wokingham | [2]— | 805 |
| Wolverhampton | 1,327 | 1,120 |
| Worcestershire | [2]— | 3,530 |
| York | 1,218 | 1,101 |

[1] Shire authority affected by local government reorganisation
[2] Not applicable—authority affected by local government reorganisation
[3] Information not available
*Source:*
Department of Health's annual returns

*Table 2: Number of registered nursing care beds in England by health authority at 31 March*

| *Health authority* | *1997*[1] | *2001* |
|---|---|---|
| England | 197,514 | 186,828 |
| Avon | 4,877 | 5,125 |
| Barking and Havering | 647 | 1,015 |
| Barnet | 1,031 | 935 |
| Barnsley | 1,049 | 792 |
| Bedfordshire | 998 | 1,520 |
| Berkshire | 2,007 | 1,879 |
| Bexley and Greenwich | 558 | 867 |
| Birmingham | 2,966 | 2,889 |
| Bradford | 3,230 | 3,765 |
| Brent and Harrow | 906 | 1,405 |
| Bromley | 1,094 | 995 |
| Buckinghamshire | 1,735 | 1,951 |
| Bury and Rochdale | 2,276 | 1,647 |
| Calderdale and Kirklees | 2,389 | 2,472 |
| Cambridge | 1,063 | 2,042 |
| Camden and Islington | 265 | 457 |
| Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly | 2,710 | 3,180 |
| County Durham | 4,207 | 3,251 |
| Coventry | 542 | 630 |
| Croydon | 1,004 | 1,013 |
| Doncaster | 971 | 807 |
| Dorset | 3,656 | 3,086 |
| Dudley | 1,045 | 1,236 |
| Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow | 789 | 1,250 |
| East and North Hertfordshire | 1,526 | 1,184 |
| East Kent | 2,412 | 1,892 |
| East Lancashire | 3,003 | 1,957 |
| East London and The City | 635 | 855 |
| East Riding | 1,856 | 1,577 |
| East Surrey | 2,244 | 2,617 |
| East Sussex, Brighton and Hove | 4,628 | 4,368 |

*Table 2: Number of registered nursing care beds in England by health authority at 31 March*

| *Health authority* | *1997*[1] | *2001* |
|---|---|---|
| Enfield and Haringey | 904 | 1,129 |
| Gateshead and South Tyneside | 1,462 | 1,363 |
| Gloucestershire | 4,047 | 3,064 |
| Herefordshire | 532 | 695 |
| Hillingdon | 455 | 489 |
| Isle of Wight | 457 | 356 |
| Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster | 1,582 | 1,578 |
| Kingston and Richmond | 929 | 842 |
| Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham | 1,592 | 1,925 |
| Leeds | 2,321 | 2,469 |
| Leicestershire | 2,463 | 1,623 |
| Lincolnshire | 4,129 | 3,185 |
| Liverpool | 2,734 | 2,991 |
| Manchester | 2,169 | 1,721 |
| Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth | 2,243 | 2,540 |
| Morecambe Bay | 1,051 | 1,138 |
| Newcastle and North Tyneside | 1,749 | 1,696 |
| Norfolk | 2,110 | 2,959 |
| North and East Devon | 2,617 | 2,020 |
| North and Mid Hampshire | 1,586 | 1,731 |
| North Cheshire | 1,445 | 1,467 |
| North Cumbria | 919 | 831 |
| North Derbyshire | 2,101 | 1,937 |
| North Essex | 2,590 | 2,133 |
| North Nottinghamshire | 2,118 | 1,781 |
| North Staffordshire | 1,743 | 1,921 |
| North West Anglia[2] | 3,280 | [3]— |
| North West Lancashire | 2,864 | 2,515 |
| North Yorkshire | 4,782 | 4,352 |
| Northamptonshire | 1,502 | 2,334 |
| Northumberland | 831 | 993 |
| Nottingham | 3,389 | 2,857 |
| Oxfordshire | 1,516 | 1,686 |
| Portsmouth and South East Hampshire | 1,708 | 1,689 |
| Redbridge and Waltham Forest | 723 | 789 |
| Rotherham | 1,212 | 1,124 |
| Salford and Trafford | 1,996 | 1,762 |
| Sandwell | 995 | 909 |
| Sefton | 2,408 | 2,113 |
| Sheffield | 2,207 | 2,705 |
| Shropshire | 1,916 | 1,877 |
| Solihull | 433 | 330 |
| Somerset | 2,626 | 2,580 |
| South and West Devon | 3,413 | 2,961 |
| South Cheshire | 4,049 | 4,003 |
| South Derbyshire | 2,582 | 2,327 |
| South Essex | 1,998 | 1,314 |
| South Humberside | 1,357 | 940 |
| South Lancashire | 1,779 | 1,713 |
| South Staffordshire | 3,694 | 3,300 |
| Southampton and South West Hampshire | 1,658 | 1,720 |
| St. Helens and Knowsley | 1,473 | 1,259 |
| Stockport | 1,212 | 1,010 |
| Suffolk | 2,293 | 2,142 |
| Sunderland | 1,837 | 1,243 |
| Tees | 2,998 | 2,662 |
| Wakefield | 955 | 1,110 |
| Walsall | 602 | 714 |
| Warwickshire | 1,833 | 1,855 |
| West Hertfordshire | 1,068 | 1,476 |
| West Kent | 2,975 | 2,976 |
| West Pennine | 1,622 | 1,445 |
| West Surrey | 2,586 | 2,195 |
| West Sussex | 4,703 | 3,941 |
| Wigan and Bolton | 1,615 | 1,714 |
| Wiltshire | 2,234 | 2,057 |
| Wirral | 2,915 | 2,211 |
| Wolverhampton | 797 | 1,012 |
| Worcestershire | 2,511 | 2,670 |

[1] Relates to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

[2] As a result of health authority reorganisation, North West Anglia was split with Cambridge and Huntingdon becoming part of Cambridge HA and East Norfolk becoming part of Norfolk HA.
[3] Not available
*Source:*
Department of Health's annual returns

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates his Department has made of the number of people who have had to sell their homes to pay for long-term care in each of the last five years. [24641]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is not held centrally.

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of time is that an individual stays in *(a)* a residential care and *(b)* a nursing home in England. [24639]

**Jacqui Smith:** The information requested is not collected centrally.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health who drafted the guidance under the Care Standards Act 2000 dealing with accommodation for residents of residential care homes. [24314]

**Jacqui Smith:** The National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People and Care Homes for Younger Adults and Adult Placements were drafted by the Department. To aid the drafting of these standards, reference groups were set up which included representatives from the private, public and voluntary sectors, national organisations and service users. Both sets of standards were consulted upon publicly and we have listened to the representations made during consultation and made appropriate changes. No guidance under the Care Standards Act 2000, in relation to the accommodation of service users in care homes, has been drafted.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received from local authority care homes concerning the Care Standards Act 2000; and if he will list them broken down by authority. [24299]

**Jacqui Smith:** The Department does not hold information in the form requested. Representations about the effect of Government policy on local authority run care homes are generally made by local authorities as part of the comments they make in their role as regulators, providers and commissioners of social care. Local authorities have been involved in the development of our modernisation agenda, particularly in the development of national minimum standards where they were one of the groups consulted before and during the various consultation exercises on the national standards. The formal consultation documents were sent to all local authorities.

## Osteoporosis

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in England suffer from osteoporosis; [24695]

(2) how many women in England suffer from osteoperia. [24696]

**Yvette Cooper:** The information requested is not available. Individuals will generally not be aware of the presence of these conditions. It has been estimated that one in three women and one in 12 men over age 50 have osteoporosis.

## Age-related Macular Degeneration

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people in England suffer from age-related macular degeneration; [24692]

(2) if he will make a statement on the possibility of using genetic engineering to restore vision to those suffering from age-related macular degeneration. [24691]

**Jacqui Smith:** It has recently been estimated that in the United Kingdom some 180,000 people suffer sight loss due to age-related macular degeneration (AMD). It is possible that gene therapy may indeed one day be used to halt or even prevent AMD. The results of a number of pre-clinical research studies have been published, and these studies do look promising. However, it is too early to say for certain whether these specific approaches will ultimately lead to cures for patients with AMD.

Here in the UK, before moving into clinic to test such approaches in human subjects, the approval of our national supervisory body, the Gene Therapy Advisory Committee (GTAC) would be required. GTAC would base their decision as to the acceptability of any such trial on the medical and scientific merits of the research proposed and carefully weighing the potential benefits and risks to patients.

## Epilepsy Patients

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of epilepsy patients are photosensitive. [24697]

**Jacqui Smith:** The information requested is not collected centrally. However, scientific research suggests that up to 5 per cent. of people with epilepsy are photosensitive.

## Child Death Helpline

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls were made to the Child Death Helpline in 2001; and if he will make a statement. [24656]

**Jacqui Smith:** The information requested is not collected centrally.

## Health Care Funding

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding for health care per patient there is in the parliamentary constituencies of *(a)* Sedgefield, *(b)* West Chelmsford, *(c)* South West Surrey and *(d)* North West Hampshire. [24631]

**Mr. Hutton:** Health authorities receive allocations to commission healthcare for their population. The health authorities for these parliamentary constituencies, and their allocations per weighted head of population in 2001–02, are shown in the table.

| Parliamentary constituency | Health authority | 2001–02[1] (£) |
|---|---|---|
| Sedgfield | County Durham | 730 |
| West Chelmsford | North Essex | 728 |
| South west Surrey | West Surrey | 749 |
| North west Hampshire | North and mid Hampshire | 736 |

[1] Allocation per weighted head of population

### Diabetes

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received concerning the Diabetes National Service Framework; and if he will make a statement. [24713]

**Jacqui Smith:** We have received just over 300 letters about the Diabetes National Service Framework since 15 October when we announced the changed plans for its publication. The Diabetes NSF standards were published on 14 December and have been widely welcomed.

### Doctor Numbers

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the ratio of doctors to people in England. [24717]

**Mr. Hutton:** The data requested are shown in the table.

| England at 30 September 2000 | Numbers | Numbers per 100,000 population |
|---|---|---|
| All NHS doctors | 97,440 | 194.9 |
| *of which* | | |
| All GMPs (including GP Retainers)[1] | 31,370 | 62.7 |
| All HCHS Staff[2] | 66,070 | 132.1 |
| *of which* | | |
| Consultants | 24,310 | 48.6 |

[1] General Medical Practitioners (including GP Retainers) includes Unrestricted Principals, PMS Salaried GPs, PMS Contracted GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA), and PMS Others.

[2] Excludes Medical Hospital Practitioners and Medical Clinical Assistants, most of whom are also General Practitioners working part-time in hospitals.

*Notes:*

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Unrounded figures were used in all calculations.

These are NHS doctors only. These figures do not show private practice doctors or doctors that are registered but not working.

*Source:*

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

### Mental Health

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many episodes of in-patient care were purchased by the NHS in the independent mental health sector in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* this financial year to date. [24523]

**Jacqui Smith:** Information is not collected centrally on the number of episodes of in-patient care purchased by the national health service in the independent mental health sector.

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his estimate is of the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of people who suffer schizophrenia (i) at any one time, (ii) during the course of the most recent year for which figures are available and (iii) during their lifetimes; [24531]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of *(a)* the general population and *(b)* the adult population with severe and enduring mental health problems; [24526]

(3) what proportion of those suffering *(a)* a disabling anxiety disorder, *(b)* clinical depression, *(c)* manic depression and *(d)* schizophrenia were (i) men and (ii) women, in the most recent year for which figures are available; [24534]

(4) what his estimate is of the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of people who suffer manic depression (i) at any one time, (ii) during the course of the most recent year for which figures are available and (iii) during their lifetimes; [24530]

(5) what his assessment is of the proportion of people who will develop *(a)* a disabling anxiety disorder, *(b)* a phobia and *(c)* an obsessive compulsive disorder during their lives; [24528]

(6) what assessment he has made of the prevalence of *(a)* psychosis, *(b)* psychiatric illness and *(c)* neurotic disorders among adults living in private households. [24524]

**Jacqui Smith:** The Office for National Statistics is responsible for compiling, analysing and disseminating information relating to United Kingdom economic, social and demographic statistics. Their report 'Psychiatric morbidity among adults living in private households, 2000' is available on the website at www.statistics.gov.uk. Along with others due for publication next year, the report contains valuable information about the prevalence of mental disorders among adults in private households.

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what number and proportion of the *(a)* general and *(b)* adult population presented with mental health problems to the NHS in the most recent year for which figures are available. [24525]

**Jacqui Smith:** The Office for National Statistics is the Government agency responsible for compiling, analysing and disseminating information relating to estimates of numbers in the general population with mental health problems, and the proportion using specific services. Their recent report "Psychiatric morbidity among adults living in private households, 2000" is available on the website at www.statistics.gov.uk

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the proposed Children's National Service Framework with regard to mental health services for children and young persons. [24522]

**Jacqui Smith:** One of the specific areas to be addressed in the Children's National Service Framework is child and adolescent mental health services. Detailed work to develop this strand of the service framework will take place in an external working group under the chairmanship of Mike Farrar, chief executive of Tees health authority, and Dr. Caroline Lindsey, consultant psychiatrist at the Tavistock clinic. The first meeting of the external working group is scheduled for January.

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health of those discharged from hospital in the most recent year for which figures are available after treatment for alcohol and drug related problems, what proportions of *(a)* men and *(b)* women were diagnosed as suffering from (i) disabling anxiety disorder, (ii) clinical depression, (iii) manic depression and (iv) schizophrenia. [24535]

**Jacqui Smith:** The information is not collected centrally by the Department, in the form requested.

The table shows the estimated number of finished consultant episodes with a primary diagnosis of mental and behavioural disorder due to psychoactive substance use, in England, for 1999–2000, the latest year for which data are available. These figures have a provisional status as no adjustments have yet been made for shortfalls in data.

*Finished consultant episodes with a primary diagnosis of mental and behavioural disorders due to the use of psychoactive substances (excluding tobacco), broken down by sex, England, 1999–2000*

| *Mental and behavioural disorders due to the use of psychoactive substances F10-F19 (excluding F17, tobacco)* | *Persons* | *Male* | *Female* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total F10-F19 (excluding F17) | 42,600 | 29,360 | 12,940 |
| Alcohol (F10) | 33,160 | 22,740 | 10,190 |
| Opioids (F11) | 4,300 | 2,900 | 1,380 |
| Cannabinoids (F12) | 630 | 490 | 140 |
| Sedatives or hypnotics (F13) | 250 | 130 | 120 |
| Cocaine (F14) | 170 | 140 | 40 |
| Other stimulants including caffeine (F15) | 640 | 440 | 190 |
| Hallucinogens (F16) | 210 | 140 | 60 |
| Volatile solvents (F18) | 70 | 60 | 10 |
| Multiple drug use and use of other psychoactive substances (F19) | 3,160 | 2,320 | 820 |

*Notes:*

1. Persons category includes 'Unknown' and 'not specified' sex categories.
2. Data for 1999–2000 have not been grossed for coverage and have a provisional status.
3. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 for confidentiality purposes.
4. Figures may not add up due to rounding.
5. Codes have been taken from the 'International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems' Tenth Revision (ICD-10).
6. Of the 42,600 episodes detailed above 2,340 have a primary diagnosis of psychotic disorder.
7. The diagnosis of psychotic disorder includes a cluster of psychotic phenomena that occur during or following psychoactive substance use but that are not explained on the basis of acute intoxication alone and do not form part of a withdrawal state. The disorder is characterised by hallucinations, perceptual distortions, delusions, psychomotor disturbances, and an abnormal affect, which may range from intense fear to ecstasy.

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of people who are homeless have a diagnosis of psychosis. [24538]

**Jacqui Smith:** The information requested is not available centrally.

## Eating Disorders

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital admissions there were in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* in the most recent year for which figures are available in respect of eating disorders. [24533]

**Jacqui Smith:** In 1997–98 there were 1,990 admissions for people with eating disorders and 1,780 in 1999–2000. The data are taken from hospital episode statistics and relate to in-patients who have finished their hospital episodes under the care of a consultant. The 1999–2000 figures are provisional as no adjustments have been made for shortfalls in the data.

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the number and proportion of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who suffer eating disorders; and how many have suffered from such disorders during their lifetimes. [24532]

**Jacqui Smith:** Information on the number of people with eating disorders is not collected centrally by the Department.

## Tilt Report

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which recommendations in the Tilt report have been implemented. [24527]

**Jacqui Smith:** The position regarding the implementation of the recommendations in the Report of the Review of Security at the High Security Hospitals (the Tilt report) is set out in the tables at Annex A, which have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

## Hepatitis C

**Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are receiving the combination treatment, ribovarin plus alpha-interferon, for hepatitis C in the United Kingdom. [24885]

**Yvette Cooper:** The information requested is not collected centrally.

## Stroke Treatment

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action he is taking to ensure that stroke patients, regardless of age, have access to specialist stroke teams and are able to participate in a multidisciplinary programme of rehabilitation; [24361]

(2) how he will ensure that younger people who suffer strokes receive the support they need to promote independence; and if he will make a statement; [24360]

(3) what action he is taking to ensure that the standard for stroke care, published in the National Service Framework for Older People, will apply to stroke patients of all ages. [24359]

**Jacqui Smith:** The Stroke Standard in the National Service Framework for Older People, the service model it details for integrated stroke services and the milestones for action it sets should apply equally to all stroke patients, irrespective of age. Integrated stroke services will need to cover or link to prevention, acute care, rehabilitation and long-term support for stroke patients and their carers. April 2002 is the milestone for every general hospital which cares for people with stroke to have plans to introduce a specialised stroke service from 2004.

## NHS (Racism)

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Government have taken to tackle racism in the NHS. [24325]

**Mr. Hutton:** We are fully committed to diversity and equality of opportunity for all health service staff and patients and we are taking vigorous action to achieve this. There is no place for discrimination or harassment in the national health service on grounds of race or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or age.

The Improving Working Lives (IWL) Standard establishes targets and measures for promoting real improvements in the working lives of NHS staff. It makes it clear that every member of staff is entitled to work in an organisation which can prove that it is investing in, and improving, diversity and tackling discrimination and harassment.

Activity to achieve this aim is occurring on a number of fronts. We have launched an equalities framework ('The Vital Connection') which incorporates clear requirements for the NHS in promoting equality and introduces a package of indicators, standards and monitoring arrangements to support progress and manage performance as part of human resources performance management. It includes specific measures on race and harassment.

In addition, the 'Positively Diverse' programme is developing the knowledge and capacity of NHS organisations to build and manage a diverse workforce. It provides the process for achieving the equalities-related aspects of IWL and the targets set by the Equalities Framework and supports NHS organisations in meeting the workforce challenges set by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

The programme is, at present, being extended to another 200 organisations. Work is also in hand to develop a mentoring and coaching scheme for black and minority ethnic staff; a trainers pack for working with race and racism and a personal work programme for examining individual attitudes towards race and culture. In addition, new guidance, aligned with the 'Zero Tolerance' campaign, on dealing with harassment from service users has been developed and will be launched in March.

## Locums

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many locums are working in NHS facilities in England and Wales. [24666]

(2) how many locums secured substantive employment in the UK in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [24665]

**Mr. Hutton:** Data for locums are not collected centrally.

## European Health Services

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the European average for health spending as a percentage of GDP was in 1998, excluding the UK, *(a)* weighted and *(b)* unweighted. [24431]

**Mr. Hutton:** The latest figures for the weighted and the unweighted European average for 1998 excluding the United Kingdom are shown in the table:

| *European average (excluding UK)* | *1998* |
|---|---|
| Unweighted spend as percentage of Gross Domestic Product | 8.0 |
| Weighted spend as percentage of Gross Domestic Product | 8.8 |

*Source:*
OECD Health Data 2001

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to visit European countries to view their health services in 2002. [24685]

**Mr. Milburn:** I plan to visit Spain, and will visit other countries as appropriate.

## NHS Modernisation Agency

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how often the NHS Modernisation Agency meets; and when the last meeting took place. [24335]

**Mr. Hutton:** The NHS Modernisation Agency is a directorate of the Department of Health. Its Director, David Fillingham, is a member of the Department's board, which meets fortnightly. The Modernisation Agency's management team meets every month.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the head of the NHS Modernisation Agency. [24334]

**Mr. Hutton:** My right hon. Friend meets David Fillingham, the director of the Modernisation Agency, on a regular basis. They last met just before the Christmas break.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been appointed to the NHS Modernisation Agency; and at what remuneration level. [24333]

**Mr. Hutton:** The National Health Service Modernisation Agency was formed in April 2001 through the merger of six pre-existing teams. Since April, 119 clinicians and managers have been appointed to the agency. Eighty-seven are on fixed term/secondment from the NHS and 19 have been appointed to the civil service. The total staff of the agency is 323 (NHS staff 250, Department of Health employees 73).

Of the total staffing profile of the agency, 13 per cent. are senior manager or clinician level (£50,000 per annum plus), 51 per cent. are programme manager level (£30,000 to £50,000 per annum) and 37 per cent. are support staff (below £30,000 per annum).

## Hospital Cleaners

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to vet hospital cleaners for criminal records. [24298]

**Mr. Hutton:** All national health service workers are asked to declare criminal convictions as part of the recruitment process. Currently checks are made against police records for all posts involving substantial unsupervised access to children. From 1 March the commencement of the Criminal Records Bureau

disclosure service will allow checks to be made on a much wider range of posts including hospital cleaners who have access to patients in the normal course of their work.

## Children's Homes

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* local authority and *(b)* private children's homes have been (i) opened and (ii) closed in each year since 1997 in (A) England and (B) west Sussex. [24306]

**Jacqui Smith:** Table 1 shows the number of local authority and private children's homes (excluding independent boarding schools) at 31 March 1997 and 31 March 2000. Separate information on the number of homes (a) opened and (b) closed is available only for the years ending 31 March 1999 and 2000. Figures for England are shown in table 2. There was one new registration of a private children's home in west Sussex in 1999 and no closures in either 1999 or 2000.

*Table 1: Numbers of local authority and private children's homes (excluding independent boarding schools)—at 31 March*

| | *England* | *West Sussex* |
|---|---|---|
| *1997* | | |
| Local authority children's homes | 838 | 13 |
| Private children's homes | 283 | 4 |
| *2000* | | |
| Local authority children's homes | 721 | 11 |
| Private children's homes | 310 | 3 |

*Source:*
Department of Health statistical return CH1

*Table 2: Number of children's homes opened and closed in England—year ending 31 March*

| | *Number of:* *New registrations* | *Establishment closures* |
|---|---|---|
| *1999* | | |
| Local authority children's homes | 5 | 30 |
| Private children's homes | 30 | 10 |
| *2000* | | |
| Local authority children's homes | 10 | 30 |
| Private children's homes | 40 | 10 |

*Source:*
Department of Health Registration and Inspection Survey

## Private Sector Operations

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the operation of the concordat between the NHS and the private sector in the last year; [24351]

(2) under the concordat operating between the NHS and the private sector, how many operations have taken place to date, broken down by *(a)* type and *(b)* average cost; and which private facilities have been used under the concordat with the NHS. [24323]

**Mr. Hutton:** The concordat has encouraged better use of spare capacity in the independent sector, which has allowed national health service patients to be treated more quickly.

According to data collected from independent healthcare providers by the Independent Healthcare Association, since November 2000 at least 75,000 patients have been treated in the independent sector, paid for by the NHS. This figure includes out-patient appointments, day cases and in-patient treatment. A breakdown by type of operation will shortly be placed in the Library. The IHA does not collect cost information.

The Department has recently surveyed health authorities and trusts on the amount of activity they are purchasing for NHS patients within the private sector and will make available key results in due course. The Department is also currently reviewing its information needs as far as NHS-funded activity in the private sector is concerned.

The challenge remains to put NHS use of private sector capacity on a planned footing. Some health authorities and primary care trusts have made particular progress on this front, but overall the picture is still generally one of "spot" purchasing.

The Department has recently announced a five point plan for expanding the role of non-NHS providers in the NHS, including up to £40 million for NHS-funded operations this winter, a national contract framework between the NHS and the private sector, inviting private companies to build and run diagnostic and treatment centres, dedicating existing private hospitals to NHS work and using overseas providers.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which private facilities have been used under the concordat with the NHS. [24541]

**Mr. Hutton:** Arrangements between the national health service and the independent sector under the concordat for the treatment of NHS patients are made locally. This information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

## Paramedics

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paramedics were employed in 2001 in *(a)* London and *(b)* West Sussex. [24330]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): ambulance paramedics within the London Regional Office, South East Regional Office areas and East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority area as at 30 September 2000*

| | *Whole-time equivalents* | *Headcount* |
|---|---|---|
| London Regional Office Area | 780 | 780 |
| South East Regional Office Area | 1,050 | 1,060 |
| *Of which* | | |
| West Sussex HA<br>East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA[1] | 230 | 230 |

[1] East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA provide ambulance staff for the whole of Sussex, therefore, staff working within the West Sussex HA area cannot be separately identified.

*Note:*
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10

*Source:*
Department of Health non-medical workforce census

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paramedics retired from the service in 2001 *(a)* in England, *(b)* from the London ambulance service and *(c)* from the Sussex ambulance service. [24331]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is not collected centrally.

### CT/MRI Scanners

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* CT and *(b)* MRI scanners are in working use in the NHS. [24663]

**Yvette Cooper:** There are approximately 285 CT scanners and approximately 190 MRI scanners in working use in the national health service in England, as of December 2001.

By 2004, central programmes will provide a further 69 additional CT and 72 additional MRI scanners for the NHS in England, as well as over 130 replacement CT and MRI scanners.

### NHS Chief Executive

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Chief Executive of the NHS. [24336]

**Mr. Milburn:** I meet Nigel Crisp, the Chief Executive, on a regular basis.

### District and Community Nurses

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district and community nurses there are in England and Wales, and how many there were in each of the last five years. [24344]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified nursing staff working within the community areas of work in England and Wales as at 30 September each year*

| | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All staff—whole-time equivalents | 48,930 | 49,430 | 50,810 | 52,080 | 53,530 |
| *of which:* | | | | | |
| Health Visitors | 10,780 | 10,670 | 10,710 | 10,810 | 10,640 |
| District Nurses | 12,860 | 12,490 | 12,410 | 12,390 | 12,310 |
| Other community nursing | 25,290 | 26,270 | 27,680 | 28,890 | 30,590 |
| *of which:* | | | | | |
| Community psychiatric | 9,230 | 9,560 | 10,000 | 10,260 | 10,860 |
| Community learning difficulties | 3,000 | 3,130 | 3,210 | 3,410 | 3,550 |
| Community services | 13,070 | 13,580 | 14,470 | 15,210 | 16,180 |
| All staff—headcount | 61,250 | 62,870 | 65,340 | 67,220 | 69,660 |
| *of which:* | | | | | |
| Health Visitors | 13,160 | 13,220 | 13,420 | 13,620 | 13,570 |
| District Nurses | 15,800 | 15,740 | 15,600 | 15,640 | 15,850 |
| Other community nursing | 32,290 | 33,910 | 36,320 | 37,970 | 40,240 |
| *of which:* | | | | | |
| Community psychiatric | 9,870 | 10,320 | 10,800 | 11,140 | 11,800 |
| Community learning difficulties | 3,320 | 3,440 | 3,590 | 3,770 | 3,990 |
| Community services | 19,100 | 20,140 | 21,930 | 23,050 | 24,440 |

*Notes:*
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Figures exclude learners and agency staff.
3. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.

*Sources:*
Department of Health non-medical work force census
NHS Staff Census—National Assembly for Wales

### Hospital Star Rating Scheme

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what choices for alternative treatment locations there are for patients whose local hospital has been given zero stars under the Government's hospital star rating scheme. [24312]

**Mr. Hutton:** We have made it clear that the ratings are not primarily about the quality of clinical care. They do not mean that a poorly performing hospital has low standards, is unsafe or does not contain some very good clinical services. Staff are often doing a good job but the assessments show that organisational performance does need to improve.

Our new proposals on patient choice mean that from July 2002, if a patient with coronary heart disease has been on an in-patient waiting list for over six months, they will be able to seek swifter treatment in either the private sector, in another European Union country or in a different national health service hospital. This option is available regardless of a trust's performance rating and will be extended across England throughout 2002–03.

### Autism Awareness Year

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Government are proposing to help promote autism awareness year. [24347]

**Jacqui Smith:** We welcome initiatives which aim to improve our knowledge and understanding of autism. Autism awareness year is seeking to raise awareness, through voluntary sector partnerships, of the issues surrounding autism and to influence and inspire action to facilitate the changes needed to services and attitudes to autism. I was delighted to accept an invitation to speak at an autism awareness year conference to be held on 14 February.

We will listen carefully to the messages which emerge from this and other current and recently completed initiatives in this field. These include the independent "National Initiative on Autism: Screening and Assessment" and the two reports commissioned by the Department of Health—from Dr. Tony Holland on Asperger's Syndrome and from the Medical Research Council on the epidemiology and causes of autism.

### Pathology Services

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many private providers of pathology services have renewed their contracts with the NHS since 1994; [24327]

(2) if he will list private providers of pathology services under contract to the NHS. [24432]

**Mr. Hutton:** The national health service has for many years worked closely with private sector providers of pathology equipment, consumables, IT and transport. There are no centrally held statistical data on these arrangements.

Two private sector companies are currently known to have contracts to provide laboratory medicine services to the national health service. These are Quest Diagnostics Ltd. at West Middlesex NHS Trust and The Doctors Laboratory at Ealing NHS Trust. Both of these are still in operation. Omnilabs had a contract at the Lister Hospital, Stevenage but this has recently expired.

### York Formula

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the York formula calculation for regional health funding. [24674]

**Mr. Hutton:** A wide ranging review of the weighted capitation formula used to allocate resources to health authorities and primary care trusts is currently taking place. The aim is to produce a fairer means of allocating resources. A key criterion of the new formula will be to contribute to the reduction of avoidable health inequalities.

### Student Doctors

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many students *(a)* completed degree courses in medicine and *(b)* carried on to work as doctors/surgeons in the NHS in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [24350]

**Mr. Hutton:** 3,980 students completed first degree courses in medicine in 1999–2000 in England. In the same year the NHS in England employed 3,540 pre-registration house officers—the first NHS job that new medical graduates take up.

Graduates from medical courses do not all go on to become NHS doctors though the vast majority will spend part of their careers working in the NHS. Some choose to use their skills by working in the research, industrial or charity sectors. Some of those from outside England return home following graduation.

### European Hospitals

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his proposals are for payment of travel costs for NHS patients receiving treatment in continental European hospitals. [24317]

**Mr. Hutton:** Regulations have been laid before the House to amend the National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) Regulations 1988 to permit NHS bodies to pay for the travel of NHS patients going overseas for treatment funded by the NHS. The NHS will meet the cost of the patient's travel from the point at which they begin their international journey (the airport, ferry port or international train station) to the foreign provider. Reimbursement of travel expenses between the patient's home to the airport, ferry port of international train station will be governed by the same rules that currently apply to payment of travelling expenses to hospitals in England. This change will ensure that patients treated overseas under the auspices of the NHS will not be disadvantaged by having to travel further for that treatment.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role will be played by GPs in the selection of European hospitals to be used for the treatment of their patients under the NHS. [24324]

**Mr. Hutton:** The hospitals to be used for national health service patients in the three test bed sites in the south east region are being selected by local commissioners, with clinical input. A practising GP has also been involved in providing input to the development of the three projects. There will be a competitive tender exercise in the new year to select approved foreign providers; again, clinicians will be involved in the selection of the final list of approved providers.

### Fly Sprays

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned on the use of chemicals in fly spray products linked to cancer. [24339]

**Yvette Cooper:** The Department has commissioned no research on the use of chemicals in fly spray products. All such pesticide products have to be approved by Ministers before they can be sold and used in the United Kingdom. It is the responsibility of industry to provide the data necessary to demonstrate fully the safety and efficacy of their products before approval can be granted. The independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides advises Ministers on these matters.

### DDVP

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the safety of DDVP in relation to liver, skin and breast cancer; and what guidelines his Department has issued on the safe use of DDVPs in consumer products. [24340]

**Yvette Cooper:** All pesticide products for use in agriculture and in the home have to be approved by Ministers before they can be sold and used in the United Kingdom. The products should always be used in accordance with label instructions specified as part of the approval.

The independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) advises Ministers on pesticide issues. A review of the safety of DDVP in non-agricultural pesticide products was carried out in 1994: the ACP concluded the chemical did not pose a carcinogenic risk to humans. A review of DDVP in pesticide products is currently being carried out, including a review of all data relating to possible mutagenicity and carcinogenicity, and I expect the ACP to make recommendations to Ministers concerning approval of these products early this year.

### Ultrasound Scanning

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department has received about the possible effect of ultrasound scanning on brain damage in babies. [24680]

**Yvette Cooper:** The Department has not received advice about the recent study from Stockholm which concludes that ultrasound exposure in fetal life increases the risk of left handedness in males. We would look to outside bodies such as the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the British Medical Ultrasound Society to assess the scientific validity of any research. The antenatal sub-group of the United Kingdom National Screening Committee keeps under review any safety issues relating to screening tests.

### Interbalkan European Medical Centre

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made with the Interbalkan European medical centre in Thessaloniki for treatment of NHS patients; what discussions have taken place between his officials and the centre; and what visits have been made by his officials to the centre. [24321]

**Mr. Hutton:** A number of European health care providers have written to the Department expressing interest in providing treatment for UK patients. Exploratory discussions have taken place with several organisations, including the Interbalkan medical centre. However, no agreement has been reached with the Interbalkan medical centre, nor have officials visited it.

### National Service Frameworks

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list which national service frameworks are planned for 2002; and when in that year. [24679]

**Jacqui Smith:** Work is in hand to publish the Diabetes National Service Framework (NSF) Delivery Strategy; the first module of the Renal NSF; and the first module of the Childrens' NSF. The precise publication dates are not fixed at this stage as in selecting a topic for and developing and implementing a national service framework, account is not only taken of the importance of a health issue in terms of morbidity and mortality and the scope for service improvement but also of the capacity of the national health service and its partner agencies to implement the framework.

### NHS Leadership Centre

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the head of the national health service leadership centre. [24338]

**Mr. Hutton:** Barbara Harris stood down from her post as Director of the Leadership Centre on 14 December. The post is currently being filled on a temporary basis and will be advertised in due course.

### Children's Hospital Schools

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to support children's hospital schools for the hospitalised *(a)* over 16s and *(b)* children who are too ill to return home; and if he will make a statement. [22492]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** I have been asked to reply.

Local education authorities (LEAs) have a duty to provide suitable education for children of compulsory school age who cannot attend school due to illness or injury. This includes those children who are in hospital. The DfES jointly with the Department of Health published in November this year new statutory guidance "Access to education for children and young people with medical needs" which sets out minimum national standards for the education of children who are unable to attend school because of medical needs.

*(a)* Local education authorities (LEAs) also have the power to provide suitable education for young people over compulsory school age but under the age of 19 who cannot attend school because of illness or injury. The new guidance makes it clear that LEAs are expected to be as helpful as possible to these vulnerable young people.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has a duty to secure the provision of proper facilities for the education and training of 16 to 19-year-olds including those who may miss out on education due to prolonged illness. The council will work with local agencies, including social services departments, local education authorities (LEAs) and hospital schools, where packages of care and learning appear the best approach.

The Connexions Service will provide integrated information, advice, guidance and personal development opportunities for all young people aged 13–19 in England. Part of their service includes giving more in-depth support to those who are at greatest risk of not making a successful transition to adulthood.

*(b)* The new guidance also makes it clear that all children of compulsory school age have an entitlement to education and that they should have as much education as their medical condition allows. This includes those children in hospitals who may have terminal or recurring conditions and who may be unable to return home.

### Infant Mortality (Burton)

**Mrs. Dean:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the infant mortality rate in Burton was in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [24073]

**Ruth Kelly:** I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mrs. Dean, dated 8 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking what the infant mortality rate in Burton was in each of the last 10 years. I am replying in his absence (24073).

The figures requested are given in the table below.

*Infant mortality numbers and rates for Burton, 1991–2000*

| *Calendar year* | *Number of infant deaths* | *Rate*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 15 | 10.8 |
| 1992 | 14 | 10.1 |
| 1993 | 14 | 10.7 |
| 1994 | 10 | 8.2 |
| 1995 | 12 | 9.5 |
| 1996 | 4 | 3.4 |
| 1997 | 2 | 1.7 |
| 1998 | 3 | 2.6 |
| 1999 | 6 | 5.2 |
| 2000[2] | 8 | 6.8 |

[1] Per 1,000 live births
[2] Provisional
*Source:*
Registrations of births and deaths

### Colon Cancer

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average survival rate was for cancer of the colon in each year since 1997. [24313]

**Ruth Kelly:** I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Tim Loughton, dated 8 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning what is the survival rate for cancer of the colon. I am replying in his absence. (24313)

The latest available five year relative survival rates from cancer of the colon in England, for cases (aged 15–99) diagnosed in the period 1992–1994 and followed up to the end of [illegible], are 42.6% in men and 42.1% in women (Source: Office for National Statistics 'One and five year relative survival (%) [by sex and age group] for patients diagnosed during 1991–93 and 1992–94, major cancer sites, England').

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Long-term Unemployment

**Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment his Department has made of the effect the new deal has had on long-term unemployment. [13167]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The positive effect of the new deal is confirmed by independent research carried out by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research. This found that, in the absence of new deal, long-term youth unemployment would be about twice as high as it now is.

The number of 18 to 24-year-olds unemployed for six months or more has fallen by over 70 per cent. in the last four years. Some of this improvement reflects the delivery of a strong and stable economy, but the new deal has helped unemployment to fall even faster. The number of people of all ages unemployed for six months or more fell by 50 per cent. over the same period.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his statement of 28 November, what plans he has (1) for the long-term unemployed to be employed in the national health service; [20277]

(2) for the Government to employ the long-term unemployed under his proposals. [20279]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The intention is to offer participants a range of jobs from which to choose. Many employment placements will be with locally based intermediate labour market operators working mainly in the public and community sectors. Work in these areas will generally be of community benefit but in jobs which would otherwise not be economically viable. It is also hoped that the scheme will attract other employers. Clearly the range of jobs available will depend on the local labour market, but it is hoped that this will include opportunities in both the private and public sectors. Government Departments and the NHS will not be under any obligation to offer jobs to participants but will be free to do so.

### South Tyneside

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what support his Department gives to those in South Tyneside with disabilities who cannot work. [13211]

**Maria Eagle:** We are giving people on benefits more choices and more help than ever before to move off welfare and into work, in return for greater responsibility to consider the help that is on offer. We recognise that some people will not be able to take advantage of initiatives to help them support themselves through work, so we are extending our support for them to ensure greater security.

In April 2001 we introduced the Disability Income Guarantee (DIG). DIG provides an extra premium, paid with income related benefits, to severely disabled people on the lowest incomes. Nationally, we expect that DIG will help around 130,000 of the poorest severely disabled people under 60, and around 30,000 families with severely disabled children.

Incapacity benefit helps people who satisfy the National Insurance contribution conditions and cannot be expected to work due to sickness or disability. In South Tyneside, which is composed of the parliamentary constituencies of South Shields and Jarrow, around 10,800 people are receiving incapacity benefit.

Income support is also available to help those disabled people who are unable to work. In South Tyneside 5,600 people are receiving income support with either a disability premium or a severe disability premium. We have also increased the disabled child premium in the income related benefits by substantially more than the normal uprating. Since 1997 we have increased this from £20.95 to £30.00, and from April 2002 it will increase to £35.50. There are 400 families in South Tyneside receiving the disabled child premium.

Disability living allowance helps those severely disabled people under the age of 65 with extra costs due to the effects of their disability and provides extra help for those disabled early in life. In South Tyneside 9,218 people receive disability living allowance. Attendance allowance helps disabled people over the age of 65 with extra care costs due to the effects of their disability. In South Tyneside 4,067 people receive attendance allowance.

### Benefits (Belgium)

**Andrew Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he last met his Belgian counterpart. [17374]

**Mr. Darling:** I met Frank Vandenbroucke, Minister for Social Affairs and Pensions, and Laurette Onkelinx, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Employment, at the Employment and Social Policy Council on 3 December.

### Housing Benefit

**Mr. Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the extent of delays in the payment of housing benefit; and if he will make a statement. [17866]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Our housing policy statement "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all—The way forward for housing" (December 2000) recognised that the fundamental challenge facing housing benefit is its administration. Problems with administering housing benefit can result in unacceptable levels of fraud and error, as well as backlogs of delayed claims.

Our immediate priority has therefore been to work in partnership with local authorities to improve standards of administration. For example, we have established the Help Team which offers practical advice and support to local authorities on ways to improve delivery. The team has already visited Hull, Lambeth, Bristol, Northampton, Derwentside and East Ayrshire. We have also set up a Help Fund to enable local authorities to formulate and implement improvement plans. In addition, we will introduce national performance standards to support the better administration of housing benefit from spring 2002.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans his Department has to increase funding for the Verification Framework. [20599]

**Malcolm Wicks:** There will be a 5 per cent. increase in Verification Framework funding from 1 April 2002. This applies to both set-up and on-going funding and is double the increase for 2001–02.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent assessment he has made of the Verification Framework for Housing Benefit. [20600]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The Verification Framework is designed to secure the gateway on to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit by defining the minimum standards for collecting evidence before a claim can be paid. As at 30 November 2001, 263 authorities have applied for or received funds to adopt the Framework. Of those 263 there are 240 authorities who are now fully compliant with the scheme.

We continue to keep the Verification Framework under regular review. During the summer we worked in partnership with local authorities on proposals to simplify the Framework.

From April 2002 we will split the Verification Framework into three modules which can be introduced in stages. This, combined with other smaller administrative easements, will make it easier for local authorities to introduce and administer the Framework while maintaining a rigorous approach to preventing fraud and error.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many local authorities are achieving the claim processing times for Housing Benefit that were in existence prior to the implementation of the Verification Framework. [20601]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Prior to the introduction of Best Value Performance Indicators in April 2000, information was not collected from local authorities on the length of time taken to process Housing Benefit claims. Under Best Value, information on average processing times is collected from English local authorities by the Audit Commission on behalf of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). Final performance figures for 2000–01 will be published by DTLR early in 2002.

Performance indicators for Scotland and Wales are the responsibility of the Accounts Commission for Scotland and the National Assembly for Wales respectively.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of the Verification Framework on the number of claims being made for Housing Benefit. [20602]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Since 1997 there has been a year on year reduction in the number of people claiming Housing Benefit. It is not possible to determine how much of this reduction, if any, is due to the introduction of the Verification Framework. The fall can be attributed to a variety of factors including lower unemployment, demographic changes and our initiatives to secure the gateway on to Housing Benefit. The Department is currently carrying out an assessment of the impact of the Verification Framework which may provide more information as to its impact on Housing Benefit caseloads.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans his Department has to make the measures entitled Do Not Redirect in the Verification Framework compulsory. [20603]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The Verification Framework and the Royal Mail Do Not Redirect schemes are not at present compulsory. However, we are monitoring closely take-up of these schemes and we would not rule out this option, should take-up prove to be unsatisfactory over time.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claims for housing benefit are waiting to be processed as a result of delays caused by the verification framework. [20607]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The information is not available.

## Benefit Errors

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the expected reduction in the monetary value of error *(a)* in income support and *(b)* jobseekers allowance in 2001–02. [18980]

**Malcolm Wicks:** We have set firm targets for reducing the amount of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance. The latest figures published by the Office for National Statistics on 29 November 2001 show that we have met our first milestone of a 10 per cent. reduction by March 2002 almost twice over. We are currently on track for meeting the targets for 2004 (25 per cent.) and 2006 (50 per cent.).

Information for 2001–02 will be available later next year.

## Benefit Fraud

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost of benefit fraud in each of the last four years. [19007]

**Malcolm Wicks:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) on 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1166W.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the constituency of Buckingham were successfully prosecuted for *(a)* housing and *(b)* council tax benefit fraud in each year since 1992. [22534]

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the Epsom and Ewell constituency were successfully prosecuted for housing benefit fraud in each year since 1992. [23432]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Information on prosecutions for housing benefit and council tax benefit fraud is not available at constituency level.

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in South Tyneside were caught involved in benefit fraud in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [22761]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Figures for South Tyneside are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the units in his Department or its agencies whose primary function is *(a)* counter fraud policy work and *(b)* fraud investigation and detection. [22893]

**Malcolm Wicks:** We set out our strategy for tackling fraud and error in the paper—A New Contract for Welfare: Safeguarding Social Security (CM 4276)—published on 23 March 1999. The overall aim of the strategy is to have a benefit system which is secure from first claim to final payment.

The implementation of this strategy means that an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of the whole Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments. However, there are specific units whose primary function is counter-fraud policy work and fraud investigation and detection.

The Fraud Strategy Unit manages the setting and dissemination of fraud policy for the Department's Agencies. In addition the Fraud Head of Profession (through the Professional Standards Unit) sets standards for operational activity and manages guidance and training for investigators in the Department's Agencies.

There are 14 groups of investigators in the Department. Serious and organised fraud is addressed by the Benefits Agency Security Investigation Service. This is the operational arm of the Counter-Fraud Investigation Branch, led by the Head of Profession, which includes other units concerned with intelligence, joint working and professional standards. In addition, each of the 13 Area Directors in the Benefits Agency manages a resource of investigators known collectively as the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service (in Scotland, the Benefits Investigation Service).

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will give the budget for *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 for (i) the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, (ii) BASIS, (iii) the Fraud Strategy Directorate and (iv) the Professional Standards Unit. [22899]

**Malcolm Wicks:** We set out our strategy for tackling fraud and error in the paper—A New Contract for Welfare: Safeguarding Social security (CM 4276)—published on 23 March 1999. The overall aim of the strategy is to have a benefit system which is secure from first claim to final payment.

The implementation of this strategy means that an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of the whole Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments. The remit of the four units specified in the question does not therefore represent the full extent of the Department's counter-fraud strategy.

The information available is in the table.

£

| | *2000–01* | *2001–02* |
|---|---|---|
| Benefit Fraud Inspectorate | 5,866,200 | 6,002,928 |
| BASIS | 13,200,778 | 11,205,000 |
| Fraud Strategy Directorate/Unit | [1]— | 2,463,209 |
| Professional Standards Unit | [1]— | 2,734,000 |

[1] Departmental re-organisation means it is not possible to compare directly one year with another nor to accurately break down the costs to allow an equal comparison.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money has been recovered from persons believed to have fraudulantly obtained benefits in each year since 1997; and if he will give a breakdown of funds recovered as a result of *(a)* Benefits Agency fraud investigations, *(b)* local authority investigations and *(c)* other investigations. [23233]

**Malcolm Wicks:** I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to him on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 784W.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the incidence of fraud in respect of *(a)* means tested and *(b)* other benefits in the last five years. [23234]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Our estimates of levels of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance are published in the series of reports "Fraud and Error in Claims for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance" which are placed in the library.

In April this year we also set up the housing benefit review which will deliver an on-going measurement of fraud and error in housing benefit. Fraud in other benefits is examined in our programme of national benefit reviews.

Our most recent estimate is that £2 billion is lost annually through all benefit fraud. It is not possible to disaggregate this estimate in respect of *(a)* income-related and *(b)* other benefits.

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Hamilton, South constituency were caught in benefit fraud in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [23360]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Information about benefit fraud at constituency level is not available.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target (1) for the timescale for processing minimum income guarantee claims following the submission of the required evidence; [19025]

(2) for the percentage of computer systems supporting pensions and income support delivery to be replaced. [19030]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to him on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 779W.

### Ministerial Visits

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times Ministers from his Department have visited *(a)* the Teesside area and *(b)* Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency to meet locally based businesses. [19072]

**Malcolm Wicks:** None, since the formation of the Department for Work and Pensions in June 2001.

### Benefit Reductions

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what reductions are applied to an entitled person's *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax benefit during a period of in-patient (i) NHS hospital treatment and (ii) private hospital treatment. [19115]

**Malcolm Wicks:** After six weeks of in-patient treatment in a national health service hospital people in receipt of housing benefit (HB) or council tax benefit (CTB), but who do not receive income support (IS), have their benefit reduced. This adjustment reflects the patient's lower day-to-day living expenses which result in more income being available to meet housing costs. At this stage, no automatic reduction is applied to HB or CTB paid to people receiving privately funded hospital treatment.

People who receive HB or CTB and IS will have an analogous reduction applied to their IS entitlement after six weeks of in-patient treatment in a national health service hospital. Their HB or CTB entitlement will remain unchanged at this point unless they cease to be entitled to IS. Where IS entitlement does stop, people affected can reapply for HB or CTB at the reduced levels.

After 52 weeks, or earlier if the local authority decides that the person's absence from home is likely to be substantially more than 52 weeks or permanent, both HB and CTB are withdrawn for all hospital in-patients.

### Local Authority Fraud Investigators

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the expenditure of £2 million for the training of additional local authority fraud investigators will be made in full in the current financial year. [19263]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Professionalism in Security (PiNS) was established in August 1998 to plan and implement Government proposals that would lead to the creation of a corps of highly skilled and motivated counter fraud staff in the Benefits Agency and Local Authorities. These fraud specialists would be working within a professional framework to the highest standards of performance and integrity.

PiNS training courses have been scheduled until the end of March 2002. We forecast that 900 local authority investigators will complete their training resulting in expenditure of around £2 million by the end of the current financial year.

### Permitted Earnings

**Mike Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review the rules on permitted earnings. [19380]

**Maria Eagle:** From 8 April 2002 we are introducing new permitted work rules for people who want to try some paid work while they are getting incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance or income support because of illness or disability. The new arrangements will allow any person claiming benefit, based on incapacity, to try some paid work without the need for prior approval from a doctor.

Any person will be able to work:

(a) for less than 16 hours a week, on average, with earnings up to £66.00 a week for a 26 week period. The period can be extended for another 26 weeks if a person is working with a job broker, personal adviser or disability employment adviser who agrees that it will help towards work of more than 16 hours a week. There will be no limit to the number of times someone can do permitted work in this category during the currency of a claim, but there must be a gap of at least 52 weeks between periods; or

(b) for earnings of up to £20.00 a week at any time.

Someone who is already doing therapeutic work when the rules change can carry on doing it until April 2003. After that they can apply to do permitted work.

There are special arrangements for those disabled people who work in the community with ongoing support or supervision from a professional caseworker (employed or engaged by a public body or voluntary organisation). They will not be subject to time limits. This is intended to help those people whose disability means that their work capacity is limited to less than 16 hours a week, but is more than the few hours covered by the £20 per week option. These are people with conditions that cannot be cured but may be amenable to control or management by medication or therapy. This category will also include people who work in a sheltered workshop or as part of a hospital treatment programme.

We have been consulting disability organisations on these proposals and will be laying regulations before the House early in the new year.

**Mike Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what account is taken of the impact of *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit thresholds when changes are made to the level of permitted earnings for those with mental health problems. [19391]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The permitted work rules allow people to try some paid work while they are getting a benefit based on incapacity. The new arrangements from 8 April 2002 will allow any person claiming benefit, based on incapacity, to try some paid work without the need for prior approval from a doctor.

Income-related benefits are intended to help people whose resources are insufficient to meet their day-to-day living expenses. Any income which is available to meet those expenses is normally taken fully into account when working out how much benefit can be paid. Earnings in excess of the appropriate disregard are taken into account against benefit.

The earnings disregard for people with disabilities was increased from £15 to £20 in April 2001. This disregard recognises the additional difficulties and expenses that these people are likely to face in taking up employment.

### Mental Health

**Mike Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will review the impact of the benefit system on people with mental health problems; and if he will make a statement; [19392]

(2) if it is his policy to consult *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations representing people with mental health disabilities when sickness benefits regulations are (i) reviewed and (ii) implemented; and if he will make a statement. [19393]

**Maria Eagle:** We are committed to helping sick and disabled people back into work where they are able to do so, while providing support for those who cannot work.

We have already increased the earnings disregards for disabled people, introduced the disabled persons' tax credit to help make work pay and the disability income guarantee which provides a guaranteed level of income for the most severely disabled people. From next April we are changing the permitted work rules to help more people try out some work without fear of it affecting their benefit entitlement. Guidance has recently been issued to Benefits Agency staff to help raise awareness about how they can help customers with mental health problems.

We routinely consult with a wide range of interested organisations and individuals to help inform proposed policy changes. Piloting, with evaluation, is often used to refine services that will make a reality of our aim to promote opportunity and independence for all. The Department is statutorily required to put proposals for amendments to existing benefit regulations to the Social Security Advisory Committee for its consideration before they come before Parliament.

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people with a mental health problem as the main reason for a claim to incapacity benefits were given a personal capability assessment last year; and of these, how many *(a)* were found capable of work and lost entitlement to incapacity benefits, *(b)* claimed other benefits instead, *(c)* were not entitled to benefits, *(d)* obtained employment and for how long, *(e)* did not obtain employment and *(f)* returned to a claim for incapacity benefit within a year. [20228]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Between 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, 279,950 people claiming incapacity benefit because of a mental health disorder were referred for a Personal Capability Assessment. Information for a corresponding period is not available on *(a)* the number of these people who were found capable of work and were no longer entitled to incapacity benefit; *(b)* the number who successfully claimed other benefits; *(c)* the number who subsequently reclaimed incapacity benefit within one year. Such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information is not collected on the number of people leaving incapacity benefit who (i) are not entitled to other benefits; (ii) obtain employment; or (iii) do not obtain employment.

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* training and *(b)* guidance examining medical practitioners are given on assessing the effects of mental health problems on day-to-day living and mobility. [20232]

**Maria Eagle:** All Medical Services doctors undertake mandatory Continuing Professional Education training in the assessment of people with mental health problems, and in relating these, as appropriate, to the functional areas of daily living, completion of tasks, interaction with other people, and ability to cope with work. The assessment includes assessing memory, attention span, and ability to concentrate.

Examining Medical Practitioners assessing day to day living needs in connection with claims for disability living allowance or attendance allowance, and mobility needs in connection with claims for the former, receive additional training in assessment of needs for guidance or supervision on account of mental health problems.

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if examining medical practitioners receive *(a)* training and *(b)* guidance on the difficulty for mental health service users in communicating their needs to an EMP. [20233]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** All Medical Services doctors undergo mandatory Continuing Professional Education training in assessment of people with mental health problems, including training in establishing rapport, the use of appropriate interviewing skills and questioning techniques, and assessment of memory, attention and concentration. Doctors are advised to seek additional information from carers or relatives when appropriate.

### Incapacity Benefit

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was the average (1) change of benefit income per person who last year failed to satisfy the personal capability assessment requirements to continue to receive incapacity benefit; [20229]

(2) net income from wages of people who obtained employment after failing the incapacity test last year; and if this was on average higher or lower than their previous benefit income. [20230]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** We are committed to helping sick and disabled people back into work where they are able to do so, while providing support for those who cannot work. Through our welfare reforms we have put into place measures to make work possible and to make it pay.

As part of these reforms the Personal Capability Assessment (PCA) was introduced in April 2000 to allow additional information to be gathered about a person's capabilities, to assist a personal adviser in helping them plan a return to work. The PCA is about helping people into work, not making it harder to get benefit.

Between 1 March 2000 and 28 February 2001 people who were found fit for work following a PCA (the All Work Test before 1 April 2000) saw an average benefit reduction of £39.60 per week.

Information is not available on the average net income of people who were found fit for work following a PCA and are now in paid employment.

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for each of the new Jobcentre Plus pathfinder areas, how many new claims for incapacity benefit have been made since the introduction of the scheme, and of these, how many *(a)* waivers and *(b)* deferrals for work-focused interviews have been made; how many work-focused interviews have taken place; and how many claimants have (i) refused to attend an interview and (ii) been subjected to benefit sanctions. [21961]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The information is not available in the format requested.

### Pensions

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to meet the Coalfields Community Campaign to discuss the issue of re-negotiating the surpluses received by the Government for acting as guarantors to the BCSSS and MPS pension schemes. [23966]

**Mr. Wilson:** I have been asked to reply.

None. Any issues relating to the current Guarantee arrangements are matters for discussion between my Department and the Trustees of the BCSSS and MPS.

### New Deal

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many lone parents on income support have school age children; how many of these parents were on the new deal for lone parents in April; how many have attended a personal adviser interview since April, broken down into those who agreed to participate in the NDLP and those who did not; how many have refused or failed to attend a personal adviser interview since April; and how many have not yet been invited to a personal adviser interview. [7909]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** At August 2001, 638,600[1] lone parents who receive income support had a child between five and 15 years old. Information is not available on how many of these people are participating in the new deal for lone parents (NDLP) programme.

Since April 2001, lone parents with a youngest child of school age (at least five years and three months old) have been asked to take part in a meeting with a personal adviser to discuss the range of help available to move into work when they make a claim for income support. This requirement is being extended to all lone parents making a claim to income support, in pathfinder areas since October 2001, and nationally from April 2002.

Lone parents already claiming income support are being invited to a compulsory personal adviser meeting, on a rolling programme, starting this year with those with a youngest child of 13–15 years.

50,320 lone parents have attended a personal adviser meeting since 30 April 2001 of whom 16,080 have chosen to join the NDLP programme[2].

If lone parents fail to attend a compulsory personal adviser meeting their claim is disallowed or, if they are already receiving income support, their benefit is sanctioned. This has happened in 887 cases up to 30 November. If the lone parent subsequently participates in a personal adviser meeting then the sanction is lifted. Lone parents are not required to take further action beyond participating in a personal adviser meeting.

Sources:

[1] Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry (August 2001)

[2] New Deal for Lone Parents and Personal Adviser Meetings Statistical First Release (statistics to September 2001)

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many lone parents have been sent an invitation to a new deal for lone parents interview since the scheme began; how many of these lone parents have attended an interview; and how many have then agreed to participate in the scheme. [7910]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Lone parents claiming income support, who are not required to attend a compulsory personal adviser meeting and who have a youngest child of at least three years old, are sent letters informing them about NDLP. These letters are not appointment letters but

do give details of how lone parents can request an initial interview to find out more about NDLP and join the programme. By the end of September 2001 nearly 300,000 lone parents had chosen to attend an NDLP interview and nearly 85 per cent. of them chose to go on to participate in the programme.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion (1) of those leaving the new deal for the long-term unemployed aged *(a)* 25 to 29, *(b)* 30 to 49 and *(c)* 50+ years found (i) employment and (ii) sustained jobs in each year since 1998; [9331]

(2) of those leaving the new deal for the long-term unemployed did so for *(a)* sustained jobs and *(b)* jobs lasting fewer than 13 weeks, broken down by region; [9421]

(3) of the pre-April 2001 entrants to the new deal for the long-term unemployed who undertook *(a)* the employment option and *(b)* the full-time education and training option found sustained jobs on leaving the new deal. [9424]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** From April 2001 we have introduced a new, enhanced new deal 25 plus for those unemployed for 18 months or more which offers more intensive, individually tailored support to participants.

The available information relating to the pre-April 2001 new deal for the long-term unemployed is in the tables. In addition to those recorded as leaving for sustained, unsubsidised jobs, we know from independent surveys that a significant proportion of leavers to unknown destinations will also have found work.

*Proportion of people leaving new deal for the long-term unemployed whose immediate destination was sustained, unsubsidised employment*

*Percentage*

| | *Age group on joining the new deal* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *25–29* | *30–49* | *50+* | *Overall* |
| 1998[1] | 34 | 29 | 17 | 26 |
| 1999 | 19 | 16 | 9 | 14 |
| 2000 | 18 | 15 | 11 | 14 |
| 2001[2] | 18 | 15 | 11 | 14 |
| Overall | 19 | 16 | 10 | 15 |

[1] From start July

[2] To end September

*Proportion of people leaving new deal for the long-term unemployed whose immediate destination was sustained, unsubsidised employment (to end September 2001)*

| *Region* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| Scotland | 12 |
| Northern | 10 |
| North West | 14 |
| Yorkshire and Humber | 14 |
| Wales | 14 |
| West Midlands | 13 |
| East Midlands and Eastern | 15 |
| South West | 20 |
| London/South East | 17 |
| Total | 15 |

*Proportion of people leaving the pre-April 2001 new deal options whose immediate destination was sustained, unsubsidised employment (to end September 2001)*

| *Option* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| Subsidised employment | 11 |
| Education and training | 15 |

*Note:*

By definition, all jobs gained by new deal leavers are sustained, unsubsidised jobs (ie to have left the programme they must not re-claim jobseeker's allowance within 13 weeks).

*Source:*

New Deal Evaluation Database

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information is given to new deal personal advisers on the opportunities that exist for new deal participants within Government Departments. [18042]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** All public sector vacancies notified to the Employment Service by various Government Departments are treated in exactly the same way as all others placed by public and private sector employers. Those new deal clients who then wish to apply for civil service opportunities are matched and screened against the desired recruitment criteria by the new deal adviser. Information on those Departments which have signed up to new deal is made available to all new deal advisers through the Employment Services' internal communications system (ESCOM).

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 160W, what proportion of the number of people leaving for *(a)* employment and *(b)* sustained employment in Government Departments represents the (i) total number of people leaving the new deal for young people and (ii) number of people leaving the new deal for young people for employment. [18060]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of individuals (1) in *(a)* the constituency of Buckingham and *(b)* total UK population have found permanent employment as a result of the new deal for (i) the long-term unemployed 25+, (ii) lone parents, (iii) disabled people and (iv) 50+ in each of the years since they were introduced; [22536]

(2) in *(a)* the constituency of Buckingham and *(b)* total UK population are participating in the new deal (i) for the long-term unemployed 25+, (ii) for lone parents, (iii) for disabled people and (iv) for 50+. [22537]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Information is not available in the format requested.

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Hamilton, South constituency found permanent employment as a result of new deal for *(a)* long-term unemployed 25 plus, *(b)* lone parents, *(c)* disabled people and *(d)* 50 plus in each of the years since they were introduced. [23358]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The available information is in the table.

*Number of people helped into sustained jobs in Hamilton, South by year*

| *Programme* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* | *2001* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New Deal 25 plus (July 1998-September 2001) | 6 | 19 | 36 | 33 | 94 |
| New Deal for Lone Parents (October 1998-September 2001) | 12 | 36 | 62 | 44 | 154 |
| New Deal 50 plus Employment Credit starts (April 2000-October 2001) | — | — | 37 | 34 | 71 |

*Notes:*
1. Sustained jobs are those lasting more than 13 weeks. No information on whether jobs are permanent is available for new deal for lone parents.
2. Figures shown are therefore for lone parents into employment.
3. Information at constituency level is not available for the new deal for disabled people.

*Source:*
New Deal Evaluation Database

## ONE Programme

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of lone parents participating in the ONE Programme has obtained employment. [9644]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Survey evidence from the ONE evaluation found that 14 per cent. of lone parents were in work of over 16 hours a week, four to five months after having begun their claim. Further information can be found in DWP Research Report No. 156, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library.

## Unemployment (Disabled People)

**Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many unemployed disabled people there were expressed *(a)* numerically and *(b)* as a percentage of the total unemployed in each month since January 1997 (i) nationally and (ii) in the south-west. [11375]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The available information is in the table:

| | | *ILO Unemployed* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Total working-age* | *Working-age disabled people* | *Percentage* |
| *Great Britain* | | | |
| 1998 | 1,703,266 | 332,768 | 19.5 |
| 1999 | 1,678,741 | 348,153 | 20.7 |
| 2000 | 1,551,454 | 348,813 | 22.5 |
| 2001 | 1,343,345 | 279,795 | 20.8 |
| *South-west* | | | |
| 1998 | 107,276 | 25,656 | 23.9 |
| 1999 | 115,601 | 24,262 | 21.0 |
| 2000 | 100,126 | 25,039 | 25.0 |
| 2001 | 85,043 | 19,913 | 23.4 |

*Notes:*
1. Information is from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), which uses the International Labour Organisation (ILO) measure of unemployment.
2. People are ILO unemployed if they are out of work, want a job, have actively sought work in the last four weeks and are available to start work in the next two weeks.
3. Information is not available by month because seasonally adjusted information from the Labour Force Survey is only available once each year. Therefore, the table provides information on Great Britain and the south-west for the spring quarter of each year since 1998.
4. Information before 1998 is not comparable due to changes in the health and disability questions asked in the LFS.

*Source:*
LFS Spring Quarters 1998–2001.

## Vocational Rehabilitation

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to develop the role of care managers *(a)* in vocational rehabilitation and *(b)* in developing appropriate (i) training and (ii) qualifications for them. [20805]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* We are still establishing our strategy on the provision of a vocational rehabilitation service. We will consider the role of a care manager in any possible future service. No decision has been taken on any appropriate training and qualifications that may be needed.

## Departmental Sickness Absence

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21339]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Such information as is available is in the table.

| *Year* | *DSS* | *ES* |
|---|---|---|
| 1998 | 1,130,000 | 431,158 |
| 1999 | 1,046,000 | 479,157 |
| 2000 | 1,082,000 | 405,272 |

*Note:*
Figures relate to the former Department for Social Security and the Employment Service.

## Small Businesses

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what structures exist to facilitate communication between his Department and small businesses. [21805]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Meeting the changing needs of small businesses will be critical if we are to succeed in maintaining economic growth and providing people with greater opportunity through work. We are very keen to listen to the views and ideas of small businesses to ensure that we succeed.

The National Employer Panel is an employer-led body which provides independent advice to Ministers on the design, delivery and performance of our welfare to work services. Three of the Panel's members are from the small business sector. The Panel also has a sub-committee on small business issues.

In addition to these formal arrangements, the Department works with the small business sector through a range of initiatives and forums. Small businesses participate in the Employer Coalitions we have set up in several major cities and in the many New Deal Steering

Groups up and down the country. Their participation helps ensure that our approach to helping people back into work is responsive to the needs of small businesses.

### Asylum Seekers

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total cost of benefits paid to people applying for asylum in the UK was in 2000–01. [23429]

**Malcolm Wicks:** From 3 April 2000 the Home Office is responsible for supporting and accommodating asylum seekers awaiting a determination of their case. Those asylum seekers in receipt of benefits prior to 3 April 2000 continue to be eligible to claim income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit. Provisional estimates are that benefit totalling £185 million was paid to these asylum seekers during the financial year 2000–01.

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is the estimated amount of money paid to asylum seekers by way of benefit in 2000. [17880]

**Malcolm Wicks:** From 3 April 2000 the Home Office is responsible for supporting and accommodating asylum seekers awaiting a determination of their case. Those asylum seekers in receipt of benefits prior to 3 April 2000 continue to be eligible to claim income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit. Provisional estimates are that benefit totalling £215 million was paid to asylum seekers between 1 January and 31 December 2000.

### Minimum Income Guarantee

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in the Epsom and Ewell constituency received the minimum income guarantee in each year since 1998. [23431]

**Mr. McCartney:** The latest figures as at August 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 for pensioners in the Epsom and Ewell constituency receiving minimum income guarantee are as follows:

*Thousand*

| | *Number of claimants* |
|---|---|
| August 1998 | 1.2 |
| August 1999 | 1.1 |
| August 2000 | 1.1 |
| August 2001 | 1.2 |

**Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Battersea receive the minimum income guarantee; and what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners who are entitled to benefit from it. [24408]

**Mr. McCartney:** As at August 2001 there were 2,800 pensioners receiving the minimum income guarantee (MIG) in Battersea.

Estimates of the number of pensioners who may qualify for, but who have not claimed the MIG are not available below national level. The latest national figures on the number of people who may be entitled to the MIG are included in the publication "Take Up of Income Related Benefits: Statistics for 1999–2000", copies of which are available in the Library of both Houses.

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Wales qualify for the minimum income guarantee; and how many are in receipt of it. [23960]

**Mr. McCartney:** As at August 2001 there were 100,200 pensioners claiming the minimum income guarantee (MIG) in Wales.

Estimates of the number of people who may qualify for, but who have not claimed the MIG are not available below national level.

### Benefits Agency Staff

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many attacks on staff have taken place in each Benefits Agency office in Greater London in each of the last five years. [23638]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The available information is in the table.

*Assault in Benefits Agency offices in Greater London*

| | *2001* | | *2000* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Site* | *Non-physical* | *Physical* | *Non-physical* | *Physical* |
| Balham Irene House | 6 | 0 | 17 | 2 |
| Barking | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Barnet Hill | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Bexleyheath | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bloomsbury | 13 | 0 | 26 | 0 |
| Brixton | 48 | 1 | 55 | 3 |
| Bromley | 20 | 1 | 14 | 1 |
| Canning Town | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| City | 8 | 0 | 22 | 1 |
| Croydon | 2 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Crystal Palace | 27 | 1 | 7 | 0 |
| Dulwich | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Ealing | 40 | 9 | 45 | 0 |
| Edgware | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Edmonton | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Euston | 3 | 0 | 20 | 2 |
| Finsbury Park | 9 | 0 | 13 | 0 |
| Fulham | 4 | 0 | 19 | 1 |
| Greenwich Park | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Hackney | 40 | 0 | 30 | 0 |
| Harrow | 7 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Highgate | 31 | 2 | 82 | 3 |
| Hounslow | 24 | 3 | 16 | 1 |
| Hoxton | 7 | 0 | 28 | 0 |
| Ilford | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Kennington Park | 31 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Kensington | 0 | 0 | 19 | 0 |
| Lewisham | 9 | 0 | 15 | 0 |
| Leytonstone | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Neasden | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Notting Hill | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Paddington | 15 | 1 | 11 | 1 |
| Peckham | 34 | 0 | 33 | 1 |
| Plaistow | 3 | 0 | 13 | 1 |
| Poplar | 21 | 0 | 31 | 0 |
| Romford | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Southall | 5 | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| Southwark | 23 | 1 | 14 | 0 |
| Stratford | 6 | 0 | 17 | 1 |
| Streatham | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Sutton | 22 | 0 | 14 | 0 |
| Tottenham | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

*Assault in Benefits Agency offices in Greater London*

| Site | 2001 Non-physical | 2001 Physical | 2000 Non-physical | 2000 Physical |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Twickenham | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Walthamstow | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Wandsworth | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| Wimbledon | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Wood Green | 10 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| Woolwich | 76 | 4 | 58 | 1 |

### Winter Fuel Allowance

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners received the winter fuel allowance in 2000; and how many will receive it this winter in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* South Tyneside. [24620]

**Mr. McCartney:** Over 11 million people received a winter fuel payment for winter 2000–01, around 32,900 of whom were in the South Tyneside local authority area. Figures for this winter are expected to be similar.

### Stakeholder Pensions

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the Buckingham constituency have taken out stakeholder pensions. [24866]

**Mr. McCartney:** The information is not available.

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many stakeholder pension plans have been sold in *(a)* Wales, and *(b)* the other regions of the UK; [23962]

(2) of those stakeholder pensions sold in Wales, how many have been transferred from existing pension plans; [23959]

(3) how many firms in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the other regions of the UK, have made provision for stakeholder pensions for their work force. [24012]

**Mr. McCartney:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

Number of stakeholder pensions sold: 491,694

Number of employers who have designated stakeholder pension schemes: 284,821

*Note:*

Figures cover all United kingdom and show the position at the end of October 2001.

*Source:*

Association of British Insurers (ABI).

The ABI has reported that over three-quarters of those employers required to do so had designated a stakeholder pension scheme for their staff by the end of October. We know that other designations were in progress at that time.

We should also remember that stakeholder pensions have led to other improvements in pension provision. Charges on personal pensions have fallen as a result of stakeholder pensions, and employers have also widened their schemes to cover more of their work forces. This means more people are able to save for their retirement.

### Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many formal notices his Department has received in the last year from the Parliamentary Ombudsman expressing an intention to carry out an investigation; and in respect of each notice, how long it took to respond. [18766]

**Malcolm Wicks** *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The Department received 234 statements of complaint from the Parliamentary Ombudsman in the last financial year April 2000 to March 2001. The average length of time taken to respond to the statement of complaint is 25.51 working days.

### Estate Management Services (PRIME Contract)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the saving from the PRIME contract with Trillium for estate management services. [18988]

**Malcolm Wicks:** In line with the findings of the National Audit Office, the public sector comparator for PRIME estimated that the Department will save £560 million over the life of the 20-year contract. This is some 22 per cent. less than it would have cost the Department had we continued with our previous estate management arrangements.

In addition to this significant reduction in our running costs, the financial benefit of many innovative ideas in the PRIME contract such as the sharing of gains on disposal of properties and various contractor incentivisation and benefit sharing provisions, are now being realised. The first three full years of the contract with Land Securities Trillium has brought about the following returns:

| | £ million |
|---|---|
| *1998–99* | |
| Centralisation of CILOR (Contribution In Lieu Of Rates) Control | 3.000 |
| Release of surplus space @ 1.4.98 | 10.000 |
| Release of space | 1.000 |
| *1999–2000* | |
| Credits from CILOR appeals | 12.488 |
| Development Gain | 10.992 |
| Utilities reconciliation | 2.714 |
| Energy savings | 1.709 |
| Release of space | .856 |
| Unavailability deduction | .128 |
| *2000–01* | |
| Business rate corrections with LAs | 8.000 |
| Development Gain pool | 1.000 |
| Energy savings | .400 |
| Utilities reconciliation | .460 |

### Pensioner Incomes

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will provide a breakdown of average pensioner incomes for each year between 1979 and the last year for which information is available. [21027]

**Mr. McCartney:** The average pensioner incomes are supplied in the table.

*Average pensioner incomes 1979—1999/2000*

*£ per annum*

| | *All pensioners* | *Pensioner couples* | *Single pensioners* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1979 | 115 | 167 | 87 |
| 1981 | 122 | 174 | 94 |
| 1987 | 147 | 212 | 111 |
| 1988 | 152 | 227 | 110 |
| 1989 | 150 | 215 | 113 |
| 1990–91 | 163 | 232 | 121 |
| 1992 | 173 | 244 | 130 |
| 1992–93 | 173 | 244 | 130 |
| 1994–95[1] | 177 | 253 | 130 |
| 1995–96[1] | 176 | 249 | 130 |
| 1996–97[1] | 187 | 268 | 135 |
| 1997–98[1] | 189 | 270 | 137 |
| 1998–99[1] | 194 | 275 | 142 |
| 1999/2000[1] | 201 | 281 | 149 |

*Notes:*

1. All incomes are £ per week and at July prices.
2. FRS information is only available from 1994. Prior to this, FES based estimates have been used.
3. Pensioners are defined as:

Single (non cohabiting) people over State pension age (65 for men and 60 for women).

Couples (married or cohabiting) where the man, who is defined as the head of a couple, is aged 65 and over.

4. The income quoted is the net mean income before housing costs. It includes all types of income including benefit income, occupational pensions, investment income and earnings.

*Source:*

[1] The Family Resources Survey (FRS) 1994/79—1999/2000
The Family Expenditure Survey (FES) 1979—1992/93

### Post Office Card Account

**Ms Atherton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made in establishing a Post Office card account system; and what factors underlay the decision as to who will receive these accounts. [23707]

**Malcolm Wicks:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Alexander) on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 119W.

### Benefits Agency

**Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will introduce freephone telephone numbers for the Benefits Agency. [23824]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* There are clearly benefits to be gained by offering Freecall and Local Call Rate services to Benefits Agency customers, but this has to be weighed against the cost to provide such services.

Where services are provided through a call centre, our policy is to offer telephone numbers which are chargeable at local call rates. This allows customers to be charged for the call at a local rate, regardless of the actual destination of that call within the UK. The Department meets the balance of the call cost. Further, where customers are likely to face significant difficulties in affording such charges, a Freecall number has indeed been provided. Customers are also able to ask for a call back from the Department rather than incurring personal call costs.

The Department is currently modernising the delivery of its services to customers. Both Jobcentre Plus and the Pensions Organisation are in the process of assessing the best use of the telephone for customer contact. We are exploring the use of a single Local Call Rate number for initial contact with the Department. Calls could then be directed automatically to the most appropriate contact point, based on the originating dialling code. We are still in the early stages of this assessment.

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what is the cost of amalgamating the Benefits Agency and the employment services in the current year; [23361]

(2) what savings his Department will make over the next five years by amalgamating the Benefits Agency and the employment services. [23362]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** We have in the current year invested £122 million in establishing the new Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices and in preparing for the wider integration of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service more generally. We expect substantial savings to accrue from the creation of Jobcentre Plus over the next five years as we implement the new Jobcentre Plus network nationwide.

### Hospital Downrating Rules

**Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact on old people whose pensions are reduced while in hospital. [24067]

**Mr. McCartney:** The Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, has looked at issues affecting hospital in-patients including rules governing the downrating of benefits.

This rule prevents double provision from public funds as the publicly funded NHS maintains people while they stay in hospital as well as providing free treatment. Social security maintenance benefits are also paid from state funds. They are therefore not paid in full indefinitely where a person is in a NHS hospital and having their day-to-day living expenses met through the NHS.

The double provision principle is a key cornerstone of the system of national insurance introduced over 50 years ago.

**Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners, affected by the hospital downrating rules, have had demands to pay back to the Pensions Service sums of *(a)* between £25 and £50, *(b)* between £51 and £100, *(c)* between £101 and £200 and *(d)* more than £200, in the last year for which figures are available. [24065]

**Mr. McCartney:** The information is not available in the required format.

**Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average value was of pension reduction applied to pensioners who had hospital stays of *(a)* more than six and *(b)* more than 52 weeks, in the last year for which figures are available. [24066]

**Mr. McCartney:** The average weekly reduction in retirement pension for pensioners in hospital between six and 52 weeks is £23.

The average weekly reduction in retirement pension for pensioners in hospital over 52 weeks is £56.

*Source:*

Administrative data, 31 March 2001.

**Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners, affected by the hospital downrating rules, had their pensions reduced after *(a)* six and *(b)* 52 weeks in hospital in the last year for which figures are available. [24068]

**Mr. McCartney:** The information requested is in the table:

| *Category of hospital reduction* | *Number of retirement pensioners* |
|---|---|
| Reduced after 6 weeks | 23,000 |
| Reduced after 52 weeks | 10,000 |

*Source:*

March 2001 Administrative Sample

**Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will quantify the cost of administrating the task of *(a)* reducing the pensions of pensioners and *(b)* collecting retrospective deductions from pensioners who have been in hospital for more than (i) six and (ii) 52 weeks. [24069]

**Mr. McCartney:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 513W.

## Benefits Take-up

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 66–67W, what measures are being considered to encourage those aged 60 years and over to claim the benefits to which they are entitled. [24244]

**Mr. McCartney:** I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 601–02W.

## Welfare to Work

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the reasons for the difference between the final voted departmental expenditure limit and provisional outturn for financial year 2000–01, as listed in the Treasury document, "Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn", for the Welfare to Work category; and if he will make a statement. [24107]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Full details of outturn against 2000–01 voted provision will be published in the appropriation accounts to be presented to the House of Commons by 31 January and will contain full explanations of any significant differences between final voted provision and actual outturn. Updated estimates of the outturn for departmental expenditure limits in 2000–01 were published in the 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318), Table B16.

## Carers' Benefits

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will place responses to the consultation on carers' benefits in the Library. [24215]

**Maria Eagle:** The Explanatory Document laid before Parliament on 17 December alongside the proposed Regulatory Order Reform (Carer's Allowance) Order 2002 contains a detailed digest of responses and is available in the Library.

## Invalid Care Allowance

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to change invalid care allowance for carers aged over 65 years. [24555]

**Maria Eagle:** On 17 December we laid a draft Regulatory Reform Order before Parliament which, if approved, will give those aged over 65 the right to claim invalid care allowance for the first time.

The order would also provide for the extension of entitlement to invalid care allowance for up to eight weeks after the death of the person being cared for and a change in the name of the benefit to carer's allowance to reflect more closely the purpose of the benefit.

## Income Support

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what target times are set for the completion of transfers from jobseeker's allowance to income support for 60-year-olds. [24750]

**Mr. McCartney:** In October 2001 we introduced simplified claim forms for people aged 60 or over to help ease their transition from working age benefits onto income support and the minimum income guarantee.

The target for clearance of income support claims is 12 days from the date that the customer provides all the necessary information. There are no separate targets for customers who claim on reaching the age of 60.

## Assaults on Staff

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 554, if he will make a statement on progress in combating verbal and physical assaults on staff. [19394]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* We estimate that over a quarter of a million people have passed through the Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices during the first month of their operation. Risk assessments for each of the new Jobcentre Plus offices have been carried out and, following consultation with local trade union health and safety representatives, a series of extra security measures has been introduced. These include wide coverage by closed circuit television; training for staff in how to handle difficult situations; better management in each office to avoid difficult situations building up; panic alarms; and more visible and effective security guards. Additionally in each pathfinder area there are screened facilities to deal with individuals and parts of the business that pose a greater risk. These will, we believe, lead to fewer incidents of verbal and physical assaults on staff.

### Competitive Tendering

**Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the schemes administered by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies where funds are allocated by a competitive bidding process; and what was the amount of money allocated to each scheme. [19732]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown** *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The Department does not itself administer schemes where funds are allocated by a competitive bidding process. It does submit bids for funds under schemes administered by the Treasury, such as the Invest to Save or Capital Modernisation Fund. The Department also uses the competitive bidding process to secure value for money in procuring goods and services from external suppliers. It is normal departmental policy to obtain competitive bids for all procurements valued at £500 or more. This policy results in thousands of procurement exercises where funds are paid to successful suppliers. Listing these exercises would incur disproportionate cost.

### Long-term Unemployed

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his statement of 28 November, what consultation he has held with *(a)* employers and *(b)* others concerning his proposals in respect of the new deal for the long-term unemployed; how many (i) employers and (ii) others have indicated a willingness to employ the long-term unemployed under the proposals; and what estimate he has made of the proportion of long-term unemployed likely to be employed by (A) private sector employers and (B) local authorities. [20278]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** We have consulted the National Employment Panel on our proposals to build on the new deal for the long-term unemployed. We are also continuing to consult with local employers and other organisations in each of the pilot locations. Participants will vary from pilot to pilot and it is too early to say what proportion of people are likely to be employed by private sector employers and by local authorities.

### Remploy

**Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what were the total non-disabled staff costs in Remploy in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [20429]

**Maria Eagle:** Total non-disabled staff costs in Remploy were as follows:

| *Year* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 30.7 |
| 1998–99 | 30.1 |
| 1999–2000 | 28.4 |
| 2000–01 | 28.5 |

These figures include costs of disabled staff who are not employed under the Workstep programmes.

**Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* lower, *(b)* middle and *(c)* senior management in Remploy there were in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000 and (iv) 2000–01; and what was the total expenditure on each of *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* for those years. [20430]

**Maria Eagle:** Remploy does not categorise its work force in the groups detailed in the question.

**Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many non-disabled workers were employed by Remploy in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [20431]

**Maria Eagle:** The numbers of non-disabled people employed by Remploy are in the table.

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 1,457 |
| 1998–99 | 1,402 |
| 1999–2000 | 1,260 |
| 2000–01 | 1,149 |

In Remploy the term "non-disabled employees" includes disabled people not supported by the Workstep programme.

### Blind People (Services)

**Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment the Government have made of moon language for the blind; and if he will make a statement. [22494]

**Maria Eagle:** The Government have not made an assessment of moon language.

### Older People

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the *(a)* frequency of meetings and *(b)* priorities of the Interministerial Committee on Older People. [23117]

**Mr. McCartney** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* Under paragraph 2 of Part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, information about Cabinet Committee business is not released.

### Industrial Action

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research his Department has undertaken into the impact on benefit claimants in areas affected by industrial strike action. [23277]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** We have ensured that benefit claimants are not adversely affected by the industrial action by introducing contingency arrangements. Benefit payments have continued to be made in the offices affected using those staff who have remained at work supported, where appropriate, by staff redeployed from other areas. Where it has not been possible to make benefit payments under the normal procedures due to a lack of sufficient numbers of experienced staff, Pathfinder offices have made interim payments at an amount equivalent to the full benefit rate.

### Jobcentre Plus

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department met the target of ensuring that all staff in new Jobcentre Plus offices were fully trained by the end of November. [23278]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Yes, with the exception of those staff absent from work because of their involvement in the ongoing industrial action or for other reasons. Those staff will be trained as soon as they return to work.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what additional risk assessments have been carried out in Jobcentre Plus offices following experience of their operation; and what the results were of such assessments. [23279]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Full risk assessments were carried out in all of the Pathfinder offices before they opened and the recommendations of each assessment implemented in full. As planned, further assessments are now being undertaken in each office to review the original recommendations in the light of actual experience of the new offices in operation. So far 32 such assessments have been completed.

Early indications from the further assessments are that Jobcentre Plus offices are working as intended as are the previously recommended safety measures. The review visits have led to some minor changes to recommended control measures, reflecting updated details in the Generic Risk Assessment, and these are being implemented as they arise.

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 785W, on Jobcentre Plus, what contingency plans are in place to ensure that customers continue to receive the benefits to which they are entitled in areas where Jobcentre Plus staff are undertaking strike action. [23372]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Benefit payments have continued to be made in Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices using those staff who have remained at work supported, where appropriate, by staff redeployed from other areas. Where it has not been possible to make benefit payments under the normal procedures due to a lack of sufficient numbers of experienced staff, Pathfinder offices have made interim payments at an amount equivalent to the full benefit rate.

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason he has not introduced the integrated claim form that was piloted in the ONE Call Centre pilots into the new Jobcentre Plus offices. [23677]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The integrated claim form was piloted in the call centre variant of the ONE pilots. The valuable lessons learned from the ONE experience have been fed through to the new modernised Information Technology solutions for the Department for Work and Pensions that are planned to be rolled out to Jobcentre Plus offices from 2002. These will include an integrated claim form for customers to complete by telephone.

### Disability Claimants

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many disability claimants there were in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the constituency of Gordon in November 2000. [23293]

**Maria Eagle:** The available information is in the table. Figures for Gordon at November 2000 are not available.

*Recipients of disability living allowance and attendance allowance*

| | *30 November 2000* | *31 May 2001* |
|---|---|---|
| *Great Britain*[1] | | |
| Disability living allowance | 2,197.6 | 2,240.5 |
| Attendance allowance | 1,291.3 | 1,290.0 |
| *Gordon*[2] | | |
| Disability living allowance | [3]— | 1,835 |
| Attendance allowance | [3]— | 1,255 |

[1] Based on 5 per cent. data, rounded to nearest 100
[2] Based on 100 per cent. data, rounded to nearest five
[3] Not available

The Northern Ireland Assembly is responsible for social security matters within Northern Ireland.

### Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are entitled to more than one reduced earnings allowance entitlement as part of their industrial injuries disablement benefit. [23963]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The number of people entitled to more than one reduced earnings allowance as part of their industrial injuries disablement benefit is 1,100.

*Source:*

10 per cent. sample of industrial injuries disablement benefit assessments at April 2000.

### Pension Schemes

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 534W, how much was paid in each year since 1992 into *(a)* defined benefit pension schemes and *(b)* defined contribution pension schemes. [24227]

**Mr. McCartney:** This information is not available. Non-state pensions are private, voluntary arrangements, and we do not ask pension administrators or providers to disclose the nature of the benefits accrued from year-on-year investments by employers or individuals.

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS

### Social Services

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many full-time equivalents per 10,000 population work in social services in *(a)* Portsmouth, South and *(b)* Hampshire; and if he will make a statement. [21798]

**Jacqui Smith:** I have been asked to reply.

The number of full-time equivalents employed by the local authority social services department at 30 September 2000 per 10,000 (population measured at 30 June 2000) was 58.11 for Portsmouth unitary authority and 26.38 for Hampshire shire county. These figures compare with an England average of 43.44.

Portsmouth unitary authority covers a larger area than Portsmouth, South constituency. Data are available only for councils with social services responsibilities and not for parliamentary constituencies.

### Early Years Development Partnerships

**Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she has received further bids from Leicestershire *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* Early Years Development Partnerships for additional funding in (i) 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [18502]

**Margaret Hodge:** An additional bid for places for three-year-olds in 2001–02, for the spring term, was received from Leicestershire. They were notified that it had been successful on 27 November 2001. This increased Leicester's allocation for 2001–02 from £3.1 million to £3.7 million.

All local education authorities in England, including Leicestershire, will shortly be notified of the funding for nursery education places for three-year-olds that they will receive in 2002–03.

### Statemented Pupils

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many statemented pupils were excluded from school on a *(a)* permanent basis and *(b)* temporary basis in (i) Durham and (ii) England. [16258]

**Mr. Timms:** The number of statemented pupils permanently excluded from maintained primary, maintained secondary and special schools in Durham LEA and England in the school year 1999–2000 were 19 and 1,494 respectively.

The number of statemented pupils who received fixed term exclusions in Durham local education authority in the school year 1999–2000 was 277.

This represents 16 per cent. of the total number of pupils excluded for a fixed term and 0.38 per cent. of the total school population in Durham.

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many, and what percentage, of pupils at *(a)* Key Stage 1 and *(b)* Key Stage 2 in Durham are statemented. [16256]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The number of statemented pupils in Durham local education authority at Key Stages 1 and 2 has been estimated at 300 and 780, respectively in 2001.

### Early Years Excellence

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight, on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, cols 798–99W, if she will list the criteria for joining the Early Excellence Centres programme contained in the latest invitation to join the programme; and if she will make a statement on how these relate to the earlier invitations. [16234]

**Margaret Hodge** *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* Criteria and detailed requirements for joining the Early Excellence Centre (EEC) programme are set out in guidance issued by the Department. The latest guidance was issued on 5 October 2001. The core activities of the programme which all centres are expected to deliver, or have well advanced and convincing plans to develop, remain unchanged from previous phases of the programme and are as follows:

- good quality integrated early education and day care for children 0-five requiring centre-based extended-day and extended-year provision;
- parental and carer involvement in the education and care of children, e.g. schemes for family learning, developing parenting skills, raising parents' expectations and in other ways;
- support services for children and parents and carers of children, e.g. health, counselling and information services, home support, drop-in facilities;
- effective early identification and intervention for children in need and children with special educational needs, with a view to improving children's prospects and, wherever appropriate, achieving inclusion in mainstream provision;
- access to adult education and training by parents of young children and other adults, including those seeking skills and qualifications for employment;
- raising standards of integrated early years provision among other early years providers, including voluntary and private providers, childminders and other carers, by contributing to the training and development strategy of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and through the development and dissemination of good practice.

Decisions on designations also take into account links with other Government programmes, geographical coverage, support of key partners, especially the local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP), and commitment to multi-agency working.

### Pre-school Education

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the new regulations affecting pre-school playgroups and nurseries introduced since 1997. [21954]

**Margaret Hodge:** Regulations have been introduced as follows:

Regulations to implement the programme of three and four-year-old nursery education funding:

- Nursery Education (England) Regulations 1998—Revoked
- Nursery Education (England) (Amendment) Regulations 1999—Revoked
- Nursery Education (England) (Amendment) (No2) Regulations 1999—Revoked
- Nursery Education (England) Regulations 2000[1]

Regulations giving power to pay £24 million training grant:

- The Education (Nursery Education Training Grant) (England) Regulations 2001

Regulations forming part of the new national system of regulating day care for under-8s, operated by Ofsted:

- Child Minding and Day Care (Disqualification) (England) Regulations 2001[1]
- Child Minding and Day Care (Applications for Registration) (England) Regulations 2001[1]
- Child Minding and Day Care (Certificates of Registration) (England) Regulations 2001[1]
- Child Minding and Day Care (Registration and Annual Fees) Regulations 2001[1]
- Child Minding and Day Care (National Standards) (England) Regulations 2001
- Day Care and Childminding (Inspections) (Prescribed Matters) (England) Regulations 2001
- Child Minding and Day Care (Functions of Local Authorities: Information, Advice and Training) (England) Regulations 2001

Regulations giving the Secretary of State power to accredit over-7s settings to enable parents to claim the child care element of working families tax credit:

Tax Credit Act (New Category of Childcare Provider) Regulations 1999.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pre-school nurseries and playgroups are registered with Ofsted in *(a)* Surrey and *(b)* England and Wales. [23408]

**Mr. Timms:** The information is not available in the form requested. The Department collects information on day nurseries, playgroups and pre-schools defined in terms of the full day or sessional care that they provide. It does not collect information on pre-schools separately from playgroups. The available information is shown in the following table.

*Number of day nurseries and playgroups and pre-schools: England and Surrey local authority area: position at 31 March 2001*

| | *Day nurseries* | *Playgroups and pre-schools* |
|---|---|---|
| England[1] | 7,800 | 14,000 |
| Surrey LA area[2] | 170 | 370 |

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.
[2] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Local authorities provided the data. Ofsted did not assume responsibility for registration and inspection of children's day care facilities until September 2001.

Figures for 2001 for England and Government Office regions were published in Statistical Bulletin 08/01 "Children's Day Care Facilities as at 31 March 2001", which is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/ and from the Library.

For information for Wales, I refer the hon. Member to the Education Department of the Assembly for Wales.

### Teaching Qualifications

**Mr. Lilley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will negotiate mutual recognition of teaching qualifications with other Commonwealth countries. [22280]

**Mr. Timms:** We have no plans to do so. Previous comparability arrangements for recognition of overseas teaching qualifications were withdrawn in 1989. These were replaced by mutual recognition arrangements with other countries in the European Economic Area coupled with an employment based training route which enables overseas-trained teachers from countries outside the European Economic Area to obtain qualified teacher status. These arrangements were augmented earlier this year to allow exceptional experienced overseas trained teachers to obtain qualified teacher status and an exemption from induction through a simultaneous assessment.

### Individual Learning Accounts

**Alistair Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what inquiry she has commenced into the circumstances of closure of the Individual Learning Accounts scheme; what the terms of reference of the inquiry are; and when she expects it to report. [22153]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* On 12 November the Secretary of State asked the Department's Head of Internal Audit to carry out a review of the development and management of Individual Learning Accounts. I will make the results of this work available to the House in due course.

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she has taken to ensure hon. Members are kept informed of developments relating to the Individual Learning Accounts programme; and if she will place relevant papers in the Library. [25375]

**John Healey:** It is important that Parliament is kept informed of developments relating to the Individual Learning Accounts programme. I wrote to all hon. Members on 24 October, 27 November and 18 December 2001. I have also undertaken to keep the Education and Skills Select Committee updated following the withdrawal of the Individual Learning Accounts programme on 23 November and I wrote to the Chairman about this on 30 November, 7 December and 18 December and copies have already been placed in the House Library. I am also responding individually to Members addressing both concerns from their constituents and parliamentary questions.

### UK Youth Parliament

**Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the development of the UK Youth Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [23325]

**Mr. Denham:** The Government want to provide more opportunities for children and young people to have a bigger say about policies and services relevant to them. I value the UK Youth Parliament as one of the routes by which this can happen. The Government have given support to the UK Youth Parliament to help it establish itself. I have now asked the Children and Young People's Unit to explore with the UK Youth Parliament what more the Parliament can do to ensure that it acts as an effective voice for children and young people, as part of our drive to improve children and young people's participation right across Government and in their communities.

### Youth Councils

**Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to encourage youth councils at a local level; and if she will make a statement. [23326]

**Mr. Denham:** On 2 November, I published "Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People." It commits Government Departments to increase opportunities for children and young people to have a bigger say about policies and services relevant to them across government and in their communities. Youth councils provide one way to help achieve this. The funding we are making available through the new "Transforming Youth Work Development Fund" will provide additional resources to support the drive for increased participation, help to ensure there is enhanced youth work provision to underpin it, and contribute to our efforts to increase young people's engagement with local democracy.

### Voter Participation

**Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to encourage more young people to vote; and if she will make a statement. [23327]

**Mr. Denham:** I have asked the Children and Young People's Unit to work with young people to identify what needs to change to encourage more young people to vote and to develop an agenda for action. On 29 October a group of young people came together from across England to present their initial views to Government, the Electoral Commission and representatives of political parties. The unit, working closely with the Electoral Commission and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, will be extending the consultation with young people and key stakeholders over the coming months with a view to producing conclusions and recommendations for further action in the spring of 2002.

### Pre-school Work

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people completed certified courses for pre-school work in 2001–02; and how many she estimates are certified for pre-school work. [23407]

**Margaret Hodge:** The Department for Education and Skills does not yet hold information regarding the number of people who have completed accredited courses for pre-school work in 2001–02.

We estimate that presently there are 147,004 people certified for pre-school work to at least the levels required by the National Standards for Under Eights Day Care and Childminding. Additionally, there are 72,300 people registered to work as child minders. The total excludes volunteers.

*Source:*

Preliminary findings from a recently commissioned work force survey to be published early next year.

### Pupil Exclusions

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she has collated about the linkage between exclusion and the number of criminal offences committed by under-18s. [23410]

**Mr. Timms:** My Department does not specifically collate any information about the linkage between exclusion and the number of criminal offences committed by under-18s.

However, the Home Office, which lead on Youth Crime issues, have carried out a number of research projects in this area. The latest of these is the report "The independent effects of permanent exclusion from school on the offending careers of young people", Home Office (RDS Occasional Paper No 71). MORI's (2001) Youth Survey 2001 for the Youth Justice Board also examines the link between exclusion and crime.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many decisions taken by schools in the Buckingham constituency permanently to exclude pupils were reversed by independent appeal panels in each year since 1997. [23733]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The information for Buckinghamshire local education authority is shown in the table.

Parliamentary constituencies figures are calculated by adding figures from all the schools in the constituency together. As exclusion appeals are collected at local education authority level and not at school level they cannot be aggregated into parliamentary constituencies.

| *School year* | *Number of appeals lodged* | *Number of appeals heard* | *Number of successful appeals* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 1997–98 | 12 | 8 | 3 |
| 1998–99 | 9 | 9 | 3 |
| 1999–2000 | 10 | 8 | 4 |

### Pre-school Funding

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 643W, on pre-school funding, if she will place the Ofsted and QCA advice referred to in the Library. [23576]

**Margaret Hodge:** Any documentary information relating to the advice given has now been archived. The relevant files have been called for and appropriate information identified will be placed in the Library.

### Teaching Posts

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teaching posts are *(a)* vacant and *(b)* filled by supply, temporary and agency teachers in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in the Buckingham constituency. [23726]

**Mr. Timms:** The information is not available in the form requested.

Full-time teacher vacancies in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in the Buckinghamshire local education authority in January 2001 were:

Nursery and primary: 21

Secondary: 33.

Teachers with contracts of less than one month in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in the Buckinghamshire local education authority, working for the whole day on 18 January 2001, were:

Nursery and primary: 59

Secondary: 51.

Agency teachers with contracts of one month or more are not recorded separately.

### ICT Spending

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the amount was *(a)* in total and *(b)* per pupil spent on information and communications technology in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [23727]

**John Healey:** This information is not held by the Department on a constituency basis. However, expenditure on ICT in schools in England has been collected annually since 1998 and is shown in the table:

| *Expenditure on ICT* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Primary schools* | | | | |
| in total (£ million) | 68 | 125 | 150 | 186 |
| per pupil (£) | 15 | 32 | 37 | 42 |
| *Secondary schools* | | | | |
| in total (£ million) | 143 | 161 | 177 | 210 |
| per pupil (£) | 46 | 53 | 56 | 66 |

## Teachers (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new teachers have been employed in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [23730]

**Mr. Timms:** The information is not available in the form requested. Teachers in full or part-time regular service in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools sector in Buckinghamshire local education authority area, in the March of the year after they qualified, by year of entry to teaching, were as follows:

| | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nursery and primary | 110 | 80 | 110 |
| Secondary | 90 | 130 | 100 |

[1] Data are provisional. 1999–2000 is the latest year for which information is available.

*Note:*

1. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. The figures may exclude some part-time teachers who are not members of the teachers pension scheme.

## National Grid for Learning

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much National Grid for Learning funding has been granted to schools in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [23728]

**John Healey:** National Grid for Learning funding through the Standards Fund commenced in 1998–99. Funding is allocated to local education authorities and information is not kept on a constituency basis. Since 1998 schools in Buckinghamshire have benefited from the following allocations (including match funding from the LEA):

| *Year* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1998–99 | 1.25 |
| 1999–2000 | 1.125 |
| 2000–01 | 1.694 |
| 2001–02 | 2.032 |

Through Buckinghamshire's membership of the South East Grid for Learning consortium, its schools have also benefited from a share of £5,051 million of National Grid for Learning funding allocated in 2000–01 and £6.256 million in 2001–02 to equip them with broadband internet connections.

## Pupil Referral/Learning Support Units

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* pupil referral units and *(b)* learning support units which are based in the Buckingham constituency indicating (i) staffing levels and (ii) number of places in each case. [23732]

**Mr. Timms:** Buckingham has the following Pupil Referral Units (PRUs):

| *Name of unit* | *Number of teaching staff* | *Number of non-teaching staff* |
|---|---|---|
| Aylesbury Vale Primary PRU—Aylesbury | 3 | 1.9 |
| Aylesbury Vale Secondary PRU—Aylesbury | 5 | 3.2 |
| Chilbec PRU—Chesham | 3.8 | 1.5 |
| The Oaks PRU—Amersham | 2 | 1 |
| Woodlands PRU—High Wycombe | 4.5 | 4 |
| Wycombe Grange PRU—High Wycombe | 9 | 8 |

These staffing levels do not include the Home Tuition and Hospital Teaching Service staff who are managed via the PRU Service.

Capacity in the PRUs is flexible to enable unpredictable demand for places to be met. For example, Key Stage 4 pupils are offered a range of off-site provision, including work experience and college courses. In addition, pupils may be supported on site in their own schools as well as off-site at the PRUs. Last year a total of 764 pupils were supported by the Buckinghamshire PRUs.

Buckingham's Learning Support Units (LSUs) are as follows:

| *Name of school* | *Number of teaching staff* | *Number of non-teaching staff* |
|---|---|---|
| Buckingham School—Buckingham | 1 | 2 |
| Chesham Park Community School—Chesham | 1 | 2 |
| Cressex School—High Wycombe | 1 | 2 |
| Holmer Green Upper School—Holmer Green | 1 | 1 |
| Mandeville School—Aylesbury | 1 | 2 |
| Quarrendon School—Aylesbury | 1 | 2 |

For the LSUs, DfES guidance on capacity is as follows:

A maximum of 10 Key Stage 3 pupils working in the centre at any one time;

Pupils to spend no more than 50 per cent. of their time in the centre;

Support is provided to pupils in class;

This intensive support is provided for approximately one term.

Therefore each Learning Support Unit is able to support a minimum of 30 pupils each academic year.

## Special Educational Needs

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many cases concerning schools in the Buckingham constituency were heard by the Special Educational Needs Tribunal in each year since 1997, indicating in how many cases the Tribunal ruled that additional support should be provided for children with special needs. [23734]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The Special Educational Needs Tribunal records appeals for individual local education authorities (LEAs), rather than individual constituencies. The following table shows the number of appeals involving Buckinghamshire LEA in each year since 1996–97 together with information about the number of appeals withdrawn, decided or outstanding and information about the number of cases which were upheld. A case is listed as "upheld" when any of the points at issue are decided in the parents' favour.

*SEN Tribunal cases against Buckinghamshire LEA[1]—1 September 1996–31 August 2001*

| | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *Total years* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total number of appeals | 18 | 19 | 19 | 22 | 19 | 97 |
| Total number withdrawn | 10 | 12 | 10 | 15 | 13 | 60 |
| Total decided | 9 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 36 |
| Outstanding | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total decisions upheld[2] | 4 | 5 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 29 |
| Total decisions dismissed[3] | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7 |

[1] Buckinghamshire was involved in the re-organisation of LEAs on 1 March 1998. These figures include appeal for this LEA before the changes.
[2] Upheld are those appeals where the Tribunal ruled, in whole or in part, in favour of the appellant.
[3] Dismissed are those appeals where the Tribunal ruled in favour of the LEA.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding has been made available to schools in the Buckingham constituency from the Special Educational Needs Standards Fund. [23736]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** Standards Fund grant is allocated to local education authorities (LEAs), rather than individual constituencies. It is for individual LEAs to decide how they will use their grant but we expect them to work in partnership with their schools when deciding their special educational needs priorities.

In 2001–02, Buckinghamshire local education authority received £647,509 from the Standards Fund for pupils with special educational needs or who cannot attend school because of illness or injury or who are in public care. This allocation will increase by 11 per cent. to £717,443 in 2002–03. It will be available for a range of issues, for example training and preparation for the new SEN and Disability Codes of Practice, and improving partnership working between schools, LEAs and health and social services.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many special needs status *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school children there were (i) nationally and (ii) in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [23737]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The information requested is shown in the table.

| | *Buckingham constituency* | | *England* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Pupils with statements* | *SEN pupils without statements* | *Pupils with statements* | *SEN pupils without statements* |
| *Maintained primary schools* | | | | |
| 1997 | 113 | 819 | 63,551 | 759,449 |
| 1998 | 112 | 1,042 | 67,014 | 821,342 |
| 1999 | 118 | 1,063 | 69,797 | 859,742 |
| 2000 | 88 | 1,081 | 72,525 | 885,952 |
| 2001 | 91 | 1,102 | 73,144 | 898,601 |
| *Maintained secondary schools* | | | | |
| 1997 | 64 | 396 | 70,080 | 442,024 |
| 1998 | 75 | 394 | 73,956 | 479,675 |
| 1999 | 43 | 294 | 77,330 | 514,386 |
| 2000 | 93 | 563 | 79,788 | 541,406 |
| 2001 | 87 | 585 | 80,919 | 557,342 |

*Note:*
Special educational needs data are as reported by schools.

## Staff Numbers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people were employed in her Department in each of the last four years. [23794]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 256W.

## Ritalin

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimates he has made of the number of prescriptions issued for Ritalin for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder among children with a statement of special educational needs attending schools in the Buckingham constituency. [23735]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** Estimates are not made centrally of the number of children with statements who have prescriptions for Ritalin for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

## Class Sizes

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans the Government have *(a)* to continue the restriction on class sizes for infant schools and *(b)* to fund the class size initiative in the long term. [23907]

**John Healey:** Since September 2001 it has been a statutory responsibility for schools and local education authorities to limit the size of infant classes for five, six and seven-year-olds taught by one teacher to no more than 30.

Class size grant will be paid to local education authorities as a ring-fenced grant through the Standards Fund in 2001–02 and 2002–03. Funding levels for 2003–04 will be decided in the Spending Review 2002.

## Assaults on Teachers

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what initiatives the Government are undertaking to reduce the incidence of abuse by parents against teachers. [23974]

**Mr. Timms:** Legal remedies already exist to combat abuse by parents and others against teachers. These include injunctions, and prosecution for criminal damage, common assault and assault occasioning actual bodily harm. The Government have made a specific grant for school security available to all local education authorities in England since 1998. This could be used to support personal safety training for teachers and others to protect themselves from assaults. The Department has consulted on extending the use of parenting orders to situations where children manifest poor behaviour in school, and where parents need to play more of a role in setting boundaries for them. We are currently considering the responses. The relevant authorities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are responsible for drawing up their own education policies.

### Early Years Provision (Staffordshire)

**Mrs. Dean:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many free nursery places were not taken up in Staffordshire in the 2000–01 academic year; [24061]

(2) what representations she has received from Staffordshire on early years development funding in this financial year; and if she will make a statement. [24060]

**Margaret Hodge:** In 2000–01 financial year Staffordshire spent all the funding made available to them by the DfES for the provision of free early education places for three-year-olds. They were initially allocated £225,040 to provide 194 free early education places for three-year-olds. However, a further £172,000 was made available so that by spring 2001 they were able to fund 511 early education places for three-year-olds.

In 2001–02 Staffordshire were initially allocated £1,344,816 of funding to provide 1,132 places. Officials at Staffordshire local education authority wrote to the Department after this allocation requesting further funding be made available to Staffordshire to provide more free, early education places for three-year-olds. Funding has recently been increased by £226,000 and by the spring term 2002 Staffordshire will be able to fund 2,066 places.

### Exceptionally Able Children

**Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on ensuring that individual schools have resources to provide for the needs of exceptionally able children; and if she will make a statement. [24075]

**Mr. Timms:** Schools within Excellence in Cities areas and Excellence Clusters receive specific grant for the gifted and talented strand of those initiatives. Local education authorities and education action zones also receive specific funding for our national summer schools programme; otherwise, we look to schools and local education authorities to meet the costs of educating exceptionally able pupils from their general budgets. From next summer, the Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth will provide a range of opportunities for such pupils and their teachers. Several resources that benefit gifted and talented pupils more generally are already in place.

### Basic Needs Assessment (Surrey)

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what date she will send her formal response to Surrey's basic needs assessment application. [24119]

**Mr. Timms:** Decisions on all basic need applications were due to be notified to local education authorities on Wednesday, 19 December 2001.

### F40

**David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will meet representatives of the F40 group to discuss *(a)* the provision of an interim financial award for F40 authorities and *(b)* F40 proposals for funding from 2003–04 onwards. [24261]

**Mr. Timms:** The overall local government finance settlement for 2002–03 is a good one for education: over £1.3 billion extra in Education Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs); a further increase in Standards Fund grant of almost £160 million; and an increase in the direct grant for schools of 2.75 per cent. In the context of this settlement, there is less need for special grant support from Government than there was in 2001–02. I will be meeting a group of representatives of the F40 group in the spring to discuss the new funding system for 2003–04.

### Citizenship Lessons

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what funds have been allocated for training qualified teachers to teach citizenship lessons in secondary schools; [24267]

(2) how many teachers are being trained to teach citizenship lessons; and how many teachers will be qualified to teach citizenship lessons in September 2002. [24268]

**Mr. Timms:** A total of £27 million was made available through the Standards Fund directly to schools to prepare for implementing Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) between 2000–01 (£12 million) and 2001–02 (£15 million). With local education authority matched funding, schools are able to spend this in the way that best meets their needs, including spending on teachers' professional development, for example on courses run by citizenship organisations.

167 teacher training places were made available by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) at the beginning of the 2001–02 academic year. Of this, 147 trainees are currently undertaking the one year programme to become citizenship teachers. On successfully completing their course, they will be able to take up a teaching post in September 2002. There are likely to be in excess of 150 trainee places available next year. Many existing teachers are, of course, already teaching aspects of citizenship through other subjects.

### Special Grants Allocation

**Jeff Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the special grants allocation for schools is to continue next year. [24281]

**Mr. Timms:** Yes. School Standards Grant (SSG) will continue in 2002–03. SSG rates for next year will be as follows:

| *Pupils* | £ |
|---|---|
| *Primary* | |
| Up to 100 | 7,200 |
| 101–200 | 13,900 |
| 201–400 | 24,700 |
| 401–600 | 30,900 |
| 601+ | 49,400 |
| *Secondary* | |
| Up to 600 | 59,600 |
| 601–1,200 | 72,000 |
| 1201+ | 84,300 |
| *Special* | |
| Up to 100 | 20,600 |
| 101+ | 28,800 |

SSG will continue in 2003–04, uprated by a further 2.75 per cent.

### Student Finance

**Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects her review of student finance to be completed; and if she will make a statement. [24407]

**Margaret Hodge:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects to announce the outcome of the review this year.

### Key Stage Results

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will publish the findings of her inquiry into the release of the 2001 Key Stage results. [24436]

**Mr. Timms:** Further to the reply I gave on 27 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 782W, a statement will be made on the outcome of the inquiry before the end of January.

### Teacher Vacancies

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there are in England, broken down by LEA area; and in each case what the figure is expressed as a percentage of the establishment figure. [24437]

**Mr. Timms:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on the 19 November 2001, *Official Report,* columns 59–60W.

### Sure Start

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Sure Start programmes in the constituency of Buckingham indicating the amount spent on each scheme. [24840]

**Jacqui Smith:** There are no Sure Start programmes in the constituency of Buckingham.

### A-Levels

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the proportion of students achieving *(a)* 1 and *(b)* 1–3 A-E grades at A-level was (i) nationally and (ii) at schools and colleges based in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997; and if she will provide breakdowns of those figures between (A) independent schools and colleges and (B) state schools and colleges. [24861]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** Of the 17-year-old candidates who attempted at least one GCE A-level, the proportion who achieved *(a)* only 1 and *(b)* 1–3 passes at grade A to E in England and the Buckingham constituency since 1997 are shown in the table:

| | *1 only* | *1–3* | *4 or more* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *England* | | | |
| *1996–97* | | | |
| All schools and colleges | 12.2 | 70.4 | 24.4 |
| Independent schools | 4.9 | 66.9 | 31.8 |
| State schools and colleges | 13.6 | 71.1 | 23.1 |
| *1997–98* | | | |
| All schools and colleges | 12.2 | 68.8 | 26.4 |
| Independent schools | 5.2 | 66.3 | 32.5 |
| State schools and colleges | 13.4 | 69.2 | 25.3 |
| *1998–99* | | | |
| All schools and colleges | 11.8 | 68.0 | 27.5 |
| Independent schools | 5.3 | 66.0 | 32.9 |
| State schools and colleges | 13.0 | 68.3 | 26.6 |
| *1999–2000* | | | |
| All schools and colleges | 12.1 | 66.4 | 29.1 |
| Independent schools | 5.8 | 64.7 | 34.2 |
| State schools and colleges | 13.2 | 66.7 | 28.2 |
| *2000–01* | | | |
| All schools and colleges | 11.8 | 66.1 | 29.7 |
| Independent schools | 5.0 | 64.4 | 34.8 |
| State schools and colleges | 13.0 | 66.4 | 28.8 |
| *Buckingham* | | | |
| *1996–97* | | | |
| All schools and colleges | 8.6 | 77.2 | 18.3 |
| Independent schools | 6.9 | 92.4 | 4.8 |
| State schools and colleges | 9.8 | 67.0 | 27.4 |
| *1997–98* | | | |
| All schools and colleges | 10.2 | 86.8 | 9.8 |
| Independent schools | 7.4 | 94.9 | 2.9 |
| State schools and colleges | 12.2 | 81.0 | 14.8 |
| *1998–99* | | | |
| All schools and colleges | 13.4 | 83.0 | 14.2 |
| Independent schools | 8.0 | 92.0 | 5.6 |
| State schools and colleges | 16.3 | 78.0 | 18.9 |
| *1999–2000* | | | |
| All schools and colleges | 9.0 | 86.0 | 12.0 |
| Independent schools | 2.7 | 92.5 | 6.8 |
| State schools and colleges | 13.7 | 81.2 | 15.7 |
| *2000–01* | | | |
| All schools and colleges | 12.2 | 84.6 | 13.3 |
| Independent schools | 6.9 | 89.0 | 10.3 |
| State schools and colleges | 15.5 | 82.0 | 15.1 |

### Key Stage 2

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the proportion of school pupils achieving level 4 at Key Stage 2 in *(a)* English and *(b)* Maths was (i) nationally and (ii) from schools based in the Buckingham constituency in the latest year for which figures are available. [24862]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The following table shows the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in the Key Stage 2 tests in 2001 in Buckingham and nationally.

*Percentage*

| | *England* | *Buckingham* |
|---|---|---|
| English test | 75 | 84 |
| Mathematics test | 71 | 79 |

### Homework Clubs

**Mr. Damian Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many homework clubs have been set up in schools in England. [24886]

**Mr. Timms:** The Department does not collect statistics on homework clubs in schools: setting these up is a matter for local decision. We do, however, encourage schools to provide opportunities for young people to enrich their learning through out-of-school-hours activities. "Extending Opportunity: a national framework for study support", published in 1998, set out the contribution homework clubs can make to a school's wider programme of out-of-school-hours learning activities. We also published Homework Guidelines, which require school homework policies to refer to any opportunities that exist for pupils to do homework, under supervision, at places other than home. The homework area on the Department's Standards website supplements the guidelines with examples of good practice and case studies.

### Education At Home

**Mr. Damian Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has given to local education authorities about the funding of children educated at home; and if she will make a statement. [24888]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** Education at home includes either: home-tuition provided by local education authorities, or pupils who are being home-educated by their parents.

As regards the former, local education authorities have to provide home-tuition in some circumstances to children of school compulsory age who by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise are not receiving suitable education. Under the Financing of Maintained Schools Regulations 2001, LEAs are free to retain resources centrally for the education of those pupils who are educated otherwise than in a school. This may encompass those who are educated in a pupil referral unit, or at home. Guidance about transferring funding was issued in November 1999, entitled "School Inclusion: the LEA role in Pupil Support", supplement circular 11/99.

As regards the latter, there are no funds directly available from central Government and local education authorities are under no legal duty to provide financial support to parents who elect to home-educate their children. However, advice from the Department has been compiled in a fact sheet sent on request, and some LEAs do provide free national curriculum materials and other support to parents. The level and extent of such support is decided locally, based on the authority's own policies and the needs of the child.

### Greenwich Judgment

**Mr. Salter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what powers she has to prevent local education authorities from breaching the Greenwich judgment. [24911]

**Mr. Timms:** All admission authorities for schools must consult annually over their proposed admission arrangements. After completion of this process, an admission authority may object to the independent schools adjudicator about another admission authority's determined arrangements. In considering any objection, the adjudicator must be mindful of whether the arrangements being objected to are lawful. Complaints about the lawfulness of admission arrangements may also be made to the Secretary of State who has powers, under section 497 of the Education Act 1996, to intervene if either a local education authority or governing body has acted, or is proposing to act, unlawfully.

### Further Education

**Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent discussions she has had on improving pay and conditions for further education lecturers. [24934]

**Margaret Hodge:** The Secretary of State and her ministerial colleagues have had a number of meetings in recent months with representatives of the Association of Colleges (AoC), NATFHE, the lecturers' union, and Unison, the public service union.

Discussion at these meetings covered a wide range of issues about the further education sector, including the teaching pay initiative and the funding made available to colleges to support lecturers' continuing professional development. These measures recognise the importance of attracting new staff to the profession and rewarding and retaining excellent teachers.

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what budget has been allocated via the teaching pay initiative to *(a)* sixth form colleges and *(b)* general further education colleges for the financial years (i) 2001–02, (ii) 2002–03 and (iii) 2003–04; what criteria were used in allocating this budget; and if she will make it her policy to consolidate these budgets for future financial years. [23830]

**Margaret Hodge:** The budget for the Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI) is shown in the following table:

*£ million*

| | *2001–02* | *2002–03* | *2003–04* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sixth form colleges | 11 | 15 | 18 |
| General FE colleges | 54 | 90 | 117 |
| Total | 65 | 105 | 135 |

In 2001–02 each sixth form college and general FE college has received a share of the TPI budget for the

relevant category and has been calculated in proportion to its main funding allocation from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Colleges have also been given indicative TPI allocations for 2002–03 and 2003–04 that provide 25 per cent. more funding in 2002–03 than in 2001–02 and a further 25 per cent. in 2003–04. These provide guaranteed minimum funding levels and precise amounts will be agreed with each college by the LSC.

It is for individual colleges, as independent organisations, to decide whether to consolidate TPI awards into pensionable pay. The three-year funding commitment that has already been made is designed partly to give confidence to colleges that they can consolidate TPI pay awards if they wish. Funding beyond 2003–04 will need to recognise that TPI arrangements represent on-going commitments for colleges and that increases awarded to teachers will not be removed.

### Schools

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools there were at 31 December in *(a)* each year since 1997 and *(b)* at the most recent date for which figures are available. [24518]

**Mr. Timms:** The available information is shown in the table.

*Number of schools in England at January each year, 1997 to 2001*

| | *Primary*[1] | *Secondary*[1] | *Nursery*[2] | *Special*[3] | *Pupil referral units* | *Independent*[4] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1997 | 18,392 | 3,569 | 546 | 1,239 | 309 | 2,271 |
| 1998 | 18,312 | 3,567 | 535 | 1,229 | 309 | 2,242 |
| 1999 | 18,234 | 3,560 | 522 | 1,209 | 298 | 2,229 |
| 2000 | 18,158 | 3,550 | 516 | 1,197 | 295 | 2,202 |
| 2001 | 18,069 | 3,481 | 508 | 1,175 | 308 | 2,203 |

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[2] Includes two Direct Grant Nursery schools.
[3] Includes Maintained and Non-Maintained Special Schools.
[4] Includes City Technology Colleges.
*Source:*
Annual Schools' Census returns completed on the third Thursday of January each year.

### New Schools

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the extent of the use of the provision in the Education Bill concerning the establishment of new schools. [24516]

**Mr. Timms:** The Education Bill provides that a local education authority in England may, with the approval of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, publish a notice inviting proposals for the establishment of an additional secondary school. The need for new schools varies from year to year, but we estimate that in an average year the demand for additional secondary schools would not exceed single figures.

### Medical School Admissions

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps have been taken by medical schools over the past five years to improve accessibility of courses to people with disabilities. [24659]

**Margaret Hodge:** Under the Medical Act 1983, university medical schools are required to ensure that students are fit to practise as doctors when they graduate. To this end, in February 1999 the Council of Heads of Medical Schools issued guidance on admissions making it clear that a disability should not be a bar to becoming a doctor provided it did not impair fitness to practise. More generally, medical schools will—with the rest of universities—be subject from September 2002 to the provisions of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

### Youth Parliament

**Mr. Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will respond to the UK Youth Parliament Manifesto; and if she will make a statement. [23324]

**Mr. Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the Government will respond to the UK Youth Parliament's Manifesto. [24058]

**Mr. Denham:** I shall be responding shortly.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Waste Management

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's position is on the inclusion of incineration within local authority waste plans. [1676]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* In order to achieve more recycling the Government set statutory targets in March under Best Value for local authorities to double the amount of household waste recycled by 2003–04 and treble it by 2005–06. This has been reinforced in the guidelines on Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects, which stress that recycling and composting must be at the heart of new applications for waste facilities. Incineration should only be considered where recycling is not feasible or not the best practicable environmental option.

## Flooding

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures the Government have taken to improve the state of drains and sewers to cope with long-term flooding. [13005]

**Mr. Meacher:** Sewerage undertakers have a duty under section 94 of the Water Industry Act 1991 to drain their area effectually and this duty is enforceable by the Secretary of State or the Director General of Water Services. However, there can be practical or financial constraints. The duty in the 1991 Act is not, therefore, considered to be an absolute requirement on undertakers to prevent sewer flooding in all circumstances. Each undertaker is expected to set priorities for work which may be necessary. Ofwat and my officials are currently examining the causes of sewer flooding and possible remedies. Ofwat will publish a paper on the issue early in 2002.

**Mr. Lilley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which agencies are responsible for handling flooding in areas where there is no river. [25247]

**Mr. Morley:** The emergency response to flooding, from whatever source, is led by local authorities in partnership with the emergency services and bodies that are responsible for the source of the flooding.

The Environment Agency has permissive powers to undertake flood defence measures in relation to main rivers and the sea. The Agency is also responsible for issuing flood warnings and has a general supervisory duty over all matters relating to flood defence. Local authorities or, where they exist, internal drainage boards, have flood defence powers on ordinary watercourses.

Sewerage undertakers are generally responsible for dealing with flooding from sewerage systems while the relevant highways authority is responsible for road drainage systems. Flooding from groundwater can arise for disparate reasons and there is no single body responsible for such flooding. However, the Environment Agency may be able to provide hydrological information and advice in relation to serious problems with the water table and the existence of local springs.

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Association of British Insurers in relation to the agreement between the Government and the ABI to ensure flood cover is provided in respect of previously flooded properties. [23988]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 519W.

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the cost to the Environment Agency and its predecessor bodies of inland flood defence in England and Wales in *(a)* 1971, *(b)* 1979, *(c)* 1989, *(d)* 1995 and *(e)* 2000. [23652]

**Mr. Morley:** Information is not readily available for 1971 or 1979. For the other years, the available information relates to all flood defences and it is not possible to provide separate figures for inland flood defences.

The Environment Agency, and its predecessor body the National Rivers Authority, spent the following total sums on inland, tidal and coastal flood defence for the years in question as follows:

| *Year* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 163.8 |
| 1995–96 | 250.1 |
| 2000–01 | 274.4 |

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of properties affected by inland flooding in 2000 were not given prior flood warning by the Environment Agency. [23374]

**Mr. Morley:** I understand that between September and mid-November 2000, the Environment Agency's Automatic Voice Messaging (AVM) system delivered messages to 85,715 locations with a success rate of between 75 and 80 per cent. This was a five-fold increase from the 15 per cent. success rate at the time when the agency became responsible for flood warnings in 1996.

Following the autumn 2000 floods, as part of its usual practice of monitoring its flood warning performance, the agency undertook 'post event' surveys in 13 areas where in excess of 100 properties had experienced flooding. A total of 1,493 interviews were conducted. Of those who had experienced flooding 60 per cent. received a warning prior to the event (91 per cent. of whom received more than two hours notice).

The agency offers the full Flood Warning Service which encompasses both direct methods (AVM, flood wardens, loud hailers, sirens) and indirect methods (broadcast media, Floodline service). Out of a total of 1.9 million properties situated in the natural floodplain of England and Wales, currently some 1.2 million properties receive the full Flood Warning Service. This represents an increase of 325,000 properties covered by the full Flood Warning Service since 2000.

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what meetings she has had with insurers regarding the floods in October; and if she will make a statement. [23650]

**Mr. Morley:** The Government continue to maintain close links with the insurance industry to help ensure continued availability of affordable flood cover. There is an agreement among Association of British Insurers (ABI) member companies that they will continue to provide flood cover, except in exceptional circumstances, for domestic properties and small businesses which they currently insure, during 2001 and 2002. Cases where there is an alleged breach of this agreement have been referred by DEFRA to the ABI for investigation. However, it must be recognised that insurance companies need to take a commercial decision as to what risk they will cover and on what terms. Also, the insurance industry is a competitive one and customers may need to shop around to obtain the best deal.

My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and I had previously met the ABI on 5 September to discuss our mutual aim of ensuring that affordable flood insurance cover continues to be generally available after

December 2002. Ministers have not had a further meeting with ABI since the floods of October but discussions continue at official level.

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria a watercourse must meet for it to become the responsibility of the Environment Agency; and if she will make a statement. [23651]

**Mr. Morley:** The Environment Agency has permissive powers to undertake flood defence works on main rivers. On ordinary watercourses these powers reside with local authorities or, where they exist, with internal drainage boards.

There are no objective criteria for deciding whether a particular watercourse should be designated as main river or ordinary watercourse, although the rivers presenting the most significant flood risk will tend to be 'enmained'. The initiative for 'enmaining' rivers rests with the Environment Agency and their Regional and Local Flood Defence Committees.

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many properties in Essex suffered loss or damage from the floods on the rivers Blackwater, Colne and tributaries in October. [23373]

**Mr. Morley:** The Environment Agency reports that some 612 residential and commercial properties were flooded from the main rivers of Colne and Blackwater/Pant during October 2001. Details are not readily available for flooding from ordinary watercourses or overland flow.

## Hunting

**Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received against the recommencement of hunting following the foot and mouth outbreak. [12837]

**Alun Michael:** I have met with the Campaign for the Protection of Hunted Animals which incorporated representatives from the RSPCA, League against Cruel Sports and International Fund for Animal Welfare. Correspondence has also been received from the Hunt Saboteurs Association, Protection of Wild Animals and the New Forest Animal Protection Group. A number of individuals have also written to the Department. In general, those who oppose hunting have made clear their continued opposition to hunting per se, but appreciate that our own decision is entirely about the extent to which activities that were allowed before the advent of foot and mouth disease can be permitted within the disease control measures that are necessary to eradicate the disease.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice she has issued to farmers and landowners concerning liability for losses should foot and mouth be spread by hunts on their land. [18384]

**Mr. Morley:** The Department has not issued any advice to farmers concerning liability for losses connected with any activity which might cause the spread of foot and mouth disease. The decision on whether to allow hunts onto their land is one for individual farmers and landowners. The Department of course continues to urge farmers to maintain strict biosecurity at all times.

## Correspondence

**Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many letters from right hon. and hon. Members received more than four months ago have not been given a substantive reply. [11677]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* Of letters received over four months ago (i.e. 19 June–19 September) 1,370 have not yet been given a substantive reply. In this period the Department received 2,874 letters from right hon. and hon. Members.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the letters of the hon. Member for Vale of York of *(a)* 15 May on behalf of Mr. R. Corner of Bedale, concerning the foot and mouth epidemic, *(b)* 5 June on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Pearson of Bedale, concerning the foot and mouth epidemic, *(c)* 21 June on behalf of Mrs. P. Crosby of Thirsk, concerning the foot and mouth epidemic, *(d)* 11 July on behalf of Mr. Peter Winston of Sullivan Agriculture Ltd., York, concerning the foot and mouth epidemic, *(e)* 17 July on behalf of Mr. D. Creer of Wigginton, York, concerning the Policy Commission on Food and Farming, *(f)* 3 August on behalf of Mr. R. J. H. Cobbold of Harrogate, concerning the foot and mouth epidemic, *(g)* 8 August on behalf of Mrs. I. Wilkinson of York, concerning the foot and mouth epidemic and *(h)* 18 September on behalf of Mr. John Trenholme of Thirsk, concerning the foot and mouth epidemic, have not been replied to; and if she will send responses to each constituent before 19 December. [22779]

**Mr. Morley:** All of the above letters were responded to by 19 December with the exception of the 21 June letter on behalf of Mrs. P. Crosby of Thirsk, concerning the foot and mouth epidemic. We will respond to this as soon as possible.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to all Members of Parliament on 14 November explaining the scale of the current problems faced by those dealing with Members' correspondence within the Department and setting out the mechanisms put in place to overcome these problems.

**Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 14 June, 11 July, 10 August, 20 September, 18 October, 16 November and 12 December, relating to correspondence from her constituent, Mr. I Dukes of Cheshunt, Hertfordshire. [23608]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The hon. Member's letters were transferred to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) on 28 December 2001 for a reply as the issues raised falls under their remit.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to all Members of Parliament on 14 November explaining the scale of the current problems faced by the Correspondence Section and setting out the mechanisms put in place to overcome these problems.

**Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 17 July, 16 August, 13 September, 11 October, 16 November and 12 December, relating to correspondence from her constituent, Mr. Stan Kitchiner, of Cuffley, Hertfordshire. [23609]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* My noble Friend Lord Whitty replied to the letters dated 17 July, 16 August, 13 September, 11 October, 16 November and 12 December from the hon. Member for Broxbourne on 20 December.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to all hon. Members of Parliament on 14 November explaining the scale of the current problems faced by the Correspondence Section and setting out the mechanisms put in place to overcome these problems.

### Public-Private Partnerships

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the projects in her Department which have been considered as potential public-private partnerships since 1997 which have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the public private partnership proposed; and if she will make a statement. [13429]

**Mr. Morley:** In our 1997 reforms of PFI, the Government abandoned the requirement to submit all capital projects to PFI testing. Accordingly, it will be concluded at a very early stage in the option appraisal process whether a PPP approach is likely to deliver value for money (vfm); where it is not, a public sector comparator (PSC) will not be constructed. Only when it is concluded, following careful consideration, that PPP is likely to offer value for money, will a PSC normally be developed.

Against this background, and with the maturing of the PPP process and the PPP market, it is likely that a high proportion of projects which do embark on the PPP route will contract on that basis, with competition helping to secure value for money and the PSC acting as a quantitative aid to informing judgment.

PPP deals continue to account for only a small proportion of the total sums invested to improve the delivery of public services. Public sector gross investment is projected to rise from £19 billion in 2000–01 to £35.2 billion in 2003–04. Over the same period, capital investment by the private sector through PFI will be about £3 billion annually.

From information held centrally the Department is not aware of any potential public private partnerships which have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the public private partnership proposed.

### Farm Diversification

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost to public funds to date has been of the measures to assist in farm diversification as set out in "Planning Consultancy Advice for Farm Diversification", published by her Department. [13274]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* This scheme was launched on 12 September 2001 and has attracted a good level of interest from farmers. To date DEFRA has received 113 applications for planning consultancy advice, of which 62 have been approved so far. The cases approved have yet to result in any claims on public funds, which are only made once the consultant's work has been completed and the farmer satisfied with the service provided.

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers have taken up the Department's offer of free advice to help them diversify. [23702]

**Mr. Morley:** With regard to Free Planning Advice for farmers pursuing a viable diversification project, which was launched in September, to date we have received 373 applications; 237 of these have been approved; 97 are currently being processed.

In addition, the Farm Business Advice Service, which was introduced in October 2000 under the Action Plan for Farming and consists of three days of free on-farm business advice, is available to help farmers take stock of their businesses and decide on the future direction—whether it is improving their business, diversifying or leaving the industry. Since its launch, 7,613 farms have requested the service, 4,637 farms have received an initial diagnostic visit and 2,851 farms have received the full three-day service resulting in an Action Plan.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received about failures to pay slaughter premium on cattle slaughtered during the foot and mouth outbreak. [14001]

**Mr. Morley:** Slaughter premium is not payable on cattle slaughtered during the foot and mouth outbreak but if the market value for such animals would have been influenced by expectation of slaughter premium then the valuation for compensation should reflect this. Standard valuations, which operated between 22 March and 29 July, took account of slaughter premium.

The Department will shortly be issuing clarification to interested parties.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) on how many premises culling took place of *(a)* cattle, *(b)* sheep, *(c)* pigs and *(d)* other animals under the (i) infected premises, (ii) dangerous contact, (iii) slaughter on suspicion and (iv) contiguous cull schemes operating during the foot and mouth disease outbreak broken down by (A) county and (B) region; and how many samples were taken and how many positive tests were found at each premises; [16713]

(2) how many *(a)* infected premises and *(b)* contiguous premises were recorded during the foot and mouth disease outbreak broken down by (i) county and (ii) region; and how many samples were collected in each case. [16714]

**Margaret Beckett:** I will place the information requested in the Library of the House today.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what date she intends to disband her Department's teams of foot and mouth disease blood testers operating in the south-west of England; what plans she has to divert foot and mouth disease blood tester personnel and resources to the testing of cattle for bovine tuberculosis in the south-west of England; and if she will make a statement. [18046]

**Mr. Morley:** No date has been set for disbanding the teams of blood testers for FMD in the south-west of England but as the threat from the disease diminishes there will be less need for testers.

Under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 blood sampling for laboratory testing can be undertaken by paraprofessionals. The TB test can only be carried out by qualified veterinary surgeons who are accredited to the relevant LVI Panel. The number of blood samplers who can be diverted to TB skin testing is minimal. The only other resource that will be required for the restart of TB testing is a sufficient supply of Tuberculin to meet the projected future need.

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many temporary veterinary inspectors have written to her about their experiences during the foot and mouth epidemic. [22106]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* We have no record of letters from temporary veterinary inspectors (TVIs) to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about their experiences during the foot and mouth outbreak. Some may have written on an individual and personal basis.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on how many farms animals have been slaughtered in relation to foot and mouth disease; and how many animals have been slaughtered by type in each case since 30 September. [23259]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* As at 17.30, 12 December 2001, 9,578 premises have been affected by foot and mouth disease ie premises which have been classified as an Infected Premises, Dangerous Contact or Slaughter on Suspicion on which slaughter of animals has occurred.

The following table details all slaughterings on foot and mouth disease affected premises since 30 September 2001. There have been no outbreaks since that date; these figures therefore relate to slaughter on suspicion cases or to dangerous contact cases identified by surveillance bleeding.

| *Date slaughtered* | *Cattle* | *Sheep* | *Pigs* | *Goats* | *Deer* | *Other* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 October 2001 | 0 | 80 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 80 |
| 2 October 2001 | 0 | 183 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 183 |
| 10 October 2001 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 10 October 2001 | 5 | 1,739 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,744 |
| 10 October 2001 | 0 | 57 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 57 |
| 11 October 2001 | 0 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25 |
| 11 October 2001 | 0 | 141 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 141 |
| 13 October 2001 | 0 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| 17 October 2001 | 0 | 387 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 387 |
| 18 October 2001 | 324 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 324 |
| 24 October 2001 | 0 | 131 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 131 |
| 24 October 2001 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 26 October 2001 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 27 October 2001 | 0 | 247 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 247 |
| 30 October 2001 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 31 October 2001 | 0 | 80 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 80 |
| 1 November 2001 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 10 November 2001 | 0 | 128 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 128 |
| 10 November 2001 | 0 | 129 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 129 |
| 10 November 2001 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 10 November 2001 | 0 | 57 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 57 |
| 10 November 2001 | 0 | 178 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 178 |
| 10 November 2001 | 0 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 50 |
| 13 November 2001 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 20 November 2001 | 0 | 60 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 60 |
| 21 November 2001 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 27 November 2001 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 27 November 2001 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 27 November 2001 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| 6 December 2001 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 10 December 2001 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 330 | 3,793 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4,125 |

*Source:*

DEFRA Disease Control System Database as at 17.30 12 December 2001. Figures subject to change as more data become available.

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reasons animals with foot and mouth disease anti-bodies and no other symptoms of the disease were slaughtered during the foot and mouth outbreak. [24389]

**Mr. Morley:** Foot and mouth disease (FMD) antibodies are not found in healthy livestock in FMD free countries. Their presence indicates that the animal has been exposed to the virus. Such exposed animals could be diseased and infectious or they could be convalescent. It is also possible that a carrier state may develop in some animals which have FMD antibodies whereby the animal can carry the virus for prolonged periods and could possibly cause a recrudescence of disease. This is particularly so in the case of sheep. It is therefore essential that animals with FMD antibodies are promptly culled as part of the control mechanisms in place to eradicate FMD.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farms in Worcestershire have not yet been cleaned and disinfected after an outbreak of foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [24455]

**Mr. Morley:** Of the 132 premises in Worcestershire affected by Foot and Mouth disease, secondary cleansing and disinfection has been completed on 130. Significant work has been undertaken on the remaining two premises, but in both cases has been halted. No other premises in Worcestershire will require cleansing and disinfection.

Nationally, the secondary cleansing and disinfection operation is well advanced with 88 per cent. of premises subject to secondary C and D now complete, a further 7 per cent. in progress and only 1 per cent. to start. 4 per cent. of premises will not undergo secondary C and D.

**Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many foot and mouth cases there were, broken down by *(a)* farm and *(b)* animals slaughtered, by category, in each (i) constituency and (ii) local authority in 2001. [24900]

**Mr. Morley:** The information requested is presented in the following two tables:

*Table 1: Number of premises infected with foot and mouth disease and number of animals slaughtered on infected premises by constituency*

| Constituency | Number of infected premises | Number of animals slaughtered on infected premises | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Cattle | Sheep | Pigs | Goats | Deer | Other | Total |
| Aberavon County | 1 | 416 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 418 |
| Banbury County | 1 | 0 | 537 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 537 |
| Basildon Borough | 1 | 31 | 0 | 37 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 68 |
| Berwick-upon-Tweed County | 20 | 2,954 | 23,966 | 13 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 26,937 |
| Bishop Auckland County | 44 | 4,194 | 19,481 | 2,808 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 26,496 |
| Blyth Valley Borough | 1 | 0 | 2,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,000 |
| Bosworth County | 4 | 550 | 112 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 668 |
| Bradford South Borough | 2 | 155 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 155 |
| Braintree County | 1 | 5 | 493 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 508 |
| Brecon and Radnorshire County | 45 | 2,608 | 34,243 | 2 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 36,875 |
| Brentwood and Ongar County | 2 | 206 | 0 | 308 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 514 |
| Bridgwater County | 2 | 36 | 55 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 91 |
| Bristol North West Borough | 1 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| Bromsbrove County | 2 | 253 | 83 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 336 |
| Burton County | 20 | 2,354 | 2,515 | 62 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 4,938 |
| Caerphilly County | 1 | 127 | 363 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 490 |
| Cannock Chase County | 2 | 131 | 243 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 374 |
| Carlisle Borough | 72 | 17,622 | 17,953 | 0 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 35,594 |
| Chorley County | 1 | 0 | 988 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 988 |
| City of Durham County | 3 | 410 | 1,099 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,509 |
| Congleton County | 2 | 0 | 1,961 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,961 |
| Copeland County | 9 | 791 | 7,411 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 8,211 |
| Crewe and Nantwich County | 1 | 158 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 163 |
| Cynon Valley County | 1 | 112 | 994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,106 |
| Devizes County | 9 | 151 | 2,628 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2,781 |
| Dover County | 2 | 0 | 2,446 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,446 |
| Dumfries County | 137 | 24,586 | 64,131 | 136 | 155 | 0 | 0 | 89,008 |
| East Devon County | 1 | 125 | 2,109 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,234 |
| Eddisbury County | 4 | 650 | 1,297 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,947 |
| Forest of Dean County | 48 | 2,987 | 14,121 | 153 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17,261 |
| Galloway and Upper Nithsdale County | 39 | 9,986 | 22,331 | 55 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 32,372 |
| Hereford County | 31 | 3,461 | 33,019 | 48 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 36,531 |
| Hexham County | 64 | 7,603 | 35,887 | 524 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 44,015 |
| Hyndburn Borough | 2 | 25 | 752 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 777 |
| Islwyn County | 1 | 46 | 74 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 120 |
| Keighley County | 3 | 263 | 243 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 506 |
| Lancaster and Wyre County | 2 | 457 | 49 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 506 |
| Leigh County | 1 | 47 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 47 |
| Leominster County | 13 | 947 | 5,456 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6,407 |
| Lichfield County | 6 | 201 | 2,314 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,516 |
| Ludlow County | 8 | 1,184 | 4,074 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5,258 |
| Macclesfield County | 2 | 179 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 179 |
| Maldon and East Chelmsford County | 1 | 0 | 604 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 606 |
| Medway County | 2 | 162 | 765 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 927 |

*Table 1: Number of premises infected with foot and mouth disease and number of animals slaughtered on infected premises by constituency*

| Constituency | Number of infected premises | Number of animals slaughtered on infected premises | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Cattle | Sheep | Pigs | Goats | Deer | Other | Total |
| Mid Worcestershire County | 6 | 421 | 6,819 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7,240 |
| Monmouth County | 23 | 1,876 | 12,828 | 587 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15,291 |
| Montgomeryshire County | 25 | 2,361 | 9,059 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11,420 |
| Morecambe and Lunesdale County | 8 | 1,726 | 2,440 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4,167 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne North Borough | 6 | 379 | 628 | 134 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,141 |
| Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough | 1 | 157 | 150 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 307 |
| Newport West County | 3 | 463 | 2,123 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 2,593 |
| North Cornwall County | 3 | 313 | 1,726 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,039 |
| North Devon County | 40 | 4,280 | 27,118 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 31,402 |
| North Essex County | 2 | 96 | 2,565 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,663 |
| North Shropshire County | 4 | 512 | 1,621 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2,139 |
| North West Durham County | 37 | 4,941 | 18,768 | 50 | 26 | 0 | 0 | 23,785 |
| North West Leicestershire County | 1 | 0 | 1,506 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,506 |
| Northampton South Borough | 1 | 0 | 558 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 558 |
| Northavon County | 3 | 116 | 35 | 5,490 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5,641 |
| Nuneaton County | 2 | 429 | 1,025 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,454 |
| Oxford West and Abingdon County | 1 | 0 | 266 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 266 |
| Pendle Borough | 3 | 540 | 647 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,187 |
| Penrith and The Border County | 642 | 113,945 | 302,176 | 2,278 | 115 | 20 | 0 | 418,534 |
| Pudsey Borough | 1 | 75 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 75 |
| Rayleigh County | 3 | 26 | 489 | 1,064 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1,583 |
| Redditch Borough | 2 | 3 | 153 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 172 |
| Ribble Valley County | 37 | 5,378 | 13,586 | 10 | 6 | 0 | 133 | 19,113 |
| Richmond (Yorks) County | 40 | 5,292 | 19,477 | 1,380 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 26,149 |
| Roxburgh and Berwickshire County | 11 | 1,012 | 9,590 | 4 | 37 | 2 | 0 | 10,645 |
| Rutland and Melton County | 1 | 0 | 179 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 179 |
| Ryedale County | 1 | 160 | 2,311 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,471 |
| Scarborough and Whitby County | 19 | 2,072 | 5,313 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 7,390 |
| Sedgefield County | 9 | 1,020 | 3,774 | 29 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4,823 |
| Shrewsbury and Atcham County | 3 | 137 | 1,340 | 319 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,796 |
| Sittingbourne and Sheppey County | 1 | 0 | 347 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 347 |
| Skipton and Ripon County | 62 | 7,608 | 41,558 | 16 | 17 | 0 | 104 | 49,303 |
| South Derbyshire County | 8 | 610 | 782 | 0 | 34 | 0 | 0 | 1,426 |
| South East Cornwall County | 1 | 69 | 236 | 70 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 375 |
| South Staffordshire County | 5 | 105 | 2,870 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,975 |
| South West Devon County | 1 | 443 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 443 |
| Stafford County | 3 | 298 | 794 | 1,848 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,940 |
| Stockton South Borough | 4 | 870 | 2,325 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3,196 |
| Stone County | 6 | 200 | 2,049 | 1,400 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3,650 |
| Stroud County | 12 | 2,053 | 1,263 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,316 |
| Tamworth County | 2 | 0 | 2,889 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,889 |
| Tatton County | 7 | 629 | 1,106 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,735 |
| Taunton County | 5 | 249 | 1,202 | 0 | 358 | 0 | 0 | 1,809 |
| Tewkesbury County | 12 | 815 | 4,714 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5,529 |
| The Wrekin County | 1 | 0 | 271 | 584 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 855 |
| Tiverton and Honiton County | 9 | 1,004 | 4,233 | 22 | 5 | 0 | 6 | 5,270 |
| Torridge and West Devon County | 122 | 19,112 | 48,497 | 1,653 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 69,266 |
| Upminster Borough | 1 | 198 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 204 |
| Vale of York | 11 | 1,065 | 4,138 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 5,219 |
| Wansbeck County | 3 | 606 | 3,287 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3,900 |
| Warrington North Borough | 1 | 371 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 375 |
| Wells County | 1 | 0 | 619 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 619 |
| West Worcestershire County | 4 | 0 | 9,062 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9,062 |
| Westmorland and Lonsdale County | 18 | 1,842 | 12,875 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14,717 |
| Workington County | 152 | 33,509 | 44,186 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 77,706 |
| Wyre Forest County | 8 | 975 | 2,115 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,090 |
| Ynys Môn County | 13 | 636 | 7,296 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7,937 |
| Total | 2,026 | 307,170 | 953,792 | 21,162 | 879 | 25 | 249 | 1,283,277 |

| Constituency | Description | Number of infected premises | Number of animals slaughtered on infected premises | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Cattle | Sheep | Pigs | Goats | Deer | Other | Total |
| Bradford District | Metropolitan District | 5 | 418 | 243 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 661 |
| Caerffili-Caerphilly | Unitary Authority | 2 | 173 | 437 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 610 |
| Casnewydd-Newport | Unitary Authority | 3 | 463 | 2,123 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 2,593 |
| Castell-Nedd Port Talbot–Neath Port Talbot | Unitary Authority | 1 | 416 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 418 |

| Constituency | Description | Number of infected premises | Number of animals slaughtered on infected premises | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Cattle | Sheep | Pigs | Goats | Deer | Other | Total |
| Cheshire County | County | 16 | 1,616 | 4,364 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5,985 |
| City of Bristol | Unitary Authority | 1 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| Cornwall County | County | 4 | 382 | 1,962 | 70 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,414 |
| County of Herefordshire | Unitary Authority | 44 | 4,408 | 38,475 | 52 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 42,938 |
| Cumbria County | County | 893 | 167,709 | 384,601 | 2,294 | 138 | 20 | 0 | 554,762 |
| Darlington | Unitary Authority | 8 | 1,012 | 3,049 | 29 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4,090 |
| Derbyshire County | County | 8 | 610 | 782 | 0 | 34 | 0 | 0 | 1,426 |
| Devon County | County | 173 | 24,964 | 81,957 | 1,676 | 12 | 0 | 6 | 108,615 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | Unitary Authority | 176 | 34,572 | 86,462 | 191 | 155 | 0 | 0 | 121,380 |
| Durham County | County | 85 | 9,553 | 40,073 | 2,858 | 39 | 0 | 0 | 52,523 |
| Essex County | County | 9 | 333 | 4,151 | 1,376 | 13 | 0 | 1 | 5,874 |
| Gloucestershire County | County | 72 | 5,855 | 20,098 | 153 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 26,106 |
| Greater London Authority | Greater London Authority | 1 | 198 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 204 |
| Kent County | County | 3 | 0 | 2,793 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,793 |
| Lancashire County | County | 53 | 8,126 | 18,462 | 10 | 7 | 0 | 133 | 26,738 |
| Leeds District | Metropolitan District | 1 | 75 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 75 |
| Leicestershire County | County | 6 | 550 | 1,797 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,353 |
| Medway | Unitary Authority | 2 | 162 | 765 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 927 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne District | Metropolitan District | 6 | 379 | 628 | 134 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,141 |
| North Yorkshire County | County | 133 | 16,197 | 72,797 | 1,404 | 27 | 3 | 104 | 90,532 |
| Northamptonshire County | County | 1 | 0 | 558 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 558 |
| Northumberland County | County | 88 | 11,163 | 65,140 | 541 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 76,852 |
| Oxfordshire County | County | 2 | 0 | 803 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 803 |
| Powys-Powys | Unitary Authority | 70 | 4,969 | 43,302 | 2 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 48,295 |
| Rhondda, Cynon, Taf-Rhondda, Cynon, Taff | Unitary Authority | 1 | 112 | 994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,106 |
| Scottish Borders | Unitary Authority | 11 | 1,012 | 9,590 | 4 | 37 | 2 | 0 | 10,645 |
| Shropshire County | County | 15 | 1,833 | 7,035 | 322 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 9,193 |
| Sir Fynwy-Monmouthshire | Unitary Authority | 23 | 1,876 | 12,828 | 587 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15,291 |
| Sir Ynys Môn-Isle of Anglesey | Unitary Authority | 13 | 636 | 7,296 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7,937 |
| Somerset County | County | 8 | 285 | 1,876 | 0 | 358 | 0 | 0 | 2,519 |
| South Gloucestershire | Unitary Authority | 3 | 116 | 35 | 5,490 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 5,641 |
| Staffordshire County | County | 45 | 3,446 | 13,824 | 3,311 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 20,589 |
| Stockton-on-Tees | Unitary Authority | 4 | 870 | 2,325 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3,196 |
| Telford and Wrekin | Unitary Authority | 1 | 0 | 271 | 584 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 855 |
| Thurrock | Unitary Authority | 1 | 31 | 0 | 37 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 68 |
| Warrington | Unitary Authority | 1 | 371 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 375 |
| Warwickshire County | County | 2 | 429 | 1,025 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,454 |
| Wigan District | Metropolitan District | 1 | 47 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 47 |
| Wiltshire County | County | 9 | 151 | 2,628 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2,781 |
| Worcestershire County | County | 22 | 1,652 | 18,232 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 19,900 |
| Total | | 2,026 | 307,170 | 953,792 | 21,162 | 879 | 25 | 249 | 1,283,277 |

*Note:*
Figures subject to revision as more data become available
*Source:*
DEFRA Disease Control system Database as at 21 December 2001

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Institute of Animal Health's polymerase chain reaction test for the foot and mouth disease virus in livestock; and if she will make a statement. [25196]

**Mr. Morley:** The Institute of Animal Health at Pirbright has improved the speed of Foot and Mouth Disease diagnosis using polymerase chain reaction methods. This system involves the automated extraction of nucleic acid from tissues and robotic control of the reverse transcription reactions using a probe and primers capable of detecting all seven serotypes of Foot and Mouth Disease viral RNA. The results can be available in around four hours when fewer than 30 samples are tested. The sensitivity and specificity of the method is comparable with virus isolation in cell culture which takes several days.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list by county *(a)* the number and *(b)* the location of individual burial pits containing the carcases of livestock slaughtered as a result of foot and mouth disease control measures; [25194]

(2) what her Department's policy is on the publication of the location of burial pits containing the carcases of livestock slaughtered as a result of foot and mouth disease control measures. [25193]

**Mr. Morley:** The Department's policy is to make available the locations and addresses of premises on which individual burial pits are sited only to third parties with a legitimate interest in the information. This interest may for example include environmental monitoring or farmer support.

If an individual site owner consents to unlimited disclosure, the name and address of the owner and location of the site can be made publicly available.

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when Dr. Iain Anderson's Lessons Learned Inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak is to start; and if she will make a statement. [23915]

**Margaret Beckett:** Dr. Iain Anderson's Lessons Learned Inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak launched its framework document on 14 December, marking the formal start of this independent inquiry.

The Prime Minister has confirmed that he expects all Ministers and civil servants to cooperate fully with the inquiry.

I welcome the start of the Lessons Learned Inquiry. This inquiry, and the Royal Society's independent scientific review, will be rigorous investigations of all the relevant scientific and policy issues and will enable us to establish the best way forward. We are contributing fully to the independent inquiry process.

**Mr. MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* infected premises and *(b)* contiguous premises there were from which samples were taken during the foot and mouth disease outbreak; what was the total number of premises recorded by region in each category; how many animals in each category were culled; and, of those culled, how many returned positive tests. [16055]

**Mr. Morley:** I will place the information requested in the Library of the House today.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the value is of the *(a)* VAT and *(b)* council tax deferred as a result of the economic impact of foot and mouth disease for which payment is being sought. [20908]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* There has been no change in the Government's policy on the collection of taxes due from businesses affected by foot and mouth disease. A total of £202 million of payments of income tax, VAT and national insurance contributions (of which £88 million relates to VAT) have been deferred by agreement beyond their due date without interest becoming payable. Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue continue to take a sympathetic approach, on a case-by-case basis, to recovery of the outstanding amounts.

No records are held centrally of any council tax payments that local authorities may have agreed to defer. Partial information is available on deferred business rate payments: a survey by the Local Government Association shows that 101 local authorities have deferred rate payments from nearly 6,000 businesses, and, based on information from 54 of those authorities, estimates the value of deferred payments in their areas at around £2 million. To help authorities meet the demand to defer rate payments, the Government deferred 50 per cent. of all payments into the national rate pool from 151 rural authorities between April and August 2001.

## British Meat

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Ministry of Defence to bring about an increase in the proportion of British meat supplied to the UK armed forces; what role her Department takes in developing the core list of food products available to the armed forces; and if she will make a statement. [16035]

**Mr. Morley:** My noble Friend Lord Whitty is currently discussing with his ministerial colleagues at the Ministry of Defence their procurement policies for meat. However, the decision as to what food products to buy for the armed forces is for the Ministry of Defence.

## Sheep Annual Premium

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on farm *(a)* cash flow and *(b)* livelihoods in the Macclesfield constituency of delays in the despatch of sheep annual premium to farmers who have had a partial contiguous cull of sheep as a result of foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [15809]

**Mr. Morley:** The Sheep Annual Premium Scheme is fully funded by the European Community. In administering the scheme member states must ensure that the rules are strictly enforced to avoid disallowance of Community funding. We are conscious of the need to pay claims without undue delay, but this must be balanced with the need to safeguard taxpayers' money.

European Community rules for farmers affected by FMD require claims to be cross-checked against veterinary records to ensure that the animals culled were eligible for premium. The majority of FMD affected claims have been paid their first advance of the premium from late July as usual. There are some cases where we require further information from claimants on the number of eligible sheep retained, including those where only part of the flock has been culled due to FMD. None of these are in the Macclesfield area.

Additionally, claim processing on all schemes has been affected by the diversion of staff to FMD duties and industrial action.

## Fair Trade

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's policy is in relation to departmental spending for supplies concerning the purchase of fair trade goods. [15205]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* The Department's procurement policy is to achieve value for money. On the matter of fair trade policy I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn) on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 931W.

## Animal Experiments

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's negotiating position on a draft Directive to control the use of animals in experiments in the EU. [17756]

**Mr. Meacher:** I am not aware of any proposals for a Directive to control the use of animals in experiments in the EU. There are, however, proposals for new legislation to improve the control of hazardous chemicals. These proposals, which were described in the answer given to the right hon. Member on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1026W, are very welcome except that they have the potential to increase animal testing. We intend to avoid excessive animal testing resulting from this new legislation by pressing for companies to share data arising from animal testing, by prioritising the testing

programme to focus on chemicals of greatest concern, and by making decisions, wherever possible, based on information not derived from animal testing.

### Classical Swine Fever

**Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many samples of imported meat have been tested for the classical swine fever virus in each month since testing began. [18413]

**Mr. Morley:** The tests are only carried out on illegally imported meat. To date four such samples have been tested, one in October 2000, two in November 2000 and one in January 2001. The virus isolation tests for classical swine fever proved negative in all cases.

**Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of classical swine fever there were in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001, broken down by (i) constituency and (ii) local authority. [24901]

**Mr. Morley:** There were 16 cases of classical swine fever in the UK in 2000, as follows:

| *UK* | *Number of cases* |
|---|---|
| *County council* | |
| Suffolk | 7 |
| Norfolk | 8 |
| Essex | 1 |
| Total | 16 |
| *District council* | |
| Suffolk, Coastal | 4 |
| Waveney | 3 |
| South Norfolk | 4 |
| Breckland | 3 |
| Broadland | 1 |
| Colchester | 1 |
| Total | 16 |
| *Constituency* | |
| Suffolk, Coastal | 6 |
| Waveney | 1 |
| South Norfolk | 4 |
| South-West Norfolk | 1 |
| Mid-Norfolk | 3 |
| Colchester | 1 |
| Total | 16 |

There were no cases of classical swine fever in the UK in 2001.

### Ministerial Visits (North-East)

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times Ministers from her Department have visited *(a)* the Teesside area and *(b)* Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency to meet locally based businesses. [19067]

**Mr. Morley:** Since the creation of the Department there have as yet been no visits by DEFRA Ministers to *(a)* the Teesside area, or *(b)* Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency to meet with locally based business.

### Dioxin Inhalation

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what action is being taken by her Department to compensate the workers at Dagenham for damage to their health from the inhalation of dioxins from recycled ash; [20762]

(2) what assessment her Department has made of the effect of inhaling the level of dioxins found in fly ash at Edmonton. [20759]

**Mr. Meacher:** Two independent health risk assessments have so far been carried out, one for the Environment Agency, and the other by consultants for the London borough of Barking and Dagenham. Neither found the ash pile to pose a serious health risk. I understand that no medical evidence has been presented to support allegations of damage to health. Therefore the question of compensation does not arise.

The Department of Health has advised that no health impacts would be expected as a result of non-occupational exposure to the Edmonton ash at Dagenham. This advice takes into account the highest levels of dioxins measured in the ash pile.

### Edmonton Incinerator

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Environment Agency advised Tarmac that it was safe for them to use fly ash from the Edmonton incinerator. [20764]

**Mr. Meacher:** Neither the Department nor the Environment Agency can find any record of advising Tarmac on the safety of using fly ash from the Edmonton incinerator. I understand from Tarmac that they have no record of such advice.

### Contaminated Meat Imports

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much infected meat has been imported into the UK from countries where foot and mouth disease is endemic since 1 February. [20777]

**Mr. Morley:** None. EU and UK import rules do not permit entry of infected meat into the UK, and controls are in place to ensure that meat presented for checking on import is certified free of disease, including foot and mouth. When illegally imported meat is identified it is destroyed. It is not routinely tested for presence of disease agents. To our knowledge no imported meat infected with foot and mouth has ever been identified in the UK, including from countries where the disease is endemic.

### Sheep and Cattle Subsidies

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what grounds she will not provide a breakdown by name or holding of those who are claiming subsidy for sheep or cattle. [20714]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* It is not possible for this level of detailed personal information to be released for reasons of confidentiality and data protection.

### Refrigerator Disposal

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to give financial assistance to retailers to help dispose of old fridges and freezers. [21525]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* None. However, the Department has announced a payment of £6 million to local authorities to cover their costs of storing and disposing of fridges and freezers until March 2002.

### Cattle Slaughter

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many heifers will be slaughtered at or near birth in 2001; and if she will make a statement. [21853]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* It is likely that few, if any, heifers will be slaughtered at or near birth. Heifer calves are usually retained as replacement animals in dairy or suckler cow herds, or raised and fattened for slaughter at 18 months or more of age.

### Fish Stocks

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what initiatives she plans to protect global fish stocks from the effects of overfishing. [22450]

**Mr. Morley:** The UK argues that EU decisions on the management and technical conservation of fish stocks should be in accordance with sound science. We have supported recovery plans for stocks where the science indicates this to be necessary and will continue to do so.

More globally, the UK plays a prominent role in various Regional Fisheries Organisations (RFOs), supports efforts to increase RFOs' effectiveness and to create new ones, and supports full implementation of the UN Fisheries Agreement through RFOs.

In relation to EU Fisheries Agreements with third countries, the UK has played a leading role in pressing for improved EU arrangements for negotiating and managing the Agreements and monitoring their effect. One of the aspects in need of improvement is the assessment of stocks and of the effect on them of fishing under the Agreements. We are pressing for there to be a comprehensive debate on the approach to these Agreements within the framework of the forthcoming review of the Common Fisheries Policy.

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment was made of the implications for *(a)* fish stocks and *(b)* the local fishing economy before the EU reached its recent agreement with the Government of Mauritania on allowing EU registered trawlers to fish off that country's coastline. [22453]

**Mr. Morley:** Such assessments are the responsibility of the European Commission, who wrote an evaluation report on the previous EU-Mauritania Agreement which ran from 1996 to 2001, as they do on all third country fisheries agreements that come up for renegotiation.

The Government have no independent insight into the workings of the EU-Mauritania Agreement but have repeatedly advanced the view on behalf of the UK that the EU's general approach to negotiating, managing and monitoring such agreements needs substantial improvement. In particular, improvement is needed in the areas of scientific assessment, impact monitoring, evaluation of effect and general coherence with overseas development policy. We shall continue to press for a proper debate on the EU's approach which we hope can be achieved in the context of the forthcoming review of the Common Fisheries Policy.

### Agrimonetary Compensation

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers in the Buckingham constituency have received agrimonetary compensation since 1997; and what is the total amount that has been paid out. [22640]

**Mr. Morley:** Unfortunately, we cannot except at disproportionate cost calculate either the number of farmers who have received agrimonetary compensation, or figures restricted to the constituency of Buckingham. However, since 1997 a total amount of £6.3 million has been paid in agrimonetary compensation in the county of Buckinghamshire.

### Combined Heat and Power

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by the Government in 2001 on encouraging CHP schemes. [22595]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Government introduced a number of measures in April 2001 to help encourage CHP schemes, including:

- the exemption of good quality CHP used on site or sold to known end users from the climate change levy,
- eligibility of good quality CHP for enhanced capital allowances on investment in energy saving technologies, and
- exemption from business rates of the electricity generating plant and machinery in CHP schemes.

The value of each of these to CHP operators will depend on their uptake, which it is too early to estimate. In addition, the Government funds a number of other activities that promote CHP with a combined estimated cost in 2001–02 of around £1.5 million. These include the CHP club and the CHP quality assurance programme.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress the Government have made towards reaching its CHP target of 10,000 MW by 2010. [22618]

**Mr. Meacher:** By the end of the year 2000 there were 1,556 CHP schemes in the UK with a combined good quality CHP capacity of 4,632 MW, producing 6 per cent. of the UK's electricity requirements and delivering an estimated 3.9 MtC of carbon savings annually. The UK's current good quality CHP capacity is estimated to be around 4,700 MW.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations the Government have received from industries on employment levels in the CHP sector. [22592]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Combined Heat and Power Association, and one of their members, recently came in to talk to me about the state of the CHP industry, including job losses and threats to jobs. In addition, a number of representations were made to me by senior members of the industry when I attended the recent CHPA annual conference. I am also aware that the Minister for Industry and Energy has received similar representations from the industry.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for each year since the introduction of NETA, by what percentage the export of power from CHP has changed compared with the preceding year. [22617]

**Mr. Meacher:** The new electricity trading arrangements, which are a matter for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Ofgem, were introduced on 27 March last year, and it is therefore too early to put a figure on the percentage of power from CHP compared with the preceding year. However, the recent report by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, "Report to DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators", issued in August of this year, indicates that the export of power from CHP has reduced by around 60 per cent.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on the viability of CHP of reducing the level of the climate change levy on CHP. [22596]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** I have been asked to reply.

The viability of combined heat and power is dependent on many factors—the relative prices of gas and electricity being the most important of those factors. However, as announced in the pre-Budget report, subject to legal and other constraints, the Government will consider the environmental case for providing more favourable treatment for CHP within the climate change levy.

### Protection of Animals Act

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will propose amendments to the Protection of Animals Act 1911 to allow earlier intervention by enforcement authorities. [22903]

**Mr. Morley:** The creation of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has brought together most animal welfare laws under one roof. This provides a unique opportunity for revising these laws, including the Protection of Animals Act 1911. I have begun the review process and I hope to shortly ask those involved with animals, including welfare and commercial interests, how they would like to improve the law.

### Broiler Chickens

**Mrs. Calton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many and what type of *(a)* therapeutic and *(b)* non-therapeutic drugs were regularly given to chickens to prevent the spread of infection in the broiler chicken industry between 1995 and 2001. [22928]

**Mr. Morley:** The Veterinary Medicines Directorate does not hold data on the usage of veterinary medicinal products.

### Supermarkets

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about the Competition Commission's recommendation for a code of practice to be introduced governing the relationship between supermarkets and their suppliers; and when she expects the code to be introduced. [23060]

**Mr. Morley:** The Secretary of State has had no discussions with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about the code of practice, but we have been kept informed of progress on its development.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 18 December that she had accepted undertakings from the UK's major supermarkets to abide by the code and that it will come into effect from 17 March 2002.

### Milk

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on farm gate milk prices of change to the temperature attained in the pasteurisation of milk process. [23064]

**Mr. Morley:** I am not aware of any proposals to change the temperature required for the pasteurisation of milk. However, in a recent consultation paper on their draft strategy for the control of "Mycobacterium avium" subspecies "paratuberculosis" in cow's milk the Food Standards Agency proposed that the pasteurisation time for milk should be increased from 15 to 25 seconds. I understand that most liquid milk production in the UK is already pasteurised for 25 seconds. Accordingly, I would expect this proposal to have little effect on the farmgate price of milk.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health and the Chairman of the Food Standards Agency on changes in the pasteurisation of milk process; and what recent representations she has received from milk producer organisations regarding proposed increases in the temperature attained in the pasteurisation of milk. [23063]

**Mr. Morley:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not had any recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Health or the chairman of the Food Standards Agency on changes in the pasteurisation of milk process. Nor has she received any recent representations from milk producer organisations regarding proposed increases in the temperature attained in the pasteurisation of milk. My right hon. Friend is not aware of any proposals to change the temperature required for the pasteurisation of milk. However, a recent consultation paper on the Food Standards Agency draft strategy for the control of "Mycobacterium avium" subspecies "paratuberculosis" in cows' milk proposed that

pasteurisation time for milk should be increased from 15 to 25 seconds. This practice is already observed in most dairies.

### Rhizomania

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what support her Department has given to *(a)* the development and *(b)* the dissemination of information on rhizomania-tolerant varieties of sugar beet. [23062]

**Mr. Morley:** DEFRA and the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have spent over one million pounds on research into rhizomania. Much of this research has been into the biology of the organisms which cause and spread the disease, essential information for those developing tolerant varieties. Included in this work are projects more specifically related to the development of tolerant varieties including investigation of the biology and control of Plasmodiophoraceous virus vectors, an investigation of the significance of resistance-breaking Beet Necrotic Yellow Vein Virus (BNYVV) pathotypes for the UK sugar beet industry, and a project which seeks to identify new sources of rhizomania resistance. Additionally, DEFRA has supported the use of new tolerant varieties by accepting an industry request to allow their use on outbreak farms, in fields in which the disease has not been found. However, the development and dissemination of information on new varieties is the task of the seeds industry. Given the widespread findings of the disease in many European countries, where it is managed through the use of tolerant varieties, inevitably much of this development work has been done in those countries.

### Laying Hens

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the future impact of the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive on the *(a)* operations and *(b)* profitability of the UK egg producing industry. [23066]

**Mr. Morley:** A partial regulatory impact assessment was produced to accompany the draft regulations to implement the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive during a recent public consultation exercise.

The regulatory impact assessment is now being updated following consultation.

### Biosecurity

**Mr. Gummer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to link future claims for compensation for loss of livestock to the implementation of biosecurity recommendations. [23631]

**Mr. Morley:** The Animal Health Bill provides for the payment of compensation following infection with foot and mouth disease to be linked to good practice in maintaining adequate levels of biosecurity on affected farms. All farmers will qualify for 75 per cent. of market value, with the payment of any additional amount being subject to an assessment of biosecurity and related matters. Under this adjusted compensation scheme farmers will be incentivised to maintain effective biosecurity. This will benefit responsible farmers and the wider community by helping to limit the spread of disease.

The Bill also provides powers to enable the extension of the provisions on adjusted compensation to other animal diseases, should we decide that it is necessary. This would be done by order, subject to affirmative resolution.

### Cattle Imports

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cattle imports there have been in each of the last three years. [23698]

**Mr. Morley:** Estimates of number of cattle imported in the last three calendar years are given in the table. The majority of these imports are from the Republic of Ireland into Northern Ireland.

*UK live cattle imports*

| | *Thousand* |
|---|---|
| 1998 | 8.6 |
| 1999 | 20 |
| 2000 | 27 |

*Source:*
HM Customs and DARD, Northern
Prepared by: Statistics (Commodities and Economics and Statistics)

### Food Imports

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the food imports from each European Union country over the last 12 months, broken down by product. [23712]

**Mr. Morley:** The table shows the value of food, feed and drink imports from each of the European Union countries, over the most recent 12 months for which data are available, broken down by product.

*UK Imports of food, feed and drink from EC countries: October 2000-September 2001*[1]

*£ million*

| *Product group/type* | *France* | *Netherlands* | *Irish Republic* | *Germany* | *Spain* | *Italy* | *Denmark* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Beverages* | | | | | | | |
| Beer | 30 | 35 | 51 | 54 | 11 | 7 | 1 |
| Cider and other fermented beverages | 1 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mineral water | 99 | 43 | 34 | 17 | 3 | 8 | 5 |
| Other spirits | 78 | 12 | 56 | 4 | 4 | 89 | 0 |

*UK Imports of food, feed and drink from EC countries: October 2000-September 2001*[1]

*£ million*

| *Product group/type* | *France* | *Netherlands* | *Irish Republic* | *Germany* | *Spain* | *Italy* | *Denmark* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Whisky | 1 | 2 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Wine | 613 | 8 | 1 | 81 | 135 | 187 | 2 |
| Total | 822 | 103 | 158 | 163 | 153 | 291 | 8 |
| *Cereals and Cereal Preparations* | | | | | | | |
| Barley, unmilled | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Bread, crispbreads, savoury biscuits | 52 | 41 | 76 | 54 | 6 | 22 | 20 |
| Cereal, milled | 12 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Cereal, rolled or flaked | 21 | 12 | 1 | 14 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Mixes and doughs for baking | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Other cereal (including maize), unmilled | 103 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pasta uncooked | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 53 | 0 |
| Rice | 8 | 21 | 1 | 4 | 14 | 21 | 0 |
| Sweet biscuits | 34 | 19 | 20 | 25 | 6 | 21 | 2 |
| Wheat, unmilled | 28 | 4 | 4 | 10 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| Total | 267 | 110 | 116 | 116 | 31 | 126 | 32 |
| *Coffee, Tea, Cocoa and Spices* | | | | | | | |
| Chocolate | 43 | 53 | 108 | 54 | 2 | 7 | 3 |
| Cocoa | 10 | 47 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Coffee | 15 | 18 | 3 | 68 | 5 | 7 | 3 |
| Spices | 3 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Tea | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 73 | 127 | 113 | 132 | 11 | 15 | 7 |
| *Dairy Products and Birds Eggs* | | | | | | | |
| Butter | 9 | 4 | 46 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 110 |
| Cheese | 101 | 31 | 190 | 55 | 6 | 56 | 70 |
| Condensed milk | 0 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Eggs and egg products | 12 | 14 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Ice cream | 52 | 3 | 5 | 11 | 8 | 5 | 0 |
| Milk and cream | 6 | 1 | 18 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| Milk powder | 5 | 13 | 15 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other milk products | 7 | 7 | 10 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Yogurt | 14 | 0 | 4 | 27 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| Total | 206 | 74 | 290 | 141 | 17 | 65 | 191 |
| *Feedingstuffs for Animals* | | | | | | | |
| Dog or cat food for retail | 42 | 26 | 23 | 20 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| Flours, meals and pellets of meat, offal or fish | 1 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Oil cake | 4 | 53 | 3 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other animal feedingstuffs | 7 | 23 | 15 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 54 | 105 | 46 | 56 | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| *Fish and Fish Preparations* | | | | | | | |
| Crustaceans | 15 | 7 | 10 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 28 |
| Fish and crustaceans prepared or preserved | 6 | 13 | 4 | 12 | 17 | 1 | 17 |
| Fish fresh or chilled | 10 | 3 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17 |
| Fish frozen | 3 | 15 | 2 | 27 | 7 | 0 | 55 |
| Fish live | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 35 | 39 | 33 | 45 | 29 | 2 | 116 |
| *Meat and Meat Preparations* | | | | | | | |
| Bacon and ham | 30 | 232 | 14 | 8 | 1 | 13 | 230 |
| Beef and veal | 5 | 25 | 157 | 10 | 2 | 6 | 5 |
| Beef products (inc. corned beef) | 4 | 3 | 46 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Edible offal and other meat | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Lamb and mutton | 3 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Other meat products | 35 | 57 | 94 | 11 | 1 | 8 | 48 |
| Pork | 33 | 42 | 31 | 29 | 6 | 1 | 149 |
| Poultrymeat (inc. poultry offal) | 93 | 270 | 21 | 44 | 16 | 13 | 26 |
| Sausages and related products | 13 | 15 | 6 | 29 | 3 | 16 | 7 |
| Total | 219 | 651 | 376 | 138 | 31 | 57 | 473 |
| *Miscellaneous Edible Products* | | | | | | | |
| Infant food for retail | 7 | 3 | 66 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Margarine | 0 | 12 | 15 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| Other food products and preparations | 55 | 42 | 137 | 56 | 5 | 18 | 11 |
| Pasta, cooked or stuffed | 4 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 25 | 0 |

*UK Imports of food, feed and drink from EC countries: October 2000-September 2001*[1]

*£ million*

| *Product group/type* | *France* | *Netherlands* | *Irish Republic* | *Germany* | *Spain* | *Italy* | *Denmark* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sauces, condiments, seasonings | 15 | 71 | 9 | 17 | 4 | 30 | 0 |
| Total | 82 | 129 | 231 | 85 | 11 | 75 | 13 |
| *Oil Seeds and Oleaginous Fruits* | | | | | | | |
| Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits | 27 | 8 | 3 | 35 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 27 | 8 | 3 | 35 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| *Oils and Fats* | | | | | | | |
| Animal oils and fats, not chemically modified | 4 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 9 |
| Processed fats and waxes | 3 | 13 | 1 | 23 | 1 | 2 | 8 |
| Vegetable oils and fats, soft, crude, refined or fraction | 36 | 122 | 2 | 10 | 24 | 23 | 2 |
| Total | 44 | 143 | 6 | 38 | 25 | 27 | 19 |
| *Sugars, Sugar Preparations and Honey* | | | | | | | |
| Honey | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Molasses | 0 | 17 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Other beet or cane sugar | 21 | 4 | 23 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Other sugars | 28 | 13 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Raw beet or cane sugar | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sugar confectionery | 16 | 18 | 14 | 25 | 32 | 5 | 1 |
| Total | 69 | 54 | 39 | 39 | 32 | 7 | 3 |
| *Vegetables and Fruit* | | | | | | | |
| Apples, fresh | 85 | 11 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 11 | 0 |
| Apricots, cherries, peaches, plums and sloes (fresh) | 15 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 38 | 32 | 0 |
| Bananas | 29 | 14 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Grapes, fresh or dried | 6 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 23 | 8 | 0 |
| Jams | 17 | 16 | 2 | 29 | 20 | 24 | 12 |
| Juice | 47 | 58 | 18 | 45 | 9 | 10 | 1 |
| Lemons and Limes | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 1 | 0 |
| Lettuce and chicory, fresh or chilled | 16 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 73 | 6 | 0 |
| Mushrooms and truffles, fresh or chilled | 4 | 25 | 79 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Nuts | 1 | 2 | 0 | 14 | 3 | 6 | 0 |
| Oranges and Mandarins etc. | 1 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 98 | 1 | 0 |
| Other citrus fruit | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other fruit | 29 | 24 | 0 | 8 | 65 | 15 | 0 |
| Other vegetables, fresh or chilled | 55 | 142 | 7 | 5 | 188 | 17 | 1 |
| Other vegetables, prepared or preserved | 36 | 23 | 2 | 13 | 12 | 33 | 1 |
| Pears and quinces fresh | 2 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 0 |
| Potato products | 5 | 105 | 4 | 10 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| Potatoes, fresh or chilled (inc. seed) | 21 | 19 | 2 | 3 | 10 | 5 | 0 |
| Tomatoes, fresh or chilled | 3 | 79 | 0 | 1 | 144 | 4 | 0 |
| Tomatoes, prepared or preserved | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 82 | 0 |
| Vegetable, frozen or provisionally prepared | 16 | 38 | 9 | 3 | 16 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 392 | 606 | 134 | 145 | 726 | 266 | 20 |
| Total Food, Feed and Drink | 2,287 | 2,148 | 1,546 | 1,133 | 1,072 | 934 | 894 |

*£ million*

| *Product group/type* | *Belgium* | *Greece* | *Portugal* | *Austria* | *Sweden* | *Finland* | *Luxembourg* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Beverages* | | | | | | | |
| Beer | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cider and other fermented beverages | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mineral water | 18 | 0 | 0 | 55 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Other spirits | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Whisky | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Wine | 5 | 2 | 39 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 39 | 2 | 40 | 56 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| *Cereals and Cereal Preparations* | | | | | | | |
| Barley, unmilled | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Bread, crispbreads, savoury biscuits | 56 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| Cereal, milled | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cereal, rolled or flaked | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Mixes and doughs for baking | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Other cereal (including maize), unmilled | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Pasta uncooked | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Rice | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

£ million

| Product group/type | Belgium | Greece | Portugal | Austria | Sweden | Finland | Luxembourg |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sweet biscuits | 17 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Wheat, unmilled | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 109 | 22 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 4 | 0 |
| *Coffee, Tea, Cocoa and Spices* | | | | | | | |
| Chocolate | 57 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Cocoa | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Coffee | 8 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Spices | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Tea | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 68 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| *Dairy Products and Birds Eggs* | | | | | | | |
| Butter | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cheese | 62 | 6 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Condensed milk | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Eggs and egg products | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ice cream | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Milk and cream | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Milk powder | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Other milk products | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Yogurt | 8 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 94 | 12 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 1 | 0 |
| *Feedingstuffs for Animals* | | | | | | | |
| Dog or cat food for retail | 29 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Flours, meals and pellets of meat, offal or fish | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Oil cake | 9 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other animal feedingstuffs | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 45 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Fish and Fish Preparations* | | | | | | | |
| Crustaceans | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Fish and crustaceans prepared or preserved | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Fish fresh or chilled | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 0 |
| Fish frozen | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Fish live | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 10 | 5 | 9 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 0 |
| *Meat and Meat Preparations* | | | | | | | |
| Bacon and ham | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Beef and veal | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Beef products (inc. corned beef) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Edible offal and other meat | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Lamb and mutton | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other meat products | 26 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Pork | 19 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Poultrymeat (inc. poultry offal) | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sausages and related products | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 78 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| *Miscellaneous Edible Products* | | | | | | | |
| Infant food for retail | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Margarine | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Other food products and preparstions | 21 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Pasta, cooked or stuffed | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sauces, condiments, seasonings | 14 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 45 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| *Oil Seeds and Oleaginous Fruits* | | | | | | | |
| Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Oils and Fats* | | | | | | | |
| Animal oils and fats, not chemically modified | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Processed fats and waxes | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 0 |
| Vegetable oils and fats, soft, crude, refined or fraction | 14 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 22 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 7 | 0 |

£ million

| Product group/type | Belgium | Greece | Portugal | Austria | Sweden | Finland | Luxembourg |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Sugars, Sugar Preparations and Honey* | | | | | | | |
| Honey | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Molasses | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other beet or cane sugar | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other sugars | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Raw beet or cane sugar | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sugar confectionery | 16 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 33 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| *Vegetables and Fruit* | | | | | | | |
| Apples, fresh | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Apricots, cherries, peaches, plums and sloes (fresh) | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bananas | 32 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Grapes, fresh or dried | 1 | 43 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Jams | 10 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Juice | 17 | 0 | 1 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Lemons and Limes | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Lettuce and chicory, fresh or chilled | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mushrooms and truffles, fresh or chilled | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Nuts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Oranges and Mandarins etc. | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other citrus fruit | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other fruit | 11 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other vegetables, fresh or chilled | 7 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other vegetables, prepared or preserved | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pears and quinces fresh | 8 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Potato products | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Potatoes, fresh or chilled (inc. seed) | 10 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Tomatoes, fresh or chilled | 6 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Tomatoes, prepared or preserved | 0 | 15 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Vegetable, frozen or provisionally prepared | 44 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 183 | 84 | 41 | 20 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Total Food, Feed and Drink | 730 | 116 | 100 | 99 | 51 | 19 | 0 |

[1] 2000–01 EU data are provisional and subject to amendment

*Source:*

HM Customs and Excise: Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities and Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFR

## Livestock Markets

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many livestock markets were open in England and Wales on 1 December; and if she will list them. [23710]

**Mr. Morley:** There were no livestock markets open in England and Wales for the auction and sale of live animals on 1 December 2001 although some were open as collecting centres for animal movements under licence.

## Staff Numbers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people were employed in her Department in each of the last four years. [23796]

**Mr. Morley:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 256W.

## Beef Imports

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much beef has been imported from Argentina in each of the last three years. [23711]

**Mr. Morley:** Overseas Trade Statistics show that the UK imports of beef from Argentina between 1998 and 2000 were as follows:

| | Tonnes | £000 |
|---|---|---|
| 1998 | 10,636 | 18,341 |
| 1999 | 10,982 | 17,897 |
| 2000 | 10,252 | 19,143 |

*Source:*

HM Customs and Excise

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much beef was imported from New Zealand in each of the last three years. [23715]

**Mr. Morley:** Overseas Trade Statistics show that the UK imports of beef from New Zealand between 1998 and 2000 were as follows:

| | Tonnes | £000 |
|---|---|---|
| 1998 | 5,860 | 8,321 |
| 1999 | 1,601 | 1,766 |
| 2000 | 1,202 | 1,401 |

*Source:*

HM Customs and Excise

## BSE

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her oral answer of 15 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 961, on BSE, what peer reviews the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has used of the research work of Professor Ebringer on BSE. [23268]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has invited Professor Ebringer to attend its next meeting in February 2002. The Committee, which comprises independent and eminent scientists in the field, will then review Professor Ebringer's work. Generally, research is not peer reviewed specifically for the purposes of aiding SEAC's deliberations. On this occasion, however, an independent scientist has been approached to review the work prior to SEAC's discussion.

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is *(a)* the target reduction of annual incidence of BSE for 2001 and *(b)* the actual figure for 2001. [24378]

**Mr. Morley:** The Department has a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target for this area; that is to reduce the annual incidence of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) to less than 650 cases by 2001 and by 2004 be on track for fewer than 30 cases by 2006, a 99 per cent. reduction compared with 1997 when there were 4,312 cases.

The actual figure for 2001 is likely to be around 750 confirmed BSE cases in cattle presented as clinical suspects. Progress against the PSA target has been affected by movement restrictions introduced to deal with the foot and mouth disease outbreak. This has disrupted the slaughter of older cattle under the over-30-months scheme (OTMS) because available rendering capacity has been used to dispose of the carcases of animals arising from the control of foot and mouth disease. This, in turn, has increased the mean age of the cattle population and resulted in more cases than previously anticipated. Nevertheless, the outturn for 2001 still represents a reduction of more than 40 per cent. compared to 2000 (1,311 cases in cattle presented as clinical suspects), so that the epidemic continues rapidly to decline. There is no particular concern at present in relation to the 2004 and 2006 targets.

## Westlake Farm, Devon

**Mrs. Browning:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the gross costs are for the acquisition of the land used as a holding/transit area for carcases at Westlake Farm, Oakford, Devon; [23534]

(2) what the gross costs are for the construction of the holding/transit area for carcases at Westlake Farm, Oakford, Devon. [23535]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The site at Westlake Farm was not purchased. Negotiations are ongoing with the owner over the terms of the rental arrangements and about reinstatement of the site, taking into account of the council's requirements. Construction costs for the holding facility were £668,640.

## Farms (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on recent trends in farm incomes in the constituency of Buckingham. [23740]

**Mr. Morley:** Information on UK farm incomes was published on 29 November 2001. Total Income from Farming (TIFF) is forecast to increase by 15 per cent. in real terms in 2001, compared with 2000. There are no plans to publish farm incomes data for the constituency of Buckingham.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers in the constituency of Buckingham have received free consultancy advice from the Farm Business Advice Service. [23739]

**Mr. Morley:** Management Information for the Farm Business Advice Service is collected by Business Link region and we are unable to provide figures for the constituency of Buckingham. However, figures for the Business Link region of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire show that in the year since the launch of the service in October 2000, 95 farms have received a first visit and 85 farms have completed the full three days resulting in an Action Plan.

## Government Grants (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people in the constituency of Buckingham have received funding from the *(a)* rural enterprise scheme, *(b)* processing and marketing grants scheme, and *(c)* vocational training scheme since their introduction, indicating the level of funding received from each scheme. [23742]

**Mr. Morley:** Since the introduction of the rural enterprise, processing and marketing grants, and vocational training schemes, four projects have been approved in Buckinghamshire. Two were under RES, attracting total funding of £58,054 and two under VTS, attracting total funding of £34,483.

## Mink Farms

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the costs awarded to MAFF following the case of MAFF *v.* TT Smith (Mink) Ltd. (11 March 1999) have been paid by the defendant. [23179]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* The fine of £5,000 has been paid but the costs of £10,000 remain unpaid. Enforcement of payment is a responsibility of the magistrates court and we are pressing them to enforce payment.

## Game Rearing Farms

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many official inspections of game rearing farms have been carried out in each year from 1995 to date. [23188]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* No. There are no statistics for inspections of game rearing farms.

### Animal Slaughter (Jedburgh)

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the number and type of each animal slaughtered at *(a)* Beirhope farm, Jedburgh and *(b)* Renniestone, Jedburgh and on (i) contiguous premises and (ii) 3 km premises in April. [23260]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* 900 sheep were slaughtered at Beirhope farm, Jedburgh and 1,766 sheep were slaughtered at Renniestone, Jedburgh.

1,706 cattle and 2,550 sheep were slaughtered on premises contiguous to Beirhope farm and 2,991 cattle and 10,797 sheep were slaughtered on premises contiguous to Renniestone.

2,624 sheep were slaughtered within the 3 km zone surrounding Beirhope farm and 35 cattle and 5,205 sheep were slaughtered within the 3 km zone surrounding Renniestone.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many premises were tested for evidence of foot and mouth disease as a result of the outbreaks at *(a)* Beirhope farm, Jedburgh and *(b)* Renniestone, Jedburgh in April; and what the result of the tests was. [23258]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* Animals on both Beirhope farm and Renniestone were tested for foot and mouth disease and the test results were positive, confirming the disease in both cases. No tests were conducted on animals on the contiguous premises or on premises within the 3 km area surrounding each farm.

A total of 92 premises located in the area between 3 and 10 km from both farms were tested for foot and mouth disease. As both farms are in the same ownership separate records of this surveillance blood testing were not kept. All of these tests were negative. However, a negative result does not guarantee that there are no traces of virus present.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* contiguous and *(b)* 3 kilometre premises were slaughtered out following outbreaks of foot and mouth disease at (i) Beirhope farm, Jedburgh and (ii) Renniestone, Jedburgh in April. [23261]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* There are six premises contiguous to Beirhope farm, Jedburgh and nine premises contiguous to Renniestone, Jedburgh. Animals on a further four premises were included in the 3 km cull surrounding Beirhope farm and a further 15 premises were included in the 3 km cull surrounding Renniestone.

### Plaice

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the present minimum landing size for plaice in all sea areas will continue during 2002. [23272]

**Mr. Morley:** Yes. The EU minimum landing size of 27 cm which had been extended by derogation (from the original 22 cm) from 1 January 2000 was made permanent in May 2001.

### Forests

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the change in the level of forest cover has been in the UK since May 1997. [23958]

**Mr. Morley:** The level of forest cover in the UK is estimated to have increased by approximately 70,000 hectares since May 1997.

### Abattoirs

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to promote the use of small local abattoirs. [23964]

**Mr. Morley:** Despite the reduction in abattoir numbers over recent years there remains considerable over-capacity in the slaughtering sector and a reasonable spread of abattoirs across the country. As we announced in the Rural White Paper last year, Agriculture Departments in England, Scotland and Wales have agreed to transfer £8.7 million to the Food Standards Agency for the three financial years 2001–02 to 2003–04; this has enabled the FSA significantly to reduce inspection charges levied on many small and medium-sized meat plants. This will have positive benefits for small and medium-sized abattoirs. It is, however, too early to assess how the revised charging system will affect their profitability or future operation. The Policy Commission for Food and Farming will no doubt be considering the number and spread of abattoirs and we will consider carefully any recommendations in this area that it might make.

**Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has to encourage the provision of local abattoirs. [23934]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* Despite the reduction in abattoir numbers over recent years there remains considerable over-capacity in the slaughtering sector and a reasonable spread of abattoirs across the country. As we announced in the Rural White Paper last year, Agriculture Departments in England, Scotland and Wales have agreed to transfer £8.7 million to the Food Standards Agency for the three financial years 2001–02 to 2003–04; this has enabled the FSA significantly to reduce inspection charges levied on many small and medium-sized meat plants. This will have positive benefits for small and medium-sized abattoirs. It is, however, too early to assess how the revised charging system will affect their profitability or future operation. The Policy Commission for Food and Farming will no doubt be considering the number and spread of abattoirs and we will consider carefully any recommendations in this area that it might make.

### Bovine Respiratory Disease

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to ensure effective protection against bovine respiratory disease, and its most commonly involved bacteria, pasteurella haemolytica. [24015]

**Mr. Morley:** In the UK, two bovine respiratory diseases are notifiable. These are contagious bovine pleuropneumonia and bovine tuberculosis. Regulations require that the incidence of these diseases is reported so that investigation and action can be implemented. Contagious bovine pleuropneumonia is not present in the UK and cattle imports are subject to international regulations designed to reduce the risk of importing this condition. Bovine tuberculosis is present in the UK and subject to regulation. Measures are in place to protect human health and to control the disease in cattle. These include requirements for notification, surveillance, slaughter with compensation, pasteurisation of milk and meat inspection. Other forms of bovine respiratory disease, including that caused by pasteurella haemolytica, are dealt with on a case-by-case basis and the appropriate control is a matter for the cattle owner and his or her veterinary surgeon.

### Animal Movements

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on lifting animal movement restrictions in Wales. [24017]

**Mr. Morley:** Animal movement restrictions in England and Wales were introduced to help combat the spread of disease. They are developed on the basis of scientific and veterinary advice and have been applied in accordance with the designation of each county. All of Wales is now designated 'free' and benefits from the least restrictive animal movement regulations.

We have announced that around mid-February these movement restrictions are to be further relaxed and that final details of these changes will be published in the new year.

**Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she plans to take to encourage the export of sheepmeat rather than live sheep and lambs; and if she will make a statement. [23931]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* We regularly confirm our view that trade in meat is preferable to the long distance movement of live animals. We are pleased to see the efforts the meat industry is making to develop meat exports after the FMD outbreak and we are convinced that this is the best way forward.

**Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to discourage the long distance transport of live animals between farms, markets and abattoirs. [23932]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The Government would prefer a trade in meat rather than in the long distance transport of animals for slaughter. This is a matter that will be considered when the European Commission produces its proposals to update and improve the present EU rules on the protection of animals during transport.

**Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she proposes to reduce the number of journeys undertaken by live animals between farms, markets and abattoirs. [23933]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* Markets have been closed during the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak and are expected to open progressively through the interim animal movement regime in 2002. To reduce the risk of spreading disease through the frequent movement of livestock a general 20 day standstill on moving animals currently applies; and will continue as part of the interim regime. The longer term animal movement regime, including the question of any more permanent movement standstill arrangements, will take account of the outcome of the inquiries announced in August and developments in EU controls in the light of FMD. Individual livestock movements are also subject to strict controls on grounds of animal welfare.

### Badger Baiting

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to eliminate badger baiting. [23970]

**Mr. Morley:** This Government deplore the illegal killing of badgers. The principal legislation protecting the welfare of badgers is the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Under the 1992 Act it is an offence to kill, take or dig for a badger, or attempt to do so, except under licence or in certain particular circumstances, or to injure one or attempt to do so. The maximum penalty for an offence under the 1992 Act is a fine of £5,000 and/or six months' imprisonment.

The level of protection for badgers is unique for an unendangered animal and reflects the concern which is felt by Parliament about the gratuitous acts of cruelty to which badgers have been subjected all too often in the past.

### Cockle Gatherers (Carmarthenshire)

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Secretary for Rural Affairs at the National Assembly for Wales on compensation for cockle gatherers in Carmarthenshire. [23980]

**Mr. Morley:** None. This is entirely a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

### Environmental Impact Assessments (Wales)

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the National Assembly for Wales regarding *(a)* the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive and *(b)* the implementation of its guidelines. [23983]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Environmental Impact Assessment Directive must be implemented UK wide. Officials have worked very closely with the National Assembly for Wales Agriculture Department and other Agriculture Departments in the devolved Administrations to determine key factors of the new regime which is being introduced to implement the uncultivated land provisions. This will ensure consistency of implementation and decision making across the UK, while allowing for any appropriate regional variations.

## Electronic Tagging (Cattle)

**Mrs. Dean:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will introduce electronic tagging and data collecting for cattle; and if she will make a statement. [24070]

**Mr. Morley:** The Department is currently reviewing all aspects of electronic identification of livestock together with farming industry representatives. In addition, the European Commission is undertaking extensive field trials of various electronic devices and we are awaiting the results of those trials to see what EU-wide rules might be agreed. The introduction of electronic identification in England will need to take account of this work.

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made in developing electronic tagging technologies for the identification of livestock. [24736]

**Mr. Morley:** The Department is currently reviewing all aspects of electronic identification of livestock together with farming industry representatives. In addition, the European Commission is undertaking extensive field trials of various electronic devices and we are awaiting the results of those trials to see what EU-wide rules might be agreed. The introduction of electronic identification in England will need to take account of this work.

## IACS Payments

**Mrs. Dean:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to ensure the timely payment of Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) cheques. [24071]

**Mr. Morley:** The Rural Payments Agency has, since 20 August, been affected by industrial action. Several thousand days of processing time have been lost and this is impacting on its ability to process claims as quickly as it would normally do.

Most schemes are affected to some degree but the greatest impact has been on the Arable Area Payment Scheme (AAPS).

AAPS payments under the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) are made between 16 November and 31 January following the harvest. For land growing non-food crops the final payment date is 31 March.

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) is doing everything that it can to ensure that delays in making payments are kept to a minimum. These include:

Encouraging overtime working

Redeploying all RPA staff with relevant experience on to the AAPS

Back filling staff redeployed with casual/agency staff

Increasing the number of staff authorising claims

Using validation reports to determine which claims can best be handled by less experienced staff so that better use is made of those with more experience

Switching staff periodically from case-work to payment authorisation

Deploying staff returning from FMD duties.

## Poultry (Additives)

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 395W, on the Advisory Group on Veterinary Medicines, what plans she has to make available the AGVR minutes before the Food Standards Agency 'Feed Additives in Poultry' stakeholders meeting on 16 January 2002. [23645]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* It is very unlikely that these minutes will be available before 16 January 2002. As indicated in an earlier answer, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate will have to seek the agreement of all former members of the Advisory Group on Veterinary Residues to their release. This is in accordance with Part II, Paragraph 14 a) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, Second Edition (1997). This is a time-consuming exercise but officials will complete the exercise as quickly as practicable.

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the total amount of poultry *(a)* produced and *(b)* sampled for (i) nicarbazin, (ii) lasaloci, (iii) dimetridazole and (iv) other residues in the last month of (A) 1998, (B) 1999, (C) 2000 and (D) 2001. [23594]

**Mr. Morley:** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The total amounts of poultry produced in the last month of 1998, 1999 and 2000 are set out in table 1. The figures for 2001 are not yet known. The numbers of samples taken from poultry throughout the United Kingdom for testing for the substances listed for the same months are set out in table 2. The figures for the last month of 2001 are the numbers of samples requested by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

*Table 1: UK poultry slaughterings*

*Million*

| | *December 1998* | *December 1999* | *December 2000* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Broiler birds | 50.63 | 50.21 | 51.99 |
| Boiling fowls | 2.90 | 2.89 | 2.76 |
| Turkeys | 3.65 | 3.05 | 3.29 |
| Ducks[1] | 1.42 | 1.50 | 1.50 |
| Geese[1] | 0.083 | 0.083 | 0.083 |

[1] Figures only available for annual production. Figures shown are based on one twelfth of annual production.

*Source:*
UK livestock surveys

*Table 2: Number of UK poultry samples taken for analysis for veterinary residues in December*

| | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* | *2001*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nicarbazin | n/a | 26 | 14 | 26 |
| Lasalocid | n/a | 30 | 23 | 26 |
| Dimetridazole | n/a | 164 | 18 | 177 |
| Other | n/a | 533 | 291 | 709 |

[1] Figures for December 2001 relate to the number of samples requested.

## Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the

Performance and Innovation Unit report, "Winning the Generation Game", *(a)* what progress her Department has made and *(b)* what future plans her Department has for acting on them; and if she will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24197]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 335W.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to reply to the Question of 5 December, ref. 21336, from the hon. Member for Buckingham on sickness absence. [24755]

**Mr. Morley:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 423–24W.

### Feed Additives

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what timetable for the replacement of the currently marketed antibiotic feed additives containing mycelial grade substances with premixes containing pharmacopoeial grade active substances was agreed at the Veterinary Products Committee meeting of 18 October; and if she will make a statement. [22960]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* At its meeting of 18 October the Veterinary Products Committee agreed the following timetable for the replacement of mycelial grade antibiotics with pharmacopoeial antibiotics:

by 1 December 2003—marketing authorisation holders to submit to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) valid applications for new marketing authorisations or to vary existing marketing authorisations;

by 1 December 2004—VMD to complete assessment of the relevant applications;

by 1 June 2005—marketing authorisation holders to implement the change.

Failure to meet this timetable could lead to the revocation of marketing authorisations.

### Rural-based Grants

**Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what amount of rural-based grants from *(a)* the EU and *(b)* other sources was paid in each year since 1990, broken down by (i) constituency and (ii) local authority; [24906]

(2) what amount of rural-based grants was made by the Government broken down by *(a)* constituency and *(b)* local authority in each year since 1990. [24905]

**Alun Michael:** This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Rural Pubs and Post Offices

**Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* pubs and *(b)* post offices there were in rural areas, broken down by (i) constituency and (ii) local authority in each year since 1990. [24896]

**Alun Michael:** The information is not available in the form requested. Information on numbers of rural pubs is not held centrally and I understand from Consignia that information on numbers of rural post offices by constituency and local authority is not available. The Government have been monitoring the position on rural post offices and a number of initiatives have been taken to provide a secure future for rural post offices and other local facilities wherever possible.

### Over-30-Months Scheme

**Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* BSE cases and *(b)* slaughtered animals under the over-30-months scheme there were, broken down by (i) constituency and (ii) local authority in each year since 1990. [24902]

**Mr. Morley:** The information is as follows:

*(a)* It is not possible to provide the information in the format requested, as data are not collected by constituency or local authority area. However, information is available by county as follows:

*Number of confirmed cases of BSE, by year of confirmation for each county in Great Britain 1990–14 December 2001*

| *County* | *1990* | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* | *2001* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Avon | 257 | 474 | 643 | 607 | 391 | 285 | 210 | 106 | 52 | 40 | 22 | 10 |
| Bedfordshire | 37 | 67 | 93 | 96 | 78 | 45 | 22 | 13 | 11 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Berkshire | 58 | 104 | 178 | 157 | 126 | 107 | 54 | 54 | 22 | 19 | 9 | 6 |
| Borders | 19 | 54 | 100 | 154 | 101 | 51 | 25 | 3 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Buckinghamshire | 128 | 180 | 254 | 332 | 280 | 122 | 94 | 57 | 27 | 45 | 17 | 19 |
| Cambridge | 49 | 63 | 91 | 133 | 91 | 54 | 33 | 20 | 18 | 13 | 8 | 2 |
| Central | 9 | 17 | 37 | 67 | 54 | 28 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Cheshire | 366 | 903 | 1,519 | 1,560 | 1,144 | 694 | 339 | 184 | 110 | 89 | 34 | 29 |
| Cleveland | 21 | 23 | 42 | 58 | 36 | 30 | 20 | 15 | 9 | 5 | 9 | 4 |
| Clwyd | 132 | 353 | 534 | 623 | 439 | 261 | 117 | 81 | 48 | 58 | 21 | 15 |
| Cornwall | 834 | 1,679 | 2,458 | 2,124 | 1,181 | 688 | 387 | 194 | 130 | 123 | 81 | 45 |
| Cumbria | 237 | 595 | 1,153 | 1,328 | 910 | 534 | 344 | 182 | 111 | 75 | 40 | 21 |
| Derbyshire | 202 | 386 | 880 | 940 | 733 | 486 | 263 | 103 | 75 | 69 | 28 | 13 |
| Devon | 1,208 | 2,306 | 3,253 | 2,906 | 1,870 | 1,055 | 640 | 397 | 268 | 204 | 98 | 65 |
| Dorset | 1,048 | 1,655 | 2,061 | 1,824 | 1,199 | 725 | 423 | 271 | 206 | 136 | 66 | 37 |
| Dumfries | 85 | 203 | 518 | 671 | 463 | 233 | 112 | 49 | 27 | 16 | 9 | 13 |
| Durham | 54 | 71 | 164 | 171 | 159 | 117 | 60 | 40 | 23 | 13 | 10 | 4 |
| Dyfed | 550 | 1,145 | 1,863 | 1,905 | 1,214 | 655 | 293 | 131 | 94 | 49 | 36 | 25 |

*Number of confirmed cases of BSE, by year of confirmation for each county in Great Britain 1990–14 December 2001*

| *County* | *1990* | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* | *2001* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Essex | 53 | 70 | 162 | 196 | 184 | 129 | 73 | 39 | 14 | 9 | 7 | 7 |
| Fife | 37 | 34 | 55 | 105 | 65 | 26 | 6 | 3 | 3 | — | — | — |
| Mid Glamorgan | 34 | 36 | 45 | 51 | 37 | 30 | 12 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 3 | — |
| South Glamorgan | 22 | 44 | 110 | 106 | 65 | 35 | 10 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| West Glamorgan | 8 | 8 | 28 | 36 | 17 | 15 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 | — |
| Gloucestershire | 346 | 538 | 697 | 677 | 473 | 258 | 167 | 108 | 71 | 73 | 32 | 26 |
| Grampian | 95 | 118 | 268 | 397 | 230 | 141 | 78 | 41 | 13 | 10 | 11 | 15 |
| Gwent | 85 | 143 | 234 | 258 | 160 | 119 | 58 | 39 | 24 | 21 | 5 | 3 |
| Gwynedd | 29 | 69 | 154 | 184 | 120 | 73 | 44 | 22 | 12 | 5 | 2 | 9 |
| Hampshire | 450 | 591 | 714 | 730 | 616 | 297 | 198 | 87 | 79 | 41 | 36 | 21 |
| Herefordshire/Worcestershire | 233 | 349 | 547 | 645 | 426 | 269 | 139 | 109 | 70 | 68 | 42 | 15 |
| Hertfordshire | 67 | 62 | 105 | 160 | 130 | 105 | 60 | 31 | 15 | 21 | 7 | 6 |
| Highland | 22 | 35 | 60 | 89 | 66 | 32 | 15 | 10 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Humberside | 71 | 98 | 137 | 214 | 163 | 137 | 78 | 32 | 38 | 25 | 20 | 16 |
| Isle of Wight | 92 | 150 | 144 | 136 | 117 | 62 | 30 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 12 | 4 |
| Kent | 245 | 310 | 398 | 449 | 264 | 198 | 103 | 54 | 32 | 26 | 17 | 9 |
| Lancashire | 297 | 621 | 1,313 | 1,376 | 906 | 531 | 328 | 138 | 120 | 90 | 48 | 23 |
| Leicestershire | 307 | 481 | 615 | 664 | 549 | 325 | 231 | 108 | 74 | 84 | 43 | 28 |
| Lincolnshire | 95 | 147 | 204 | 256 | 221 | 146 | 77 | 50 | 31 | 31 | 32 | 15 |
| London | 6 | 13 | 28 | 31 | 20 | 25 | 17 | 7 | 11 | 6 | 1 | 2 |
| Lothian | 6 | 14 | 42 | 68 | 50 | 17 | 13 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Manchester | 12 | 24 | 40 | 67 | 30 | 16 | 9 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 2 | — |
| Merseyside | 9 | 16 | 35 | 25 | 27 | 5 | 13 | 3 | 1 | — | 2 | — |
| Norfolk | 213 | 443 | 789 | 955 | 815 | 510 | 327 | 204 | 131 | 120 | 88 | 49 |
| Northamptonshire | 104 | 197 | 269 | 285 | 231 | 133 | 72 | 57 | 33 | 18 | 22 | 13 |
| Northumberland | 44 | 109 | 240 | 281 | 224 | 124 | 64 | 38 | 27 | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| Nottinghamshire | 86 | 105 | 197 | 206 | 163 | 137 | 88 | 34 | 28 | 31 | 29 | 12 |
| Orkney | 5 | 5 | 20 | 33 | 19 | 7 | 4 | 2 | — | — | — | — |
| Oxfordshire | 203 | 310 | 512 | 461 | 360 | 205 | 117 | 87 | 53 | 55 | 42 | 27 |
| Powys | 123 | 228 | 465 | 593 | 451 | 286 | 166 | 81 | 56 | 42 | 45 | 32 |
| Salop | 293 | 467 | 858 | 950 | 662 | 412 | 235 | 143 | 122 | 83 | 54 | 37 |
| Scilly Isles | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Shetland | — | 1 | 1 | — | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 | — | — | — | — |
| Somerset | 1,115 | 2,208 | 2,720 | 2,544 | 1,810 | 1,161 | 660 | 383 | 322 | 238 | 111 | 70 |
| Staffordshire | 278 | 488 | 956 | 993 | 724 | 419 | 210 | 111 | 75 | 63 | 32 | 21 |
| Strathclyde | 129 | 182 | 400 | 541 | 343 | 136 | 59 | 24 | 24 | 11 | 5 | 5 |
| Suffolk | 160 | 251 | 368 | 477 | 386 | 220 | 151 | 88 | 50 | 61 | 28 | 26 |
| Surrey | 118 | 152 | 260 | 267 | 205 | 112 | 79 | 34 | 19 | 17 | 8 | 6 |
| East Sussex | 169 | 273 | 378 | 397 | 299 | 211 | 101 | 48 | 38 | 33 | 21 | 20 |
| West Sussex | 312 | 424 | 645 | 704 | 524 | 331 | 180 | 102 | 60 | 50 | 29 | 25 |
| Tayside | 43 | 45 | 112 | 144 | 105 | 84 | 26 | 21 | 12 | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| Tyne and Wear | 1 | 6 | 10 | 16 | 12 | 6 | 6 | — | — | — | 2 | — |
| West Midlands | 8 | 10 | 27 | 35 | 19 | 15 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — |
| Warwickshire | 139 | 202 | 294 | 370 | 261 | 169 | 92 | 59 | 35 | 39 | 23 | 18 |
| Wiltshire | 743 | 1,243 | 1,433 | 1,433 | 957 | 576 | 312 | 193 | 123 | 108 | 45 | 37 |
| North Yorkshire | 505 | 832 | 1,471 | 1,618 | 1,276 | 782 | 426 | 227 | 252 | 143 | 90 | 56 |
| South Yorkshire | 53 | 70 | 117 | 148 | 140 | 116 | 64 | 38 | 44 | 27 | 12 | 12 |
| West Yorkshire | 70 | 113 | 194 | 244 | 186 | 141 | 86 | 38 | 54 | 29 | 15 | 11 |
| Total | 12,829 | 22,613 | 34,712 | 36,271 | 25,579 | 15,451 | 8,740 | 4,847 | 3,444 | 2,678 | 1,541 | 1,009 |

*(b)* OTMS throughput totals broken down into counties for GB. Of course, the OTMS only began in April 1996. At present, resources only permit us to provide information for 1999, 2000 and 2001.

| | *1999* | *2000* | *2001*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| *England* | | | |
| Bedfordshire | 1,492 | 1,463 | 976 |
| Berkshire | 2,396 | 2,454 | 1,381 |
| Buckinghamshire | 5,011 | 5,050 | 3,316 |
| Cleveland | 1,292 | 1,545 | 595 |
| Cambridgeshire | 1,871 | 1,781 | 1,192 |
| Cheshire | 36,904 | 36,471 | 21,037 |
| Cornwall | 31,869 | 31,910 | 17,326 |
| Cumbria | 48,917 | 49,170 | 19,088 |
| Derbyshire | 21,590 | 21,592 | 12,791 |
| Devon | 55,535 | 58,295 | 29,652 |
| Dorset | 23,004 | 24,587 | 14,869 |
| Durham | 7,011 | 7,535 | 2,729 |
| Essex | 2,907 | 3,016 | 1,783 |
| Gloucestershire | 14,388 | 15,459 | 7,883 |
| Hampshire | 8,897 | 9,179 | 5,648 |
| Isle of Wight | 1,773 | 1,911 | 988 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 15,737 | 16,657 | 8,336 |
| Hertfordshire | 1,849 | 1,716 | 894 |
| Kent | 5,024 | 5,749 | 3,417 |
| Lancashire | 30,957 | 30,334 | 15,045 |
| Leicestershire | 10,863 | 11,377 | 7,187 |
| Lincolnshire | 6,141 | 6,165 | 3,415 |
| Merseyside | 987 | 952 | 646 |
| Greater London | 276 | 272 | 177 |
| Norfolk | 7,247 | 7,442 | 3,897 |
| Northamptonshire | 4,776 | 5,217 | 2,962 |
| Tyne and Wear | 809 | 806 | 276 |
| Northumberland | 10,775 | 10,658 | 4,633 |
| Nottinghamshire | 4,534 | 4,716 | 2,784 |
| Oxfordshire | 6,015 | 6,265 | 4,099 |

| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Avon | 10,478 | 10,695 | 5,940 |
| Shropshire | 27,412 | 27,088 | 15,782 |
| Somerset | 34,962 | 37,965 | 21,591 |
| Staffordshire | 29,300 | 29,722 | 18,230 |
| Suffolk | 3,460 | 3,336 | 2,032 |
| Isles of Scilly | 63 | 46 | 18 |
| Surrey | 3,423 | 4,181 | 2,302 |
| East Sussex | 5,066 | 5,543 | 3,255 |
| West Sussex | 6,671 | 7,101 | 3,856 |
| Warwickshire | 6,608 | 7,414 | 4,306 |
| Greater Manchester | 3,577 | 3,449 | 1,944 |
| Wiltshire | 19,117 | 19,569 | 11,350 |
| West Midlands | 1,152 | 985 | 718 |
| North Yorkshire | 37,963 | 39,069 | 18,979 |
| South Yorkshire | 8,341 | 8,405 | 4,067 |
| West Yorkshire | 858 | 910 | 591 |
| Humberside | 3,801 | 3,789 | 2,112 |
| Total | 573,099 | 589,011 | 316,095 |
| *Wales* | | | |
| Powys | 16,477 | 16,934 | 6,922 |
| Gwynedd | 10,987 | 10,303 | 6,243 |
| Dyfed | 53,915 | 50,989 | 29,762 |
| Clwyd | 16,969 | 18,026 | 10,176 |
| South Glamorgan | 2,025 | 1,928 | 1,108 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 2,025 | 1,995 | 1,026 |
| West Glamorgan | 2,034 | 2,047 | 949 |
| Gwent | 6,874 | 6,869 | 3,573 |
| Total | 111,306 | 109,091 | 59,759 |
| *Scotland* | | | |
| Aberdeenshire | 11,607 | 12,382 | 7,197 |
| Angus | 2,559 | 2,775 | 1,905 |
| Argyllshire | 4,618 | 4,778 | 2,423 |
| Ayrshire | 21,459 | 20,424 | 11,804 |
| Banffshire | 3,106 | 3,318 | 2,193 |
| Berwickshire | 2,685 | 2,984 | 1,467 |
| Bute | 1,313 | 1,490 | 893 |
| Caithness | 2,849 | 2,931 | 2,008 |
| Clackmannanshire | 202 | 218 | 59 |
| Dumfriesshire | 13,553 | 14,047 | 6,565 |
| Dumbartonshire | 1,383 | 1,363 | 841 |
| East Lothian | 825 | 930 | 566 |
| Fife | 3,659 | 3,692 | 2,043 |
| Inverness-shire | 1,952 | 2,278 | 1,356 |
| Kincardineshire | 2,714 | 3,161 | 1,631 |
| Kinross-shire | 629 | 698 | 380 |
| Kirkcudbrightshire | 9,017 | 9,781 | 5,209 |
| Lanarkshire | 11,803 | 11,271 | 6,252 |
| Midlothian | 1,861 | 2,054 | 1,114 |
| Morayshire | 2,417 | 2,251 | 1,526 |
| Nairnshire | 801 | 803 | 499 |
| Orkney | 4,876 | 4,860 | 3,422 |
| Peeblesshire | 1,319 | 1,467 | 834 |
| Perthshire | 5,326 | 5,718 | 3,269 |
| Renfrewshire | 3,164 | 3,025 | 1,780 |
| Ross and Cromarty | 1,663 | 1,735 | 992 |
| Roxburghshire | 2,740 | 3,157 | 1,631 |
| Selkirkshire | 462 | 595 | 358 |
| Shetland | 369 | 402 | 252 |
| Stirlingshire | 3,283 | 3,462 | 1,867 |
| Sutherland | 347 | 439 | 233 |
| West Lothian | 1,441 | 1,439 | 872 |
| Wigtownshire | 11,132 | 11,323 | 5,855 |
| Total | 137,134 | 141,251 | 79,296 |
| Grant total | 821,539 | 839,353 | 455,150 |

[1] January to November

### Illegally Imported Meat

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the number of seizures of illegally imported meat and meat products during the past 12 months; and if she will list the points of entry at which the seizures were made. [25189]

**Mr. Morley:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 267W.

### British Beef Exports

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what date she expects the resumption of exports of British beef to France following the European Court of Justice ruling; what recent discussions she has had with her French counterpart about the arrangements for the lifting of the French ban on British beef; and what steps she is taking to claim compensation on behalf of British beef producers for the loss of export income during the period of the ban. [25192]

**Mr. Morley:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects the Commission to take further action against the French Government if they do not lift their ban within a reasonable timescale. My right hon. Friend made it clear at the Agriculture Council on 19 December 2001 that she expected the ban to be lifted as soon as possible.

The UK Government cannot claim compensation as they have no direct commercial interest. However, we will give exporters seeking compensation full support, practical assistance and advice, although as a matter of policy the Government will not fund their costs nor provide detailed legal advice.

### Fishing Fleet

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make a statement on what basis kilowatt days will be established for individual fishing vessels, pursuant to the European Commission's proposal for a Council regulation establishing measures for the recovery of cod and hake stocks; and if *(a)* the declared engine power according to the Fishing Vessel Register and *(b)* the actual engine power will be used; [25190]

(2) if she will make a statement on how an under-declaration of engine power will affect the United Kingdom position in respect of the list of vessels required under the EU Regulation for the recovery of cod and hake stocks; and if the UK would be penalised in a future fleet reduction programme in the event of the list being submitted to the Commission having included vessels with actual engine power found to be larger than that declared on the Fishing Vessel Register. [25191]

**Mr. Morley:** This will depend on the form in which EU legislation for recovery of cod and hake stocks is adopted. The Council has not yet begun to consider the recently published Commission proposals for limiting fishing effort.

## Agriculture Council

**Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 19 and 20 December; what the Government's position was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [25104]

**Margaret Beckett:** I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Agriculture Council in Brussels on 19 December 2001. Agriculture Ministers of the devolved Administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland were also present.

The Council reached agreement on reform of the sheepmeat regime, including a number of measures for which the United Kingdom had pressed strongly. The changes will make substantial savings in the budget for the EU's current financial year. The main ones will fix permanent rates of premium and create national envelopes which can be directed towards national or regional priorities. Different approaches will be permitted in England and the devolved Administrations. I am delighted with this outcome which will give us some valuable flexibility in the operation of this importance regime.

The Council also agreed to introduce a stabiliser which will cap spending in the seeds sector. The new arrangements fully safeguard UK interests. A further amendment of the banana regime was also agreed, bringing to a close a long running dispute with certain of the EU's trading partners.

The presidency reported the successful outcome of the international conference on foot and mouth disease at which the United Kingdom had taken a prominent part.

The Council discussed a memorandum from certain member states on the oilseeds market. I endorsed the Commission's response, arguing that further encouragement of oilseed production in the EU would be costly, unnecessary and likely to produce tension with our trading partners.

The Council took note of progress on several dossiers under the Belgian presidency and exchanged views on a useful memorandum from the German Government on organic farming.

## Fisheries Council

**Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 17 and 18 December; what the Government's position was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [25103]

**Mr. Morley:** I represented the United Kingdom at a meeting of the EU Council of Fisheries Ministers in Brussels on 17–18 December, together with Ross Finnie, Minister for Environment and Rural Development in the Scottish Executive and Mrs. Brid Rodgers, the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development.

The Council agreed by qualified majority, with France voting against, on Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and quotas to apply in 2002 in EU waters and for EU vessels fishing in waters where catch limitations apply, together with a six-month extension of the controls on fleet capacity and grants. Details of the agreed UK quotas are provided in the table.

Following on from the advice of fisheries scientists at the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) highlighting the poor state of a number of fish stocks, the Commission proposed large cuts in a wide range of TACs. I fully supported the need for large cuts where the science justified this, but argued in parallel to this that in many respects the Commission's proposals went further than science would justify.

Scientific assessment underpinned our whole approach towards stocks. We were careful both to respect scientific advice and have a sound scientific case where we disagreed with some of the Commissions's proposals.

The Commission was in particular too quick to propose large automatic cuts in relation to stocks associated and caught with depleted stocks and to cut TACs for some stocks because they appear to have been under-utilised by fishermen up to now. The former approach had led the Commission to propose, for example, further large cuts in the nephrops fisheries west of Scotland and in the Irish sea and North sea on the presumption that this would relieve pressure on depleted cod stocks: expert analysis that we have carried out on this proposition because of the importance of the nephrops fishery to UK fishermen showed conclusively that, to the contrary, the Commission's proposed cuts would have seriously penalised nephrops fishermen in order to bring benefits to cod stocks which would be minimal at best.

More generally, if implemented the proposals would have denied fishermen such benefits as the scientific advice showed could now be derived as a result of conservation measures already taken, and would have curtailed a wide range of fishing activity much more severely than could be rationally justified.

I am pleased to say that, after lengthy negotiations, we achieved an outcome which closely follows the scientific advice. This does not shirk severe measures where these are justified, but it does meet my criticisms of what the Commission proposed. Improvements of particular interest to UK fishermen include the abandonment of the unjustified further cuts proposed in the nephrops TACs, a 48 per cent. increase in the TAC for cod in the Irish sea (made possible by conservation measures previously taken there), and a valuable mitigation of the punitive cuts proposed by the commission in the TACs for monkfish.

The Council agreed a short, six-month, extension of the controls on fleet capacity and grants, raising the capacity penalty applied when vessel construction and modernisation grants are paid on vessels in fleet segments exceeding their Community limits. The Council and the Commission undertook to aim, in the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, at an active fleet policy to achieve better balance between fishing effort and fisheries resources.

The Council briefly noted, but did not discuss in any details, two areas of work that will command a lot of its attention in 2002—the review of the Common Fisheries Policy and the long-term plans to be put in place for the recovery of depleted stocks. Clearly the second of these

items will be of particular importance in the context of ensuring the long-term sustainability of the fisheries concerned and of the industries that pursue them.

*Comparative table of UK quota for 2001 and 2002*

| Stock | UK quota 2001 | UK quota 2002 |
|---|---|---|
| Sandeel IIa North Sea | 20,000 | 17,794 |
| Herring I, II | 16,460 | 16,460 |
| Herring IVa, b | 40,570 | 38,169 |
| Herring IVc, VIId | 1,693 | 4,094 |
| Herring Vb, VIaN, VIb | 21,570 | 21,571 |
| Herring VIa (Clyde) | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| Herring VIIa | 5,100 | 3,550 |
| Herring VIIe, f | 500 | 500 |
| Herring VIIg-k | 30 | 10 |
| Herring IIa North Sea Industrial by-catch | 660 | 660 |
| Cod IIa, IV | 18,930 | 19,397 |
| Cod Vb, VI, XII, XIV | 2,222 | 2,960 |
| Cod VIIa | 895 | 1,378 |
| Cod VIIb-k, VIII, IX, X | 870 | 712 |
| Megrim IIA North Sea | 2,600 | 2,599 |
| Megrim Vb, VI, XII, XIV | 1,370 | 1,367 |
| Megrim VII | 2,150 | 1,874 |
| Dab and Flounder IIa North Sea | 2,330 | 2,331 |
| Anglers IIa North Sea | 11,495 | 8,545 |
| Anglers Vb, VI, XII, XIV | 1,975 | 1,513 |
| Anglers VII | 3,870 | 3,295 |
| Haddock IIa, IV | 41,780 | 59,805 |
| Haddock Vb, VI, XII, XIV | 10,820 | 10,992 |
| Haddock VII, VIII, IX, X | 1,200 | 830 |
| Haddock VIIa (additional to haddock VII) | 1,293 | 622 |
| Whiting IIa, IV | 13,335 | 18,853 |
| Whiting Vb, VI, XII, XIV | 2,580 | 2,157 |
| Whiting VIIa | 685 | 443 |
| Whiting VIIb-k | 2,250 | 3,402 |
| Hake IIa, IV | 160 | 170 |
| Hake Vb, VI, VII, XII, XIV | 2,500 | 2,662 |
| Blue whiting IIa, IV | 1,070 | 592 |
| Blue whiting Vb, VI, VII, XII, XIV | 45,350 | 25,032 |
| Blue whiting VIII abde | 7,241 | 3,555 |
| Lemon sole IIa North sea | 6,580 | 5,937 |
| Nephrops IIa, IV | 13,380 | 14,368 |
| Nephrops Vb, VI | 11,070 | 11,072 |
| Nephrops VII | 6,200 | 5,856 |
| Northern prawn IIa, IV | 1,778 | 1,074 |
| Plaice IIa, IV | 21,780 | 20,748 |
| Plaice Vb, VI, XII, XIV | 1,170 | 1,050 |
| Plaice VIIa | 835 | 1,223 |
| Plaice VIId, e | 1,750 | 1,946 |
| Plaice VIIf, g | 180 | 119 |
| Plaice VIIh, j, k | 150 | 146 |
| Pollack Vb, VI, XII, XIV | 400 | 403 |
| Pollack VII | 2,960 | 2,964 |
| Saithe IIa, III, IV | 6,980 | 10,838 |
| Saithe Vb, VI, XII, XIV | 3,255 | 3,211 |
| Saithe VII, VIII, IX, X | 805 | 1,340 |
| Turbot and brill IIa North Sea | 1,110 | 973 |
| Skates and rays IIa North Sea | 3,128 | 2,509 |
| Mackerel IIa(EC), III, IV | 1,580 | 1,611 |
| Mackerel IIa(non-EC), Vb, VI, VII, VIIIabde, XII, XIV | 197,069 | 201,647 |
| Sole II, IV | 815 | 686 |
| Sole Vb, VI, XII, XIV | 30 | 25 |
| Sole VIIa | 240 | 244 |
| Sole VIId | 885 | 1,000 |
| Sole VIIe | 355 | 309 |
| Sole VIIf, g | 285 | 301 |
| Sole VIIh, j, k | 110 | 138 |
| Sprat II, IV | 8,350 | 8,348 |
| Sprat VIId, e | 6,300 | 6,300 |
| Spurdog IIa, IV | 7,177 | 5,745 |
| Horse mackerel IIa North Sea | 4,960 | 4,960 |
| Horse mackerel Vb, VI, VII, VIIIabde, XII, XIV | 22,850 | 14,026 |

## Asbestos

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how often since 1998 inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive have *(a)* made (i) announced and (ii) unannounced visits to asbestos removal sites and *(b)* entered the asbestos stripping enclosure during both such types of visit; and if he will make a statement. [23891]

**Dr. Whitehead:** I have been asked to reply.

*(a)* Health and Safety Executive inspectors have the discretion to decide whether to announce their visits in advance or whether to arrive on site unannounced. The system for recording the number of visits made by HSE inspectors does not differentiate between the two. The number of visits made by HSE inspectors since 1998 is as follows:

| | Visits |
|---|---|
| 1998–99 | 1,023 |
| 1999–2000 | 974 |
| 2000–01 | 951 |

*(b)* The Health and Safety Executive do not gather information about the number of HSE inspectors who enter asbestos stripping enclosures during visits to asbestos work.

## Excellence in Cities

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 497W, on the Excellence in Cities Scheme, if she will list the towns and villages that will cover the 24 excellence clusters by September 2002; and where their funding will come from. [24383]

**Mr. Timms:** I have been asked to reply.

The 24 Excellence Clusters that will be working by September 2002 are:

Barnet

Bishop Auckland

Coventry

Crewe

Croydon (Croydon and Thornton Heath)

Derby

Dewsbury and Batley (Dewsbury, Batley, Holmfirth and Heckmondwike)

East Lancashire (Burnley and Nelson)

High Wycombe (High Wycombe and Marlow)

Hillingdon (Hillingdon, Hayes, Uxbridge and West Drayton)

Huddersfield

Lancaster

Milton Keynes

Norwich

Peterborough

Portsmouth (Portsmouth and Southsea)
Shepway (Folkestone, Hythe and New Romney)
Stockport
Tameside (Ashton under Lyne, Hyde and Dukinfield)
Tilbury and Chadwell (Tilbury, Grays and Stanford le Hope)
Walsall (Walsall and Wednesbury)
West Cumbria (Cleator Moor, Maryport, Whitehaven and Workington)
West Lancashire (Skelmersdale and Ormskirk)
Wigan.

Their funding comes from the DfES Standards Fund.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Burglary

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding has been awarded to schemes under the reducing burglary initiative in the Buckingham constituency in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what targets have been set to reduce crime under the schemes. [22624]

**Mr. Denham:** None; we did not receive any bids for funding for burglary reduction projects in this area.

### Specialist Detectives

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what role specialist detectives will take on; and how many there will be. [22866]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* Specialist detectives would develop the skills to work on the most complex investigations. They would be drawn from existing officers and those choosing to specialise as they join the service. The operational needs of police forces would determine what proportion of their detective officers would specialise in investigation. These officers would still work in other areas of policing, but would develop their investigative skills to a high standard through a career anchored in investigation. This would provide an experienced pool of officers from which Senior Investigation Officers could be drawn.

In the most specialised fields we plan to introduce specialist civilian investigators. Specialist civilian investigators will provide the depth of knowledge only a career specialist could bring to investigations into high-tech crime, cybercrime, fraud, money laundering and other complex areas of crime. The numbers recruited will depend on the operational needs of the police service. Some specialists might be shared between a number of forces. By providing the civilian investigators with certain police powers they will be able to function as full members of investigating teams.

### Home Security (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been awarded to provide home security improvements for low-income pensioners living in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [22630]

**Mr. Denham:** Our scheme to provide low-income pensioners with home security improvements only operates in those police Basic Command Unit (BCU) areas that had a burglary rate above the national average according to the recorded crime statistics published in January 2000. The Buckingham constituency does not fall within an eligible area, as the Aylesbury Vale BCU has a burglary rate around half the national average.

### Special Constables (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables there have been in the constituency of Buckingham in each year since 1997. [22627]

**Mr. Denham:** I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley police that it is not possible to provide information about the number of special constables specifically for the Buckingham constituency, as such information is not collected. Figures are available for the number of special constables in the Aylesbury Vale police area, which incorporates the Buckingham constituency, at 31 March each year, and these are:

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1997 | 57 |
| 1998 | 72 |
| 1999 | 77 |
| 2000 | 43 |
| 2001 | 40 |

The Government are committed to increasing the special constabulary and as part of the police reform process we are working with stakeholders on a range of measures to significantly improve the management, welfare and deployment of specials.

### Breathalyser Tests (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many breathalyser tests were carried out in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997; and what percentage resulted in convictions. [22634]

**Mr. Denham:** Limited available information for the Thames Valley police force area is given in the table.

*Screening breath tests[1] and convictions at all courts for offences of driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs where a breathalyser will have been used[2] for the Thames Valley police force area, 1997–99*

| *Year* | *Total numbers of screening breath tests*[1] | *Total numbers of convictions at all courts*[2] | *Convictions as a percentage of breath tests* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1997 | 33,100 | 4,100 | 12 |
| 1998 | 34,200 | 3,900 | 11 |
| 1999 | 30,300 | 3,700 | 12 |

[1] Information taken from the Home Office Breath Test Statistics.
[2] Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database

*Note:*
It is important to note that because the information has been taken from two separate collections the data are not strictly comparable (the court conviction will, of course, be given at a later date).

### Antisocial Behaviour Orders

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* antisocial behaviour orders and *(b)* curfew orders have been made in the Buckingham constituency since the commencement of the schemes. [22621]

**Mr. Denham:** Official statistics on the number of Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBO) issued are based on quarterly returns received from Magistrates Courts Committees (MCCs). A review identified an undercount and my Department therefore undertook an exercise with the police to obtain more reliable figures. As a result of this reconciliation exercise the total number of ASBOs issued within England and Wales up until the end of

September this year was 466, 184 more than previously reported. Of these, seven have been issued within the Thames Valley MCC.

No applications have been received from local authorities or the police to establish child curfew schemes under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, as amended by sections 48 and 49 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. These amendments extended the upper age limit to 15 and allow the police, as well as local authorities, to initiate schemes. These changes were implemented on 1 August 2001.

**Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued by *(a)* Wandsworth council and *(b)* other local authorities in Greater London between 1999 and 2001. [22946]

**Mr. Denham:** Information held centrally on the number of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) issued up to 31 May 2000 is by police force area only. Up to that date there were nine issued within the Metropolitan police area (including City of London).

From 1 June 2000 official statistics on the number of ASBOs issued are based on quarterly returns from Magistrates Courts Committees. A review identified an undercount and my Department therefore undertook an exercise with the police to obtain more reliable figures. As a result of this reconciliation exercise the total number of ASBOs issued within England and Wales up to the end of September this year was 466, 184 more than previously reported. Within the area of the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority there have been 31 ASBOs issued since 1 June 2000. Wandsworth borough has not been reported as being involved in the application of any of these orders.

## CCTV

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the funding available for CCTV schemes in the Buckingham constituency. [22623]

**Mr. Denham:** Under the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV Initiative a potential £170 million will be spent funding 686 CCTV schemes.

Although no further bids can be accepted under the Crime Reduction Programme, other opportunities for CCTV funding may exist under the Communities Against Drugs or the Small Retailers in Deprived Areas initiatives.

We aim to announce future arrangements for funding Crime Reduction, including CCTV, as soon as possible.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the closed circuit TV schemes that have been (i) funded and (ii) part-funded by the Government in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997, *(b)* the cost of each and *(c)* targets set to reduce crime under the schemes. [22622]

**Mr. Denham:** Under Round 2 of the CCTV Challenge Competition (1996–97), the Home Office provided part funding of £9,500 for the Buckingham Town Centre CCTV system. The bid set out a target of a 40 per cent. reduction in vehicle-related crime and criminal damage in the area covered by the system.

## Drugs (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many offenders were dealt with for supply offences in respect of Class A drugs in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997; [22632]

(2) what estimate he has made of the percentage of recorded crime in the Buckingham constituency that was drug-related in the last five years. [22631]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** The information requested is not available at constituency level.

However, data from the Home Office Court Appearances and Cautions Drugs Databases show that the number of persons in the Thames Valley Police force area who were dealt with for supply offences involving Class A drugs fell from 209 in 1997 to 191 in both 1998 and 1999. Data for 2000 are not yet available.

It is difficult to calculate a single percentage figure reflecting precisely what proportion of all crimes is drug-related since no statistical data are collected on offences that may have been committed due to drug taking. However, information is collected on the number of drug offences. Details of the number of persons convicted of or cautioned for drug offences and as a proportion of persons convicted of or cautioned for all indictable offences in the Thames Valley Police force area during the period 1995–99 are given in the table.

*Number of persons convicted of or cautioned for drug offences and as a proportion of persons convicted of or cautioned for all indictable offences, Thames Valley, 1995–99*

| | *Drug offences* | *All indictable offences* | *Drug offences as a percentage of all indictable offences* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1995 | 1,914 | 11,546 | 16.6 |
| 1996 | 1,750 | 11,046 | 15.8 |
| 1997 | 1,738 | 10,474 | 16.6 |
| 1998 | 1,891 | 10,331 | 18.3 |
| 1999 | 2,042 | 11,207 | 18.2 |

*Source:*
Home Office Court Appearances and Cautions Database

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* those schemes which have received funding under the Communities Against Drugs Initiative in the Buckingham constituency, *(b)* the amount received and *(c)* what targets have been set to reduce crime under the scheme. [22656]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** Aylesbury Vale Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership was allocated £127,200 for Communities Against Drugs, in 2001–02. The table shows how the partnership is to spend this money:

£

| *Intervention* | *Sum allocated* |
|---|---|
| Police Proactive Unit | 53,723 |
| Drugs Outreach Service | 52,500 |
| Arrest Referral Project | 5,000 |
| Drug Market Analysis | 5,000 |
| Walton Court Project[1] | 10,977 |
| Total | 127,200 |

[1] Part funding for CCTV and police/neighbourhood warden office

Communities Against Drugs activity, in Aylesbury Vale, is contributing to the achievement of the Government's drugs strategy targets, and local authority best value targets.

### Crime Statistics

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of *(a)* violent crime, *(b)* burglary and *(c)* vandalism in the Buckingham constituency were reported to the police in each year since 1997; and how many investigations resulted in a conviction. [22635]

**Mr. Denham:** The requested details are not collected centrally.

Details of some offences recorded by the police have been collected by police Basic Command Unit (BCU) since 1 April 1999. The table gives details of numbers of offences and detections for the Aylesbury Vale BCU. Details of criminal damage offences are not collected at BCU level.

| | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|
| *Violent crime* | | |
| Offences | 970 | 1,217 |
| Offences detected | 775 | 834 |
| *Burglary in a dwelling* | | |
| Offences | 779 | 533 |
| Offences detected | 166 | 93 |

Violent crime is comprised of the violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery offence groups.

It should be noted that recorded violent crime is subject to changes in reporting and recording. The 2001 British Crime Survey found that in England and Wales as a whole, victimisation for the violent crime in the survey which is comparable to recorded crime decreased by 19 per cent. between the 1999 and 2000 calendar years, whereas comparable violent crime recorded by the police increased by 9 per cent. Violent crime recorded by the police may therefore not necessarily be a reflection of real changes in the level of victimisation.

Details of convictions specifically relating to offences in the Aylesbury Vale BCU are not available.

### Young Offenders (Buckingham)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many youths under the age of 18 from the Buckingham constituency have been held in young offenders rehabilitation centres in each year since 1997. [22620]

**Beverley Hughes:** The number of receptions of persons under the age of 18 into prisons in England and Wales from courts in the Buckingham constituency is given in the table:

| *Year* | *Receptions of under 18-year-old prisoners committed in Buckingham constituency*[1] |
|---|---|
| 1997 | 24 |
| 1998 | 29 |
| 1999 | 19 |
| 2000 | 29 |

[1] Data are based on court of first committal

### Speed Cameras

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many speed cameras have been installed, and how much has been spent on *(a)* installing and *(b)* maintaining and replacing speed cameras in each year since 1995; [23199]

(2) what the estimated backlog is in the prosecution of speeding related offences detected by speed cameras; [23049]

(3) what criteria the Government have set for money raised from fines arising from speed cameras being made available to meet the costs of that speed camera; [23048]

(4) what the estimated financial saving is from the cost of road accidents which has arisen since the introduction of speed cameras in the UK; [23051]

(5) what the percentage change is in the number of *(a)* serious and *(b)* fatal accidents at sites where speed cameras have been installed in the last two years; [23050]

(6) how many *(a)* pedestrian, *(b)* cyclist, *(c)* motor cyclist, *(d)* car driver and *(e)* passenger lives are estimated to have been saved by the introduction of speed cameras; [23052]

(7) if he will make a statement on the system for the funding of speed cameras in selected police areas; and what plans the Government have to extend the system; [23055]

(8) what estimate the Government have made of the number of accidents caused by drivers cutting their speeds on approaching a signalled speed camera in the last five years; [23054]

(9) what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of speed cameras on the use of police time; [23056]

(10) how much money has been raised in fines for speeding related offences, detected by speed cameras, in each year since 1995; [23198]

(11) what the average cost is of *(a)* setting up and *(b)* maintaining a speed camera; and what percentage of the maintenance and set up costs of speed cameras is covered by revenue raised from fines and other charges, made through speed related offences. [23053]

**Mr. Denham:** The number of speed cameras in police force areas is not recorded centrally. The Association of Chief Police Officers estimates that there are about 4,500 speed camera sites in England and Wales. The average cost of purchasing and installing a fixed site speed camera is in the region of £30,000.

From April 2000 eight partnerships, comprising local police forces, local authorities, highways authorities and magistrates courts, have been piloting a new 'netting off' scheme . This allows the fixed penalty revenue from speed and red-light cameras to be re-invested to fund camera enforcement. The money raised is used to meet all the costs of purchasing, installing, operating and maintaining cameras.

Under the scheme, local magistrates courts within a partnership collect all fixed penalty notice and fine revenue from offenders. The element to be netted off goes

to the partnership's local authority, which acts as treasurer for the scheme, and distributes the funds to each of the partners on the basis of invoiced expenditure. Any revenue not used for camera enforcement goes to Her Majesty's Treasury. For areas outside the netting-off scheme all camera related costs are met by the police, local authorities and other agencies involved in the enforcement process. Proceeds go to Her Majesty's Treasury.

The results of the netting-off scheme demonstrate its value. Evidence from the pilot areas shows that motorists are slowing down in all areas where speed cameras are located, and not just in the immediate vicinity of camera sites. The first year report of the scheme shows that across the eight pilot areas as a whole the number of people killed or seriously injured dropped by 18 per cent. compared to the average of the previous three years. On average, the number of people killed or seriously injured at the camera sites is down by 47 per cent., and the average speed is down by 5.6 miles per hour. On the basis of historical trend data, we estimate that there were 109 fewer people killed or seriously injured as a result of the increased camera enforcement, although we cannot break this down by type of road user. We estimate that £27 million has been saved by the reduction of casualties and collisions at camera sites in the pilot areas when account is taken of ambulance and medical costs, lost output and the human costs of road accidents.

In addition, the evidence suggests that police operational priorities have not been distorted in any way. Automatic road safety cameras do not need police attendance and act as a continuous deterrent. They free up police resources to deal with other crimes and to undertake other traffic law enforcement activities. In the pilot areas, wider criminal activity has also been detected by chasing up non-payers caught on camera. The Association of Chief Police Officers strongly supports the netting-off scheme.

In August we announced the national roll-out of the netting-off scheme, and a further seven partnership areas joined the scheme in October 2001. A further 12 force areas have applied to join the scheme next year, and more are expected soon All areas wishing to join the scheme are expected to do so over the next two to three years.

We have made it clear that cameras will only be placed at sites where there is a proven history of speed-related injuries or at accident hotspots where excess speed is a problem. There will be a requirement that all cameras are properly sign-posted and sufficiently visible, with their deployment well publicised locally. Camera use will be monitored to ensure that they help to reduce accidents. Those that do not will be moved to a more appropriate location or removed altogether. We shall be issuing new guidance to local authorities and police forces operating speed cameras outside the netting-off scheme, so that the requirements for other cameras mirror the netting-off rules.

The number of fixed penalties over the last five years for speeding offences where cameras have provided the evidence is given in the table. Automatic camera devices provided evidence from 1995 to 1998 and all camera types for 1999. Data for 2000 are not yet available. From 1995 to 1999 the fixed penalty charge for speeding offences was £40. All the money was paid to Her Majesty's Treasury.

| | *Fixed penalties* | *Estimated revenue*[1] *£ million* |
|---|---|---|
| 1995 | 170,000 | 6.8 |
| 1996 | 212,600 | 8.8 |
| 1997 | 288,600 | 11.5 |
| 1998 | 338,800 | 13.6 |
| 1999[2] | 423,000 | 16.9 |

[1] 'Estimate' based on paid £40 fixed penalty charge from 1995 to 1999 for England and Wales.

[2] Automatic cameras until 1998, all camera types for 1999.

Information on the number of speed related offences awaiting prosecution is not held centrally.

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* speed-related and *(b)* other criminal prosecutions have been made by use of speed camera equipment in each year since 1995; and what the average cost of prosecution per speed camera is. [23070]

**Mr. Denham:** Available information on the number of fixed penalties and prosecutions for speeding and traffic light offences detected by cameras is shown in the table.

Information is not collected centrally by my Department on whether speed camera evidence has been used in any other criminal prosecutions. Average cost figures for prosecutions per speed camera are also not available centrally.

*Fixed penalties and prosecutions for offences detected by cameras*[1] *England and Wales 1995 to 1999*

*Number of offences*

| *Year* | *Fixed penalty*[2] | *Prosecutions* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Speeding* | | | |
| 1995 | 170,000 | 36,900 | 206,900 |
| 1996 | 212,600 | 49,600 | 262,200 |
| 1997 | 288,600 | 48,100 | 336,700 |
| 1998 | 338,800 | 65,100 | 403,800 |
| 1999 | 423,000 | 75,600 | 498,600 |
| *Traffic lights* | | | |
| 1995 | 33,300 | 14,800 | 48,100 |
| 1996 | 33,400 | 19,400 | 52,800 |
| 1997 | 34,600 | 18,800 | 53,300 |
| 1998 | 31,800 | 11,800 | 43,500 |
| 1999 | 37,100 | 14,900 | 52,000 |
| *All offences* | | | |
| 1995 | 203,300 | 51,700 | 255,000 |
| 1996 | 246,000 | 67,000 | 312,900 |
| 1997 | 323,200 | 66,900 | 390,000 |
| 1998 | 370,500 | 76,800 | 447,400 |
| 1999 | 460,100 | 90,500 | 550,600 |

[1] Automatic cameras until 1998, all camera types for 1999

[2] Paid, ie no further action

## Metropolitan Police Officers

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan police officers have *(a)* retired, *(b)* resigned and *(c)* been dismissed in each of the last three years. [22485]

**Mr. Denham:** The information set out in the table has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

| | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Retired[1] | 1,087 | 839 | 685 |
| Resigned | 332 | 361 | 359 |
| Required to resign | 48 | 30 | 20 |
| Dismissed | 10 | 15 | 10 |

[1] Includes medical retirements: 494, 285, 220, 153 (April to November)

### James Ashley

**Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the publication of information concerning the fatal shooting of James Ashley in 1998. [22783]

**Mr. Denham:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 344W. Subsequently the Police Authority considered the matter and concluded that it is not possible at this stage to disclose the investigation reports.

I have commissioned two other reports which will address matters relevant to this shooting:

a report from the Sussex Police Authority under section 43 of the Police Act 1996 on the events surrounding the shooting and the action taken by Sussex police to ensure that they have responded appropriately.

a report from the Police Complaints Authority under section 79 of the Police Act 1996 to consider the lessons to be learned from investigations supervised by the Police Complaints Authority since January 1998 into incidents in which police shootings resulted in death or injury.

### Social Exclusion

**Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate has been made of the administrative cost to the *(a)* state, *(b)* unsuccessful applicants and *(c)* successful applicants of the competitive grant schemes, provided by his Department and its agencies, open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion. [22402]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* No such estimate has been made. The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Home Office does, however, publish application criteria and guidance notes for each grant programme in the hope that this will reduce the number of inappropriate applications received.

### Driving Convictions

**Pete Wishart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there were for driving without motor insurance in the past five years. [22803]

**Mr. Denham:** Available information on the number of convictions for the offence of 'using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks' is shown in the table.

*Findings of guilt at all courts for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks, England and Wales, 1995 to 1999*

| Year | Convictions |
|---|---|
| 1995 | 283,141 |
| 1996 | 267,932 |
| 1997 | 257,689 |
| 1998 | 256,974 |
| 1999 | 259,552 |

### Downview Prison

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 476W, on Downview Prison, what steps he will take to secure the immediate local transfer of male prisoners who are now in higher category prisons than Downview. [23214]

**Beverley Hughes:** As stated in the previous answer, in preparation for the change of role of Downview to a women's prison, 340 male prisoners were moved from the establishment between 17 July 2001 and 1 September 2001. No prisoners were moved out of the South East and none had their security category increased as part of this process.

As far as possible prisoners were relocated to other category C training prisons/units or where appropriate were recategorised and transferred to an appropriate category D prison from Downview.

One hundred and forty Downview prisoners were temporarily accommodated at Wormwood Scrubs in a separate wing, supervised by former Downview staff, in category C conditions. The majority of these prisoners were moved to category C training prisons or recategorised and transferred to appropriate category D prisons. A small number, for whom Wormwood Scrubs is a convenient location, have remained there in long term category C conditions.

### Cyber-terrorism

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the measures to counter cyber-terrorism; what time scale is planned to build on the assessment; how much extra funding will be allocated to countering cyber-terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [23227]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The threat from computer-related attacks by terrorists or their supporters is kept under continuous review, as are measures to counter it. Government co-ordination of the effort to protect the United Kingdom critical national infrastructure is centred in the National Infrastructure Security Co-ordination Centre (NISCC). The risk is assessed to be low, but growing. It could change rapidly at any time and our response will need to adjust to remain proportionate. I will keep closely under review the level of funding needed for this work.

### Sports Clubs (Charitable Status)

**Kate Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate has been made of the number

of sports clubs that will apply for charitable status following the decision to recognise healthy recreation as charitable. [22979]

**Angela Eagle:** This is a matter for the Charity Commission as the Government Department that registers charities in England and Wales. The Chief Charity Commissioner will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

### EU Treaty Bodies

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which organisations are referred to as representatives of other Treaty bodies under Article 1.12 of 12442/01, Council doc COPEN 56. 9 October 2001, Belgian Initiative on Joint Investigation Teams; and what *(a)* privileges and *(b)* immunities will be granted to these organisations. [22889]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** Council document 12442/01 COPEN 56, now document 14242/01 COPEN 71 (Council Framework Decision on joint investigation teams) of 28 November 2001, is a joint initiative of Belgium, France, Spain and the United Kingdom. Paragraph 12 of Article 1 of the Framework Decision provides that the two or more member states setting up a joint investigation team may enter into arrangements for persons other than the representatives of the competent authorities of these member states to take part in the activities of the team. These other persons may include, but are not limited to, officials of bodies set up pursuant to the Treaty on the European Union. Such bodies include Europol, OLAF which is the European Community's anti-fraud office and, when the relevant Council Decision comes into effect, Eurojust. The Government are still considering what privileges and immunities, if any, should be granted to persons who are not representatives of United Kingdom competent authorities.

### Prison Visitors

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if prison visitors to prisons run by private companies are subject to *(a)* fingerprints and *(b)* photographic records. [23208]

**Beverley Hughes:** Yes. Private prisons in England and Wales are required to meet appropriate security standards. Prisons which hold category A prisoners must have some form of visitor recognition system in place, and it is considered good practice in lower category prisons. However, it is for local management to decide exactly which form of visitor recognition system they employ or, for prisons that do not have category A prisoners, how they manage this issue without using such technology.

### Tagging

**Mr. Denis Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are on release under the tagging system; and what the equivalent figures have been in each year since the introduction of the system. [24458]

**Beverley Hughes:** As at midnight on 30 November 2001, a total of 1,786 prisoners were being monitored under the Home Detention Curfew scheme. The equivalent figures for 30 November 1999 and 30 November 2000 were 2,000 and 1,939 respectively. The scheme was introduced on 28 January 1999.

### Women Prisoners (Wales)

**Julie Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of women in the prison population are from Wales; and what the equivalent figures were for each of the last five years. [22185]

**Beverley Hughes:** Information is provided on the basis of a prisoner's court of committal as home address is not consistently recorded on central records.

The information requested is given in the table[1]:

| | *Total females* | *Females committed in Wales* | *Percentage of female population committed in Wales* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1998 | 3,120 | 119 | 3.8 |
| 1999 | 3,207 | 119 | 3.7 |
| 2000 | 3,355 | 126 | 3.8 |
| 2001 | 3,713 | 138 | 3.7 |

[1] The information in the table is provisional and shows data as of 30 June each year for prisons in England and Wales. Data for 1997 were not available.

For the latest date available (30 November 2001) there were 169 female prisoners in prisons in England and Wales who were committed in Wales. There were 4,022 female prisoners in total.

### Criminal Records Bureau

**Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total annual cost is of the contract with Capita Services for the operation of the Criminal Records Bureau. [21702]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Payments are linked to the volume of disclosures processed, which are expected to increase significantly over the first few years of the contract. The estimated value of the 10-year contract with Capita is £450 million.

**Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost of establishing the Criminal Records Bureau in financial years *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [21704]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The cost of establishing the Criminal Records Bureau for 2001–02 is estimated to be £14 million. In 2002–03, we estimate that it will cost £1 million to complete the setting up of the Bureau.

### Visas

**Mr. Gummer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of visitors on a one-year student visa travelled to other parts of the European Union during the course of visa validating in the last 12 months. [23668]

**Angela Eagle:** I regret that the information requested is not available.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 76W, on Pakistani nationals, how many Pakistani nationals holding UK visas have been refused entry to the UK since 11 September at Birmingham airport. [10719]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 76W, to her earlier question about refusals of Pakistani nationals and to my letter of 31 October 2001 responding to her subsequent representations.

Information on the number of Pakistani nationals refused leave to enter during 2001 are due to be published in the Command Paper "Control of Immigration Statistics United Kingdom 2001" by the end of 2002.

All nationals of Pakistan are required to obtain entry clearance. The majority of refusals in 2000 were the result of not having the correct entry clearance. Visas issued since 2 October 2000 confer leave to enter the United Kingdom upon the holder and a passenger with a visa as leave to enter will not normally require further examination. The immigration rules allow persons holding visas to be refused only in exceptional circumstances.

## Game Licences

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of prosecutions there were in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available for shooting game without a game licence. [22398]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* Shooting game without a game licence is an offence under Section 23 of the Game Act 1831. The number of defendants prosecuted for shooting game without a game licence cannot be separately identified, in information held centrally on the Home Office's Court Proceedings Database, from the number of defendants prosecuted for the offences of killing or taking of game without a licence by other means, laying poison to destroy game, taking or destroying eggs of game, killing game on Sunday or Christmas Day, killing game out of season and the occupier of land killing game without authority. Data showing the number of defendants prosecuted for all these offences during the years 1991–2000 are given in the table.

*Defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts for killing game without a licence[1] England and Wales, 1991–2000*

| | Total number proceeded against |
|---|---|
| 1991 | 50 |
| 1992 | 38 |
| 1993 | 73 |
| 1994 | 27 |
| 1995 | 19 |
| 1996 | 22 |
| 1997 | 21 |
| 1998 | 20 |
| 1999 | 25 |
| 2000[2] | 9 |

[1] Also includes the offences of laying poison to destroy game, taking or destroying eggs of game, etc., killing game on Sunday or Christmas Day, killing game out of season, and occupier of land killing game without authority.

[2] Staffordshire police force were able to submit only sample data for prosecutions at magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.

*Note:*
All data are given on a principal offence basis.

## Channel Tunnel

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has made to his French counterpart on security on rail freight using the channel tunnel. [23315]

**Angela Eagle:** My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised the current severe disruption to rail freight services through the channel tunnel with French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin on 29 November. He had previously written to M. Jospin on this subject on 16 November.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is in regular contact with his French counterpart Daniel Vaillant about the channel tunnel and other immigration matters. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport has both written and spoken to M. Gayssot, the French Transport Minister, emphasising the need for a speedy resolution.

Home Office officials and those from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions are also in close contact with their French counterparts on a range of issues, including the security improvements required to allow the early resumption of full rail freight services. On 3 December, the head of security for SNCF informed the UK Immigration Service of their intention to speed up the improvements to anti-intrusion measures at the Frethun freight yard.

## Prisoners

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to reduce the prison population. [23971]

**Beverley Hughes:** The Government believe that prison is right for dangerous, serious and some persistent offenders and that sentences should be as long as necessary for punishment and public protection, but no longer.

Home detention curfew plays an important role by enabling prisoners to be released from prison early, while still subject to restrictions placed on their liberty. This facilitates a smoother and more effective integration back into the community and helps offenders to secure or resume employment or training as soon as possible.

The Government believe that community punishments can make a major impact and support their increased use, particularly for some non-violent offenders such as those convicted of theft and handling, or fraud. The Government's reform of the probation service, with its focus on reducing re-offending, means that rigorously enforced community sentences are a real and tough alternative to imprisonment. Changes already introduced, for example the Drug Testing and Treatment Order and the ability of Courts to impose community punishment, rehabilitation orders and curfew orders as one sentence, should enable sentencers to consider a robust community sentence as an alternative to imprisonment.

In the longer term the proposed sentencing reforms, including sentencing guidelines and new flexible sentences incorporating both custody and supervision, should have a significant impact. In this context the Government are also exploring the scope for innovative new sentences, such as intermittent custody, and for restorative justice interventions.

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average distance was from the committal court at the time of release for *(a)* male prisoners, *(b)* female prisoners and *(c)* young offenders in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [23902]

**Beverley Hughes:** Data are not available on the distance prisoners are held away from committal court at the time of release. However, data are collected periodically on the distance prisoners are currently held away from committal court. The latest figures, obtained on 30 September 2001 are set out in the table.

*Miles*

| *Population group* | *Average distance prisoners are held away from committal court* |
|---|---|
| Male prisoners[1] | 53 |
| Female prisoners[1] | 63 |
| Young offenders[2] | 50 |

[1] Including young offenders.
[2] Male and female, including juveniles.

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bail information schemes are in operation in women's prisons; and how many staff work in each of them. [23901]

**Beverley Hughes:** Each of the seven female establishments that hold remand prisoners operate a bail information scheme. They are required to have sufficient trained staff to provide all eligible prisoners with the facilities necessary to assist in their applications for bail. These duties may be shared between a number of staff. The number of staff involved in providing bail information at one time will vary according to the size of the remand population.

### Police Officers (London)

**Clive Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of police officers for each London borough in each month since 1 July 1999 that *(a)* were in post, *(b)* left the service and *(c)* were recruited. [18651]

**Mr. Denham:** The information requested has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and a table has been placed in the Library.

## TREASURY

### Stability and Growth Pact

**Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to submit an updated annual Convergence Programme as required by the Stability and Growth Pact. [25920]

**Ruth Kelly:** As required under the Stability and Growth Pact, an updated, annual Convergence Programme was submitted to the European Commission on 20 December 2001. Copies of the programme were placed in the Libraries of both Houses and are also available in the Vote Office.

### European Investment Bank

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of the European Investment Bank's loans for projects in the United Kingdom in each year since 1992. [24809]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested, which has been obtained from EIB's annual reports, has been placed in the Library of the House.

### Corporation Tax

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the receipts for advance corporation tax for each of the last 54 months. [24824]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Monthly receipts of advanced corporation tax (ACT) for April 1999 to November 2001 are given on the Inland Revenue website at: www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/tax_receipts/g_t03_1.htm.

Figures for the months April 1997 to March 1999 are given in table 1.3 of Inland Revenue Statistics 1999.

### Minimum Wage Unit

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 9 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 323, in how many cases information has been passed by Inland Revenue staff to the National Minimum Wage Unit on non-compliant employers; and what the outcome of such investigations has been. [25185]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Nearly 5,000 working families tax credit applications have been the subject of an employer inquiry by NMW staff. Non-compliance has been identified in just over a third of such cases.

### VAT

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the levying of VAT on managers' salaries in retirement accommodation where the service provider is not the freeholder; and if he will make a statement. [24915]

**Mr. Boateng:** There have been a number of representations on this issue. However, there has been no change to the VAT treatment of such services. If future changes to employment regulations have the effect of altering the VAT treatment, parallel changes will be made to ensure there is no increased VAT charge on managers' services in retirement accommodation.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was obtained from VAT charges on courses of *(a)* education, *(b)* training, *(c)* sports activity and *(d)* leisure activity in each year since 1997; and how much it costs each year to administer the collection of these charges. [24797]

**Mr. Boateng:** The information requested is not available. However, education (including physical education) and vocational training in schools, universities, higher education colleges and further education colleges is free of VAT.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the risk analysis system used by Customs and Excise for VAT control visiting is restricted to determining the *(a)* relative risk of different traders and *(b)* overall risk to the revenue. [24545]

**Mr. Boateng:** Central risk analysis enables Customs to rank traders in order of relative risk, predict outcomes, and target resources to achieve greater compliance.

Risk analysis is under continual development and Customs' definition of risk includes those likely to need support and education as well as the wilfully non-compliant.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy that a trader should receive a visit from Customs and Excise within the first three years of registering for VAT. [24811]

**Mr. Boateng:** It is not Customs policy that a business should receive a visit within the first three years of registering for VAT for that reason alone.

Currently all newly registered businesses are offered a programme of learning for VAT, including videos, seminars, meetings and visits. Customs are enhancing support and plan to make telephone contact with all newly registered businesses, around 190,000 a year, to offer support for them to meet their legal obligations.

In addition businesses may contact the National Advice Service, launched in April 2001, to resolve queries.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* voluntary organisations and *(c)* universities are paying VAT on courses of further education for adults; and if he will list the courses liable. [24796]

**Mr. Boateng:** VAT is not paid on further education courses provided by local authorities, voluntary organisations that use surplus income for educational purposes, and universities.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans Customs and Excise have to issue a VAT payer's charter setting out standards of service to VAT payers. [24793]

**Mr. Boateng:** Customs and Excise have no plans to issue an additional VAT payers charter. Their standards of service to VAT payers—and all other business customers—are already set out in the "Customs and Excise Charter", Notice 400 (most recent edition July 2001).

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each of the last 10 years *(a)* total VAT registrations and *(b)* total new registrations. [24547]

**Mr. Boateng:** Information on the number of total VAT registrations and total new VAT registrations is available in the Departmental Annual Reports published by Customs and Excise.

## Capital Gains Tax

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on what he bases his assessment that the changes to capital gains tax announced in the pre-Budget report will not create new loopholes for the treatment of income as capital gain; [25200]

(2) what measures he has taken to ensure that changes to capital gains tax, announced in the pre-Budget report, will not permit treatment of income as capital gain. [25219]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The proposed modifications to the taper relief rules for business assets are not expected to give rise to the creation of schemes for converting income to capital gain to any significant extent because the effective capital gains tax rate of 10 per cent. will not be reached until the asset in question has been held for two years, and because there are rules already in place which are designed to ensure that income is charged to income tax.

We shall, however, be keeping the position under close review and will not hesitate to take action to protect the income tax yield if such schemes are introduced.

## Carter Review

**Mr. Edward Davey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of paragraphs 5.1 and 5.4 of the Carter Review of Payroll Services; what plans he has to align the treatment of benefits in kind for the purposes of national insurance and income tax; and if he will make a statement. [24936]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Chancellor said in the pre-Budget report that the proposals in the Carter Review were a challenging but attractive package of measures. We have invited comments on the detail of the review's recommendations by 31 January 2002 so it would be inappropriate to comment on specific aspects of the report at this stage.

## Tax Reform

**Mr. Edward Davey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the Tax Law Reform Committee paper, "Employed or Self Employed", and if he will make a statement. [24937]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** We read the paper with interest when it was published in February 2001. Along with all other such publications, its contents are taken into consideration during relevant policy deliberations in the usual way.

## Amateur Sports Clubs

**Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 689W, on amateur sports clubs, what plans he has to provide funds to enable the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, to provide mandatory relief for community amateur sports clubs at the same level enjoyed by charities. [25128]

**Mr. Boateng:** On 30 November, the Charity Commission announced that it would recognise as charitable "the promotion of community participation in healthy recreation". Community amateur sports clubs that qualify for charitable status will be able to enjoy the tax relief that such status confers. This includes 80 per cent.

mandatory rate relief in England and Wales (fully centrally funded), with a further 20 per cent. available at the discretion of the local authority (75 per cent. centrally funded, with the local authority funding the remaining 25 per cent.). Any reduction in the total amount of business rates collected is automatically offset by an increase in total revenue support grant paid to local authorities.

**Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many community amateur sports clubs have *(a)* a turnover of less than £15,000 and *(b)* a rental income less than £10,000. [25020]

**Mr. Boateng:** The number of community amateur sports clubs across the UK with a turnover of less than £15,000 and a rental income of less than £10,000 will vary from year to year. It is the Government's intention to recognise the positive contribution that such clubs make to their local communities. On 30 November, a consultation documentation—"Promoting Sport in the Community"—was launched, seeking views from interested parties on the best way to support community amateur sports clubs.

**Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 689W, on amateur sports clubs, whether he will include relief from the climate change levy in his proposals for tax relief for community amateur sports clubs. [25129]

**Mr. Boateng:** A consultation document—"Promoting Sport in the Community"—was launched on 30 November, seeking views on the best way to support community amateur sports clubs. The document is held in the House Library. A number of options are available. Comments are invited and responses to the consultation will help to shape the support we shall offer.

On 30 November, the Charity Commission announced that it would recognise as charitable the promotion of community participation in healthy recreation by the provision of facilities for the playing of particular sports. The climate change levy does not apply to energy used by charities for charitable purposes.

**Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Performance and Innovation Unit regarding support for community amateur sports clubs. [25000]

**Mr. Boateng:** The Treasury is in regular dialogue with the Performance and Innovation Unit, which is currently undertaking a wider review of the legal and regulatory framework for charities. The Treasury launched a consultation document—"Promoting Sport in the Community"—on 30 November, seeking views from interested parties before finalising decisions on the best way to support CASCs. The consultation document is separate from the work of the Performance and Innovation Unit, but will have regard to the conclusions of that separate review and in the course of deciding the best way forward, responses to the consultation will be shared with the Performance and Innovation Unit.

## Smuggling

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many lorries were confiscated by customs officers for smuggling *(a)* cigarettes, *(b)* tobacco and *(c)* alcohol in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [24928]

**Mr. Boateng:** Customs do not maintain aggregate vehicle seizure records by type or nature of offence. Details on the total number of vehicles seized by Customs in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are published in Customs annual reports for those years. Similar details for 2000–01 were published in the document "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud" as part of the pre-Budget report.

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many drivers employed by hauliers were *(a)* arrested and *(b)* prosecuted for smuggling (i) cigarettes, (ii) tobacco and (iii) alcohol in (A) 1999, (B) 2000 and (C) 2001. [24929]

**Mr. Boateng:** The information requested is not available.

## Vehicle Seizures

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was paid by hauliers to HM Customs and Excise for the release of their lorries in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, and *(c)* 2001. [24890]

**Mr. Boateng:** Customs records of money received for vehicle restoration do not distinguish between types of vehicles or those paying restoration charges. The Customs and Excise annual reports for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 give details of the total restoration sums paid in those years in respect of all seized vehicles.

## Winter Deaths

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many excess winter deaths there were in each of the last 15 years. [25125]

**Ruth Kelly:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 376W.

## Labour Statistics

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged (i) 50 to 54, (ii) 55 to 59, (iii) 60 to 64 and (iv) 65 to 69 years were *(a)* in full-time work, *(b)* in part-time work, *(c)* unemployed, *(d)* long-term sick and disabled and *(e)* retired in each of the last 10 years. [25175]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 8 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about how many men and women aged 50 to 54, 55 to 59, and 60 to 64 years were in full-time work, in part-time work, unemployed, long term sick and disabled and retired in each of the last ten years (25175). I am replying in his absence.

The information requested is given in the table overleaf.

*Men and women by age by economic activity, spring (March to May) 1992–2001—United Kingdom*

*Not seasonally adjusted* — *Thousand*

| *Spring* | *Total*[1] | *Full time work* | *Part time work* | *Unemployed* | *Economically inactive* | *of which: Long term sick and disabled* | *Retired* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Men* | | | | | | | |
| *Age 50–54* | | | | | | | |
| 1992 | 1,522 | 1,178 | 44 | 134 | 166 | .. | .. |
| 1993 | 1,546 | 1,169 | 51 | 142 | 184 | 136 | * |
| 1994 | 1,588 | 1,184 | 56 | 142 | 206 | 143 | * |
| 1995 | 1,634 | 1,246 | 62 | 115 | 210 | 151 | * |
| 1996 | 1,684 | 1,278 | 66 | 105 | 228 | 162 | 18 |
| 1997 | 1,824 | 1,385 | 84 | 92 | 262 | 184 | 18 |
| 1998 | 1,919 | 1,487 | 84 | 79 | 270 | 183 | 20 |
| 1999 | 1,966 | 1,519 | 91 | 83 | 273 | 187 | 24 |
| 2000 | 1,995 | 1,529 | 102 | 89 | 275 | 181 | 28 |
| 2001 | 2,013 | 1,585 | 87 | 62 | 278 | 189 | 22 |
| *Age 55–59* | | | | | | | |
| 1992 | 1,435 | 934 | 61 | 126 | 314 | .. | .. |
| 1993 | 1,448 | 892 | 69 | 135 | 352 | 222 | 55 |
| 1994 | 1,466 | 904 | 82 | 130 | 351 | 223 | 54 |
| 1995 | 1,477 | 896 | 80 | 112 | 388 | 247 | 62 |
| 1996 | 1,464 | 902 | 90 | 109 | 362 | 229 | 64 |
| 1997 | 1,473 | 912 | 98 | 88 | 375 | 232 | 71 |
| 1998 | 1,497 | 939 | 102 | 75 | 382 | 251 | 65 |
| 1999 | 1,539 | 975 | 109 | 74 | 381 | 239 | 75 |
| 2000 | 1,583 | 1,005 | 116 | 63 | 399 | 248 | 79 |
| 2001 | 1,645 | 1,055 | 138 | 48 | 402 | 230 | 101 |
| *Age 60–64* | | | | | | | |
| 1992 | 1,371 | 561 | 88 | 74 | 648 | .. | .. |
| 1993 | 1,363 | 519 | 91 | 101 | 651 | 281 | 237 |
| 1994 | 1,353 | 520 | 89 | 80 | 664 | 331 | 220 |
| 1995 | 1,346 | 508 | 99 | 67 | 672 | 334 | 231 |
| 1996 | 1,334 | 498 | 108 | 59 | 679 | 322 | 235 |
| 1997 | 1,347 | 520 | 121 | 53 | 653 | 318 | 233 |
| 1998 | 1,362 | 511 | 116 | 47 | 688 | 334 | 252 |
| 1999 | 1,382 | 522 | 130 | 45 | 685 | 342 | 246 |
| 2000 | 1,394 | 530 | 129 | 41 | 693 | 322 | 264 |
| 2001 | 1,389 | 538 | 134 | 37 | 678 | 324 | 266 |
| *Women* | | | | | | | |
| *Age 50–54* | | | | | | | |
| 1992 | 1,535 | 489 | 519 | 57 | 471 | .. | .. |
| 1993 | 1,561 | 525 | 508 | 60 | 467 | 145 | 23 |
| 1994 | 1,602 | 535 | 542 | 59 | 467 | 146 | 22 |
| 1995 | 1,649 | 577 | 532 | 55 | 486 | 173 | 20 |
| 1996 | 1,708 | 572 | 578 | 55 | 501 | 173 | 30 |
| 1997 | 1,840 | 658 | 613 | 53 | 515 | 194 | 26 |
| 1998 | 1,937 | 697 | 651 | 46 | 542 | 217 | 26 |
| 1999 | 1,985 | 759 | 629 | 44 | 553 | 217 | 34 |
| 2000 | 2,013 | 777 | 641 | 46 | 549 | 221 | 33 |
| *Age 55–59* | | | | | | | |
| 1992 | 1,485 | 338 | 428 | 36 | 665 | .. | .. |
| 1993 | 1,477 | 326 | 431 | 48 | 672 | 209 | 105 |
| 1994 | 1,497 | 345 | 431 | 54 | 658 | 213 | 118 |
| 1995 | 1,610 | 356 | 445 | 40 | 659 | 227 | 118 |
| 1996 | 1,498 | 352 | 428 | 35 | 887 | 244 | 115 |
| 1997 | 1,508 | 350 | 410 | 38 | 708 | 265 | 119 |
| 1998 | 1,631 | 382 | 425 | 29 | 695 | 282 | 129 |
| 1998 | 1,873 | 408 | 439 | 31 | 694 | 266 | 130 |
| 2000 | 1,819 | 440 | 485 | 29 | 688 | 282 | 128 |
| 2001 | 1,881 | 488 | 491 | 20 | 703 | 265 | 148 |

*Men and women by age by economic activity, spring (March to May) 1992–2001—United Kingdom*

*Not seasonally adjusted* *Thousand*

| Spring | Total[1] | Full time work | Part time work | Unemployed | Economically inactive | of which: Long term sick and disabled | of which: Retired |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Age 60–64* | | | | | | | |
| 1992 | 1,475 | 112 | 226 | .. | 1,130 | .. | .. |
| 1993 | 1,450 | 113 | 233 | 15 | 1,099 | 131 | 551 |
| 1994 | 1,439 | 102 | 253 | 10 | 1,073 | 180 | 663 |
| 1995 | 1,421 | 103 | 247 | .. | 1,088 | 165 | 880 |
| 1996 | 1,400 | 111 | 248 | .. | 1,065 | 158 | 687 |
| 1997 | 1,410 | 117 | 254 | .. | 1,032 | 162 | 687 |
| 1998 | 1,424 | 98 | 234 | .. | 1,085 | 188 | 734 |
| 1999 | 1,444 | 113 | 229 | .. | 1,084 | 174 | 736 |
| 2000 | 1,457 | 111 | 259 | .. | 1,080 | 140 | 764 |
| 2001 | 1,452 | 110 | 283 | .. | 1,053 | 134 | 773 |

[1] Includes other economic activities.
[2] Sample size too small for reliable estimate.
.. Due to a questionnaire routing error Spring 1992 inactive categories are not available.
*Source:*
ONS—Labour Force Survey

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of employee jobs by industry in the Buckingham constituency in the most recent year for which figures are available. [24842]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated 8 December 2001:*

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of employee jobs by industry in the Buckingham constituency. (24842)

The total number of employee jobs in the Buckingham constituency for each year are shown in the table below:

*Buckingham constituency employee jobs*

| Year | Number of jobs |
|---|---|
| 1996 | 20,099 |
| 1997 | 20,328 |
| 1998 | 23,764 |
| 1999 | 21,610 |
| 2000 | 21,427 |

*Source:*
A comparable series is available from the Annual Employment Survey (1996–1997) and the Annual Business Inquiry (1998–2000)

Industry detail is accessible in the House of Commons Library from terminals linked to the Nomis database.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of working age people in the Buckingham constituency were in employment in each year since 1997. [24845]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have been asked to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow dated 8 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the proportion of working age people in employment in the Buckingham constituency. I am replying in his absence. (24845)

The table below shows the information requested.

*Working age[1] employment rate[2] for the Buckingham constituency; 1997 to 2000*

| | Percentage |
|---|---|
| March 1997-February 1998 | 84.3 |
| March 1998-February 1999 | 81.4 |
| March 1999-February 2000 | 84.3 |
| March 2000-February 2001 | 83.7 |

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59
[2] Those in employment as a percentage of all persons of working age
*Source:*
ONS Labour Force Survey (Annual LADB dataset)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average length of time that currently unemployed men aged *(a)* 50 to 54, *(b)* 55 to 59 and *(c)* 60 to 64 years have remained unemployed. [25170]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 8 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the average length of time that currently unemployed men aged 50 to 54, 55 to 59 and 60 to 64 years have remained unemployed. I am replying in his absence. (25170).

The table below shows numbers of men in these age groups according to their duration of unemployment. Information on the average length of time unemployed is not available.

*Duration of unemployment for males by age—spring (March to May) 2001 United Kingdom*

*Not seasonally adjusted* *Thousand*

| | Age 50–54 | Age 55–59 | Age 60–64 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total[1] | 62 | 48 | 37 |
| Less than three months | 17 | 10 | 12 |
| Three months but less than six months | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— |
| Six months but less than 12 months | 11 | [2]— | [2]— |
| One year or more | 25 | 26 | 15 |

[1] Includes people who did not state how long they had been unemployed
[2] Sample size too small for reliable estimate
*Source:*
ONS—Labour Force Survey

## Lone Mothers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of single lone mothers are in *(a)* part-time work, *(b)* full-time work and *(c)* all paid work. [25169]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 8 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the proportion of single mothers that are in part-time work, full-time work and all paid work. I am replying in his absence. (25169).

The information requested is given in the table below.

*Lone mothers by whether working full or part-time as percentage of all—Spring 2001*

| *Not seasonally adjusted* | *United Kingdom* |
|---|---|
| | *Number* |
| All lone mothers[1] (million) | 1.471 |
| (Per cent.) | 100 |
| *Of which:* | |
| All in employment (Per cent.) | 49.9 |
| full-time (Per cent.) | 22.7 |
| part-time (Per cent.) | 27.2 |

[1] Includes those lone mothers whose economic status is not known, but percentages are based on totals which exclude this group.

*Source:*

Labour Force Survey Household datasets

## Cot Deaths

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cot deaths there were in each of the last five years. [24646]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 8 December 2001:*

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking how many cot deaths there were in each of the last five years. (24646)

The figures requested are given in the table below.

*Number of cot deaths that occurred in England and Wales during 1996–2000*

| *Calendar year* | *Number of deaths* |
|---|---|
| 1996 | 424 |
| 1997 | 393 |
| 1998 | 286 |
| 1999 | 279 |
| 2000[1] | 243 |

[1] Provisional

*Source:*

Health Statistics Quarterly 11, Report: Sudden infant deaths

## Cancer

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many men were diagnosed with testicular cancer in each year since 1997. [24642]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 8 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many men were diagnosed with testicular cancer in (a) 2001, (b) 2000, (c) 1999, (d) 1998 and (e) 1997. I am replying in his absence. (24642)

There were 1,411 registrations of newly diagnosed cases of testicular cancer in England in 1997 and 1,541 in 1998. (Source: 1997: Office for National Statistics. 'Cancer statistics—registrations, England, 1995–1997'. 1998: 'Cancer: number of new cases, 1998, by sex and age' at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D4505.xls). Comparable information is not yet available for 1999, 2000, and 2001.

## Cancer

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many women were *(a)* diagnosed with and *(b)* died due to breast cancer in each year since 1997. [24648]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 8 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many women were (a) diagnosed with and (b) died owing to breast cancer in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001. I am replying in his absence. (24648).

The available information on the numbers of new cases, and deaths from, breast cancer in females (all ages) in England from 1997 onwards is given in the table below.

| | *Cases* | *Deaths* |
|---|---|---|
| 1997 | 31,380 | 11,240 |
| 1998 | 32,908 | 11,005 |
| 1999 | [1]— | 10,856 |
| 2000 | [1]— | 10,609 |

[1] Not yet available.

*Source:*

Cases—1997: Office for National Statistics. 'Cancer statistics—registrations, England', 1995–97. Series MBI no.28. London: The Stationery Office, 2001.

1998: 'Cancer: number of new cases, 1998; by sex and age' at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D4505.xls.

Deaths—Mortality statistics: Cause, Series DH2 Nos. 24, 25, 26 and 27. Figures are for deaths where the underlying cause was coded to 174 using the International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the five year survival rates for *(a)* breast, *(b)* lung, *(c)* cervical, *(d)* colon, *(e)* stomach, *(f)* prostate and *(g)* bladder cancer are (i) nationally, (ii) in the Buckinghamshire health authority area and (iii) in the South East regional office area. [24852]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 8 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning what the five year survival rates for (a) breast, (b) lung, (c) cervical, (d) colon, (e) stomach, (f) prostate and

(g) bladder cancer are (i) nationally, (ii) in the Buckinghamshire Health Authority area and (iii) in the South East Regional Office area. I am replying in his absence. (24852)

At the national level, figures are routinely presented for men and women separately, while those at regional and local levels are given for persons only. The latest available information is given in this format in the table below.

*Five-year relative survival (%), persons diagnosed in 1992–94 and followed up to 31 December 1999: selected cancers, England, South East Regional Office area and Buckinghamshire Health Authority area*

*Percentage*

| *Cancer site* | *England* | | *South-East* | *Buckinghamshire* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Men* | *Women* | *Persons* | *Persons* |
| Breast* | — | 75.0 | 76.4 | 78 |
| Lung | 5.1 | 5.3 | 5.2 | 4.8 |
| Cervix | : | 65.2 | 65.4 | 64 |
| Colon | 42.6 | 42.1 | 45.7 | 44 |
| Stomach | 10.0 | 10.8 | 11.7 | 8.3 |
| Prostate | 54.9 | : | 57.9 | 57 |
| Bladder | 66.2 | 57.9 | 67.7 | 72 |

*Figures for breast exclude the very small numbers of cases in men.
Source: 'Cancer Survival: five year relative survival rates in England by Health Authority up to 1999' at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D4878.xls.

Corresponding survival rates for cervical, stomach, bladder and oesophageal cancer are unpublished, but will be placed on the website in January 2002.

## Charities (Donations)

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to encourage public donations to charitable organisations. [25015]

**Ruth Kelly:** In April 2000 the Government introduced a number of measures to encourage greater charitable giving. The Getting Britain Giving package of measures included improvements to the gift aid and payroll giving schemes and a new income tax relief for giving shares to charities. The Government are supporting The Giving Campaign, led by the charitable sector, to promote the new reliefs and encourage a culture of giving.

The Chancellor has also asked the Inland Revenue to consult charities on an innovation which would allow gift aid donations to be made, and relief claimed, when people complete their annual tax returns.

## Andorra

**Mr. Hood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to *(a)* monitor the incidence of and *(b)* take action against smuggling from Andorra to the United Kingdom. [R] [23706]

**Mr. Boateng:** HM Customs and Excise include the risk of smuggling from Andorra in the overall intelligence-based assessments which inform the deployment of the Department's resources.

## Tax Credits

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the Portsmouth, South constituency *(a)* received and *(b)* were entitled to (i) WFTC, (ii) DPTC and (iii) child tax credit in (A) 2000–01 and (B) 2001–02. [24154]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The numbers in Portsmouth, South receiving the working families tax credit (WFTC) and the disabled person's tax credit (DPTC) at May 2001 and August 2001 are shown in "Working Families and Disabled Person's Tax Credit Statistics. Geographical analyses". The equivalent numbers for April 2000 to April 2001 (DPTC) and for May 2000 to February 2001 (WFTC) are shown in the respective Quarterly Enquiries, although these numbers for WFTC are estimates based on a 5 per cent. sample of awards and are therefore subject to sampling error. Copies of the Geographical analyses and the Quarterly Enquiries are in the Library.

No estimates are available of the numbers in Portsmouth, South eligible for these tax credits.

It is estimated that around 5 million families will benefit from the children's tax credit for 2001–02. It is not known how many of these are in Portsmouth, South, although it is estimated that 675,000 are in the south-east (excluding London).

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what means the child care element of the working tax credit will be paid to the main carer. [24237]

**Dawn Primarolo:** In the light of representations received in response to consultation, the Government have decided that the child care element of the working tax credit will be paid direct to the main carer, alongside payments of the child tax credit.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many WFTC recipients have *(a)* no income tax liability and *(b)* an income tax liability that is (i) lower and (ii) higher than the value of their WFTC entitlement. [24248]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** A family's income tax liability is defined only for a complete fiscal year, and is based on the incomes and other circumstances of the adult(s) in that year. Working families tax credit (WFTC) awards can start throughout the year, are for 26 weeks, and the value of an award depends on the net weekly income of the family and other circumstances of the family measured at the time of the application. This means that the income tax liability of a WFTC recipient family cannot normally be determined from the data reported on the application form.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1296W, how much each of the campaigns publicising the working families tax credit cost. [24216]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The total marketing communications spend for WFTC for 2000–01 was £7,403,191.

The total amount spent for 2001–02 to date is £1,480,806.

## Film Industry

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many British films produced in 1999–2000 claimed the 100 per cent. tax write off during the first year; and what the total loss was in tax revenue resulting from these claims. [24083]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** In 1999–2000 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport certified 76 "British qualifying" films costing less than £15 million under the Films Act

1985. The estimated tax cost of relief provided to British qualifying films under section 48 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1997 is £85 million for films produced in 1999–2000, over double the amount that would have been available under the previous arrangement.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met Mr. Jack Velenti of the Motion Picture Association of America; and what representations he has received from Mr. Velenti about extending the section 48 tax concession permitting qualifying British films with budgets under £15 million to claim 100 per cent. write-off in the first year. [24084]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Chancellor receives numerous Budget representations, from a variety of sources. All taxes are kept under review and decisions are made as part of the normal Budget process. The expiry date for the tax relief provided by section 48 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1997 was extended by three years to 1 July 2005 by Section 72 of the Finance Act 2001.

### Scottish Provident Institution

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the Scottish Provident Institution and the performance of the FSA in dealing with matters raised by Scottish Provident Action for Membership; and if he will make a statement. [24558]

**Ruth Kelly:** We regularly receive representations about a wide spectrum of issues.

### Pensions

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the marginal rates of tax and benefit withdrawal for pensioners are *(a)* in 2001–02 and *(b)* from October 2003. [24235]

**Ruth Kelly:** Pensioners currently face a variety of marginal deduction rates (MDRs), which range from 10 per cent. for those who are liable to pay tax at the lower rate only to 100 per cent. for those with incomes below the minimum income guarantee (MIG). Following the introduction of the pension credit (PC) in October 2003, pensioners will still face MDRs between 10 and 100 per cent. However, some 1.6 million pensioner households that currently face MDRs of 100 per cent., which will be eligible for the PC, will see their rate cut to 40 per cent. This is because pensioner households will receive 60 pence for every £1 of income they have above the level of the basic state pension (BSP) up to a maximum of £13.80 per week to reward them for saving for their retirement.

### Child Poverty

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Regents Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 868W, if the figure for the number of children lifted out of poverty since 1997 is net; and according to the same definition of poverty, how many children have entered poverty since 1997. [24243]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** As a result of personal tax and benefit measures announced in the last Parliament, there are 1.2 million fewer children in poverty than there would otherwise have been.

### Capital Assets

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 765W, on capital assets, which definition of investment he used in answering on *(a)* on the level of investment provided through PFI and *(b)* the level of total investment; and if he will make a statement. [24127]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Capital spending provided through PFI can be classified in national accounts as either investment by the public sector or by the private sector. The term private sector investment through PFI refers to PFI capital spending that is classified to the private sector.

Total investment in public services includes all capital expenditure financed through PFI, regardless of how that spending is classified in national accounts. It is measured gross of asset sales and before deducting depreciation.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 889W, on capital assets, if he will place in the Library information on the accounting treatment of the public private partnership projects relating to *(a)* office automation in Customs and Excise, *(b)* NIRS2, *(c)* Manchester Inland Revenue offices, *(d)* Stockport Inland Revenue, *(e)* Bootle St. John's House, *(f)* Newcastle Estate Development Scheme, *(g)* CCTA MTS Telecoms Service and *(h)* Treasury GOGGS Building; and if he will make a statement. [24256]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information is as follows:

| *Project* | *Accounting treatment* |
|---|---|
| Office automation in Customs and Excise | The initial contract and subsequent additions were reviewed to decide the appropriate accounting treatment for the PFI contract. The Department used FRS 5, "Reporting the substance of contracts", and the methodology prescribed in the Treasury Taskforce, Private Finance, Technical Note No.1 (revised), "How to account for PFI transactions" to determine the appropriate accounting treatment. The work carried out showed that the risks of ownership were borne by the provider and that the Department should not capitalise the assets. |
| NIRS2 | The arrangements for this project pre-dated the issue of the Treasury guidance. The accounting treatment for the Inland Revenue projects mentioned is reported in note 22 of the Department's 2000–01 resource accounts. The projects are operating leases and consequently are not included in the Department's balance sheet as fixed assets. |
| Manchester Inland Revenue Offices | Inland Revenue follows Treasury guidance and adopts the processes therein. The accounting treatment for the Inland Revenue projects mentioned is reported in note 22 of the Department's 2000–01 resource accounts. The projects are operating leases and consequently are not included in the Department's balance sheet as fixed assets. |

| *Project* | *Accounting treatment* |
|---|---|
| Stockport Inland Revenue | Inland Revenue follows Treasury guidance and adopts the processes therein. The accounting treatment for the Inland Revenue projects mentioned is reported in note 22 of the Department's 2000–01 resource accounts. The projects are operating leases and consequently are not included in the Department's balance sheet as fixed assets. |
| Bootle St. Johns House | Inland Revenue follows Treasury guidance and adopts the processes therein. The accounting treatment for the Inland Revenue projects mentioned is reported in note 22 of the Department's 2000–01 resource accounts. The projects are operating leases and consequently are not included in the Department's balance sheet as fixed assets. |
| Newcastle Estate Development Scheme | Inland Revenue follows Treasury guidance and adopts the processes therein. The accounting treatment for the Inland Revenue projects mentioned is reported in note 22 of the Department's 2000–01 resource accounts. The projects are operating leases and consequently are not included in the Department's balance sheet as fixed assets. |
| MTS Telecomms Service | OGCbuying.solutions, CCTA's successor body managing the telecoms contract service on behalf of Departments, follows Treasury guidance and adopts the processes therein. The outcomes of applying the guidance are as follows:<br>On 1 January 1997, some telecommunications assets were transferred to Racal Telecom as part of an agreement under which Racal undertook to provide telecommunication services under agreed terms for a period of 10 years.<br>Racal Telecomm (now Global Crossing) agreed as payment for those assets to abate the agreed level of payments for services under the contract, by an amount of £400,000 per annum for 10 years. The value of the payments over the 10 year period were sufficient to cover the book value of the assets at the time of transfer plus interest for the deferred payment schedule.<br>The original £4 million was treated as a deferred debtor in the accounts of CCTA, following advice from NAO. The abatements (£400k per annum) reduce the deferred debtor on an on-going basis. This treatment has carried forward from April 2001 to OGCbuying.solutions accounts. |
| HM Treasury GOGGS Building | The Treasury's PFI agreement for refurbishment of its new building will take effect during 2002–03. The accounting treatment has yet to be decided. The agreement will be recorded in the Treasury's 2000–01 accounts as a post-balance sheet event. |

### Aggregates Levy

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will delay introduction of the aggregates levy in Scotland. [25025]

**Mr. Boateng:** The Government will not delay the introduction of the aggregates levy in Scotland, as this would only serve to delay the environmental benefits the levy will deliver.

### Enterprise Management Incentives

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the forecast cost in the next financial year of administering enterprise management incentives. [20466]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** A Regulatory Impact Assessment was published in November 1999. It is available in the House of Commons Library.

The cost to the Inland Revenue of administering EMI is about £450,000 annually.

### European Monetary Institute

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations the Government have undertaken with the European Monetary Institute as provided for by the Treaty on European Union. [24814]

**Ruth Kelly:** The European Monetary Institute was replaced by the European central bank at the start of stage three of EMU. The Chancellor meets regularly with central bank Governors and ministerial colleagues from other countries, including representatives from the euro area.

### Single Currency

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses resident in the Buckingham constituency have contacted the Treasury requesting information on the single currency. [24867]

**Ruth Kelly:** Information is not readily available on the basis requested.

However, the Treasury euro information line has received over 450 requests from businesses in Buckinghamshire for information and advice on working with the euro now. In addition, there have been over 250,000 visits to the Treasury euro website since it was relaunched by the Chancellor on 29 March 2001. At a local level, the South East Euro Awareness Forum (SEEAF) also provides information and advice and has been involved in over 35 seminars for businesses in the south east of England.

### ISAs

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals in the Buckingham constituency have invested in *(a)* cash ISAs, *(b)* mini-ISAs and *(c)* maxi-ISAs in each year since their introduction. [24847]

**Ruth Kelly:** Estimates at a sub-national level of subscriptions to ISAs are not currently available.

### Customs and Excise

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the targets applied by Customs and Excise in the last five financial years for the length of time after registration for all traders to be visited. [24546]

**Mr. Boateng:** Customs does not set targets on the length of time after registration for businesses to be visited. Visits are conducted on the basis of a detailed risk analysis applied to all registered businesses.

Currently all newly registered businesses are offered a programme of learning for VAT, including videos, seminars, meetings and visits. Customs are enhancing support and plan to make telephone contact with all newly registered businesses, around 190,000 a year, to offer support for them to meet their legal obligations.

In addition businesses may contact the National Advice Service, launched in April 2001, to resolve queries.

### Contraband

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what quantities and value of contraband of *(a)* tobacco, *(b)* drugs, *(c)* alcohol and *(d)* other goods was seized by Customs and Excise in each of the last four years; what quantity and value of contraband alcohol was disposed of, and at what cost; and what are equivalent figures for the latest previous years for which statistics are available; [24805]

(2) if he will list for each of the last 10 years the quantities and estimated value of contraband seized, categorised by type, and indicate the means by which it has been destroyed. [24804]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Details of goods seized—including, where appropriate—their value, can be found in Customs Annual Reports, available from the House of Commons Library. Full seizure figures for 2000–01 will be published in the Annual Report for that year in due course. Details of tobacco seizures for 2000–01 were published in Customs' "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud" paper on 27 November, also available from the House Library.

The disposal of alcohol and tobacco is covered by a single contract which also includes storage and transportation, and it is not possible to distinguish between the costs that relate to each commodity.

Seized goods are in general disposed of as follows:

| *Goods* | *Disposal* |
|---|---|
| Drugs | Burned at secure Government establishments |
| Firearms | Handed over the police firearms squads |
| Alcohol products | Recycled into agricultural feed or low grade spirit fuel, or poured away |
| Tobacco products | Shredded and compressed into pellets for furnace fuel |
| Live animals | Handed over to RSPCA quarantine facilities |
| Endangered species | Handed over to zoos or returned to their country of origin |

### Taxpayers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage of total income received by *(a)* the top one per cent, *(b)* the top five per cent, *(c)* the top 10 per cent, *(d)* the bottom 70 per cent and *(e)* the bottom 10 per cent of tax payers in 2000–01. [24818]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The information is in the table:

| *Group of taxpayers* | *Percentage of total taxable income received*[1] |
|---|---|
| (a) The top 1 per cent. | 12 |
| (b) The top 5 per cent. | 24 |
| (c) The top 10 per cent. | 34 |
| (d) The bottom seventy per cent. | 41 |
| (e) The bottom ten per cent. | 3 |

[1] Non taxable income such as that from ISAs is not included as this information is not available on an individual basis.

These estimates are based on the 1999–2000 Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

### Share Incentive Plan

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was spent by the Government on research into the name of the Share Incentive Plan. [14434]

**Ruth Kelly:** In 1999 we commissioned a programme of research to develop a name for the All Employee Share Ownership Plan which companies and their employees would find meaningful and easy to use. This was in line with the general practice in communicating new incentives, and was in response to the views of the business community that they found the name "All Employee Share Ownership Plan" confusing and difficult to communicate.

The research involved employers and employees from a wide range of businesses. Employees expressed an overwhelming preference for Share Incentive Plan. The total cost of the research was £110,000.

### Tax Self-assessment

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimate of the overall impact on business of the introduction of tax self-assessment, disaggregated into *(a)* estimated extra costs and *(b)* estimated savings. [24820]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** These figures are not available. There is no reliable measure of the costs to business prior to self-assessment. Consequently, there is no pre-self-assessment baseline of costs against which any additional costs or savings as a result of self-assessment could sensibly be measured.

### Alcohol Duty

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the operation of the procedures for assessing and collecting duty from cross-channel travellers who return with purchases of alcohol; and what advice is given to businesses on the procedures to be followed. [24810]

**Mr. Boateng:** Cross-channel travellers who purchase duty-paid alcohol in another member state may bring that alcohol back to the UK without payment of UK duty if it is for their own personal use.

For businesses or individuals wishing to import alcohol for commercial purposes, there are three ways in which they may do so, and Customs and Excise public notices give advice on the procedures to be followed.

Notice 197 (importation under duty-suspension to a UK warehouse)

Notice 203 (importation by a registered excise trader)

Notice 204 (importation by a non-registered excise trader).

### Ministerial Offices

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were, *(a)* the running costs of his Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* the running costs of his Department in each of the last four years in real terms. [24826]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested is as follows:

*£ million*

| | *(a) Ministers' private office* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Running costs at 2000–01 prices* | *Total* | *of which staff* | *(b) HM Treasury* |
| 1997–98 | 2.7 | 1.9 | 67.8 |
| 1998–99 | 3.2 | 2.1 | 71.0 |
| 1999–2000 | 3.3 | 2.2 | 10.3 |
| 2000–01 | 3.6 | 2.4 | 83.5 |

### Pay Review

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what pay review body recommendations he is considering. [24819]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The pay review bodies report to the Prime Minister and to departmental Ministers, and it is primarily for the relevant departmental Ministers to consider any recommendations. The regular annual reports from the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine (NPRB) and the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (DDRB) have already been completed and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced on 17 December the Government's acceptance of their recommendations. We are considering a special report on senior civil service pay from the Review Body on Senior Salaries (SSRB) and expect to publish the Report and announce the Government's response shortly. Other reports from the pay review bodies will be considered as they come forward.

### Public Expenditure

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the privatisation of the Paymaster Agency on the Treasury's access to information needed to monitor and control public expenditure. [24828]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Privatisation of the Paymaster Agency has had no effect on the Treasury's access to such information.

### Taxes

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an annual statement of the effect of his direct and indirect taxation measures on the disposable incomes of *(a)* the bottom 10 per cent. and *(b)* the bottom 20 per cent. of income earners. [24827]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Government publish a range of statistics and analyses showing the impact of their tax and benefit policies across the income distribution in the Budget and pre-Budget report documentation.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters he has received from residents in the Buckingham constituency regarding annuities in the last 12 months. [24848]

**Ruth Kelly:** Two letters on this subject have been identified as coming from the Buckingham constituency.

### Bank of England

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions since 1971 the Treasury has exercised its powers under section 4 of the Bank of England Act 1946 to give directions to the Bank of England. [24548]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Treasury has on no occasion since 1971 exercised its powers under section 4 of the Bank of England Act 1946 to give directions to the Bank of England.

### Government Debt

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the distribution of Government debt between the banking and non-banking sectors in each month since the 2001 Budget. [24798]

**Ruth Kelly:** Since the 2001 Budget, the proportion of British Government debt held by banks has averaged 1.7 per cent. The monthly amount of Government debt held by the UK banking sector is:

*2001*

| | *Total central government debt (£ million)* | *Debt held by UK banking sector (£ million)* | *Proportion of debt held by UK banks (Percentage)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| April | 366,217 | 4,258 | 1.2 |
| May | 368,298 | 5,774 | 1.6 |
| June | 373,015 | 6,602 | 1.8 |
| July | 369,921 | 6,509 | 1.8 |
| August | 369,986 | 6,439 | 1.7 |
| September | 368,919 | 7,997 | 2.2 |

*Source:*
Financial Statistics, November 2001

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's policy on the proportion of Government debt to be sold to the banking sector. [24799]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Government do not have a specific policy on the proportion of their debt sold to the banking sector. Government debt is sold via auctions, which are open to all bidders via the gilt-edged market-makers. The Government do not influence the proportion of debt that is sold to a particular type of investor.

## Vocational Training

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have claimed tax relief for vocational training in each of the last four years; and what has been the cost to public funds in each year. [24823]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Vocational training tax relief (VTR) was abolished with effect from 31 August 2000. The number of claims received and the estimated cost of tax relief for the last four years of the relief are as follows:

| *Year* | *Claims received*[1] | *Cost of tax relief*[2] *(£ million)* |
|---|---|---|
| 2000–01 | 200,000 | 30 |
| 1999–2000 | 200,000 | 60 |
| 1998–99 | 170,000 | 50 |
| 1997–98 | 100,000 | 25 |

[1] Number of claims received and not the number of trainees as an individual could make more than one claim in a tax year. It was estimated that there were probably about 200,000 people claiming VTR in 1997–98 and 1998–99

[2] On an accrued basis

## Tax Coding

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number and proportion of incorrect notices of tax coding for 2001–02 which the Inland Revenue has sent out; and what are the principal reasons for errors. [24807]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Error rates covering all notices of tax codings for a tax year are not computed and we have not yet reached the end of 2001–02.

Quality monitoring for 2000–01 showed that around 5 million taxpayers received a revised notice of tax coding during the year of which 889,000 (about 15 per cent.) were incorrect. The main reasons for error were failing to correctly update benefits in kind in accordance with information provided by the employer and failing to restore the coding to a cumulative basis following a change of employment. We are seeking significant improvement in this area this year through our on-going quality assurance and quality control programme.

## EU Payments

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the payments the United Kingdom will be obliged to make to the European Union in each of the next four years. [24808]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Government's latest estimate of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC Budget in 2001–02 together with forecasts of the trended net contribution for 2002–03 and 2003–04 can be found at footnote 2 to Table B13 of the pre-Budget report (Cm 5318). Forecasts for years beyond 2003–04 are not currently available.

## Investment Publications

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a list of the investment publications to which Her Majesty's Treasury subscribes. [24813]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Treasury subscribes to the following publications which cover investment and related subjects.

*Accountancy Age*
*Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*
*Bloomberg Money*
*Business AM*
*Business Week*
*Economist*
*Financial Adviser*
*Futures and Options Week*
*Futures and Options World*
*Investors Chronicle*
*Investment Week*
*Money Management*
*Money Marketing*
*What Investment.*

## Unemployment

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of working age people in the Buckingham constituency lived in a household where no adult worked in each year since 1997. [24846]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 8 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the proportion of working age people living in workless households in the Buckingham constituency. I am replying in his absence.(24846)

Information on households where no adult has worked in a given period is not compiled at constituency level.

## ECOFIN Council

**Mr. Hood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 13 December; what the Government's position was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [23888]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Chancellor and the Paymaster General attended ECOFIN on 13 December.

On the introduction of the euro the Commission summarised the main points of the recently published Eurobarometer poll.

ECOFIN agreed a statement of the economic situation, which was submitted to the Laeken European Council.

The Commission reported that important progress had been made on implementation of the financial services action plan under the Belgian presidency. Six new proposals would be tabled by the Commission in 2002, including an update of the Investment Services Directive and the Capital Adequacy Directive. The Commission planned a mid-term review of the action plan before the Barecelona European Council in March 2002.

ECOFIN agreed a general orientation on a directive on combating market abuse. UK secured its negotiating objectives to deliver an effects-based regime with appropriate safeguards for innocent behaviour. Once the

European Parliament has completed its first reading of the directive, the Council should be able to agree a formal common position.

ECOFIN also agreed a general orientation on the amended collateral directive, which is designed to ensure legal certainty for cross-border and domestic collateral arrangements. This is another step forward in the completion of a single market in financial services.

A general orientation was established on a compromise text for a draft regulation on accounting standards, which provides for the adoption of international accounting standards throughout the EU. The agreement is subject to a final Memorandum of Understanding between the European Commission and the International Accounting Standards Committee Federation on the subject of copyright.

The Commission presented an interim version of their Globalisation and Development Report. The final report will be published in February 2002.

On VAT on e-commerce, a text was agreed providing for the adoption of an electronic portal solution with a time-limited interim arrangement. This meets the UK's objective of introducing a non-burdensome method of applying VAT to products downloaded from the internet, which will be non-discriminatory and apply at the place of consumption.

On the proposed directive for ensuring effective taxation of savings income, ECOFIN reconfirmed the agreement reached at the Feira European Council in June 2000, and agreed a text to form the basis for negotiations with third countries.

ECOFIN also discussed the proposed energy products directive. The Chancellor stressed that any directive must allow the UK to exempt domestic fuel from minimum duty rates. The presidency reported the discussion to the European Council at Laeken.

No votes were taken at the meeting.

### Tax Simplification

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans for tax simplification. [24817]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Government are committed to making tax law clearer and easier to use for taxpayers and their advisers. Through the work of the Tax Law Rewrite project they plan to rewrite direct tax legislation with a better structure and in simpler language. This will be achieved through a series of Bills and the first Bill covering the capital allowances code has already been enacted. The next Bill will rewrite the provisions for the taxation of employment income and pension income and taxable social security income to produce clearer and more accessible legislation.

The Government keep the whole tax system under review, acting where possible to change tax rules to remove complexity in line with its objective of a modern and fair tax system.

### National Lottery

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the main expected effects on the public accounts from 2001–02 to 2004–05 of the National Lottery, including the effects on *(a)* Government expenditure, *(b)* Government revenue and *(c)* Government borrowing. [24812]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Forecasts of expenditure by the National Lottery distributing bodies are given in table B13 of the 2001 pre-Budget report. Forecasts of receipts to the National Lottery distribution fund are included within the "Other taxes and royalties line" in table B11 of the pre-Budget report but are not separately identified. If, as anticipated, outstanding balances held by the Distribution Fund fall, this will produce a small increase in public sector net borrowing.

### Cigarette Sales (Children)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the tax revenues raised in each of the last five years from the illegal sale of cigarettes to children. [25168]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** No such estimate has been made.

### Tax Relief (Removal Expenses)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of employees (1) for whom tax relief for removal expenses and benefits was claimed in each year since 1997; [24552]

(2) for whom removal expenses and benefits exceeded *(a)* £6,000, *(b)* £8,000, *(c)* £10,000, *(d)* £12,000, *(e)* £14,000, *(f)* £16,000, *(g)* £18,000 and *(h)* £20,0000 in the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will estimate the yield to the Exchequer of limiting tax relief for removal expenses and benefits to *(i)* £6,000, (ii) £8,000, (iii) £10,000, (iv) £12,000, (v) £14,000, (vi) £16,000, (vii) £18,000 and (viii) £20,000 in 2001–02. [24800]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Tax relief for the first £8,000 of reimbursed relocation expenses provided by employers is tentatively estimated to cost around £300 million each year. Around 125,000 employees benefit from it. A breakdown of employees who start a new job and those who move to a different location with the same employer is not available.

Available information suggests that in total around 10,000 employees pay income tax on the excess over £8,000 of qualifying relocation expense payments, or have the income tax paid by their employer amounting to some £30 million.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Wednesday 9 January 2002*

## PRIME MINISTER

### Euro

**Mr. Weir:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 624W, on the euro, whether the results of a future referendum on UK membership of the euro will be broken down and available by each nation and region of the UK. [25022]

**The Prime Minister:** I have nothing further to add to my previous answer.

### International Criminal Court

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his letter of 11 December to the hon. Member for Linlithgow in relation to the letter from the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, what encouragement Her Majesty's Government have given the US Government to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court. [23646]

**The Prime Minister:** The issue has been discussed bilaterally with Secretary of State Powell as well as with officials in the US Administration. The EU, as part of its Common Policy towards the ICC, has expressed concern at the proposed introduction of legal measures which might in any way impede or delay the USA's ultimate ratification of the Rome Statute or future relations with the Court.

### Honours

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Prime Minister in what circumstances he would recommend the removal of the honour of OBE; and if he will make a statement. [25392]

**The Prime Minister:** Holders of honours who have committed offences which bring the honours system into disrepute may be considered for forfeiture. It is Government policy not to discuss individual cases.

### Missile Defence

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with the President of the United States concerning missile defence; and if he will make a statement. [25628]

**The Prime Minister:** I last discussed missile defence with President Bush in early December.

We share US concerns about the threats stemming from the proliferation of missiles and weapons of mass destruction and understand the role that missile defences can play as part of a comprehensive strategy to tackle these threats. I welcome the commitment of both Russia and the US to continue discussions on a new strategic framework including issues related to missile defence.

### Members' Communications

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister what rules govern the approval of monitoring of communications of hon. Members. [25291]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 367W.

### Renewable Energy

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Prime Minister what the impact of the Performance and Innovation Unit's review of energy needs will be on renewable energy generation. [23442]

**The Prime Minister:** The PIU energy review will make recommendations on a range of issues and will be published in due course.

### Max Mosley

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Prime Minister on what dates he has *(a)* met, *(b)* spoken by telephone to and *(c)* written to the President of the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile; and if he will place a copy of the notes of such communications in the Library. [25618]

**The Prime Minister:** I have contact and meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings.

### House of Lords Appointments Commission

**Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the future of the House of Lords Appointments Commission. [26093]

**The Prime Minister:** The Appointments Commission brought new standards of transparency, professionalism and rigour into the selection of independent peers. The Commission has, as required, published criteria for appointing peers on the basis that individuals should have a record of outstanding achievement, political independence, integrity and the ability to contribute to the House.

The 15 new independent peers were appointed because they have skills and qualities that will benefit the legislative scrutiny and revising work of the second Chamber. They included a world authority on palliative care, an expert on youth and social exclusion, a top British businessman and a leading educationist. Their expertise is already contributing to debates in the House.

As my hon. Friend knows, the White Paper on Lords Reform published last year proposes a statutory Appointments Commission to appoint independent members and to continue an open and transparent process of appointing independent members to the House of Lords. In the meantime the Appointments Commission will continue its role.

## CABINET OFFICE

### Civil Emergencies

8. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office how his Department co-ordinates with other Government Departments in planning for civil emergencies. [23450]

**Mr. Leslie:** The Cabinet Office is responsible for co-ordinating departmental strategies for civil contingencies across Government, and is conducting a review of emergency planning at present.

### Regional Governance

9. **Joyce Quin:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* regional development agencies and *(b)* regional authorities and chambers about his Department's responsibilities for regional governance in England. [23451]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** Over the past few months, my ministerial colleagues and I have met a wide range of regional leaders, including representatives of regional development agencies, regional chambers, local authorities and other stakeholders across England to discuss regional governance. As we prepare the White Paper we have been encouraging a wider public debate on the issues. Ministers are actively encouraging views from all concerned.

10. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office when he last met Ministers of the devolved institutions to discuss issues relevant to regional government in England. [23452]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** I reported on progress on our White Paper on English regional governance to the annual plenary meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee on 30 October 2001. The devolved Administrations expressed their support for extending the benefits of devolution where there was a regional demand for it, and offered to assist the process based on their own experience of devolution to date.

The territorial Secretaries of State are members of the Committee on the Nations and Regions which has been meeting regularly under my chairmanship to oversee the development of the White Paper.

18. **Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office what plans he has to change the function of Government offices in the regions. [23462]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** We are continuing to develop the role of the Government Offices so that they can operate across the full range of Departments whose policies and programmes have a local or regional impact.

22. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office how many of the Government offices of the regions the Deputy Prime Minister has visited since June. [23466]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** Since June, I have visited three Government offices. My hon. Friend the Minister of State Cabinet Office has visited five Government offices.

### Special Advisers

11. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office what his policy is on setting a maximum limit to the number of special advisers employed by Government Departments. [23453]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** The rules on the appointment of special advisers are set in the Ministerial Code. In addition, in response to reports from the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Public Administration Select Committee, the Government have committed themselves to a limit on the number of special advisers which will form part of the package of Civil Service legislation.

### Regulations

12. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office what steps are being taken to ensure that assessments of the impact of regulations are consistent between Government Departments. [23454]

**Mr. Leslie:** The Government are determined that regulations should not be introduced unless they are necessary and the benefits justify the costs.

In accordance with this, all regulatory proposals likely to have a significant cost to business, charities and the voluntary sector require a Regulatory Impact Assessment.

### Rural Policy

13. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and others on the co-ordination of rural policy. [23456]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office gave on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 898W.

### Staff Dispersal

14. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office what measures he is taking to encourage the dispersal of civil servants and Ministries from London to the regions. [23457]

**Mr. Leslie:** The existing dispersal of many civil service functions across the UK has worked well, and the Government believe that the administration of public service benefits from this national and regional diversity. The Government will continue to consider this matter.

### Climate Change

15. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office what the role of his office is with regard to *(a)* climate change and *(b)* international climate change discussions. [23458]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** I continue to play a role on international climate change discussions and negotiations on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I work to foster effective relationships internationally at the highest political level. The UK's negotiating positions for international negotiations on climate change are agreed through the

Cabinet Committee on the Environment, which I chair. The lead Department for climate change is DEFRA, which retains policy responsibility for international negotiations and implementation of the UK's policies. My office works closely with them and with other Departments with a key interest on strategic and cross-departmental issues.

24. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office if he will set out the part his Department has played in co-ordinating Government work on climate change in the last month. [23468]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** During the last month the Cabinet Office has continued to work with other Government Departments—including DEFRA which has lead responsibility for climate change—in furthering Government policy on climate change.

The Cabinet Office has provided support to me as I continue to pursue international agreement on climate change on behalf of the Prime Minister.

### Regeneration

16. **Paul Farrelly:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office if he will second an official from the Cabinet Office to the North Staffordshire Partnership to assist in the regeneration of the region. [23459]

**Mrs. Roche:** I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that at the present time there are three Cabinet Office secondees working on regeneration issues with the North Staffordshire Partnership.

### Social Exclusion

17. **Brian White:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office if he will list the projects being undertaken by the social exclusion unit. [23461]

**Mrs. Roche:** The unit is currently working on four projects, looking at: re-offending by ex-prisoners; young runaways; educational attainment of children in care; and transport and social exclusion.

### Government Office for Yorkshire and Humberside

19. **Ms Munn:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office what recent meetings his Ministers have had with the Government Office for Yorkshire and Humberside. [23463]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** I last met the Regional Director of the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber on 27 June. My hon. Friend the Minister of State Cabinet Office met various staff of the Government Office on 4 December.

### Relocation

20. **Adam Price:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office what assessment he has made of the scope to relocate Executive functions of *(a)* Government Departments and *(b)* public agencies to the nations and regions of the UK. [23464]

**The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:** No such assessment has been made.

Individual Government Departments and agencies are free to make their own decisions about location and facilities on the basis of operational requirements and value for money.

### Internet

21. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the work of the e-envoy in expanding the use of the internet among the population. [23465]

**Mr. Leslie:** The Office of the e-envoy is committed to the goal of ensuring that everyone in the UK who wants it may have access to the internet by 2005.

Progress towards meeting this target is detailed in Section 3 of the recently published UK online annual report.

### Government Car Service

23. **Richard Burden:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office what assessment he has made of the annual report of the Government Car Service. [23467]

**Mr. Leslie:** The Annual Report and Accounts of the Government Car and Despatch Agency, of which the Government Car Service is a part, were seen and approved by me before publication in the House on 17 July 2001. Furthermore, the agency's financial statements contained in that report were subject to an audit by the National Audit Office and no observations were made.

### Neighbourhood Renewal

**Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Minister of State for Cabinet Office what role his Department is playing in promoting neighbourhood renewal in the most disadvantaged communities. [23440]

**Mrs. Roche:** The Cabinet Office plays a full role in work across Government to deliver the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

Both the Social Exclusion Unit and the Regional Co-ordination Unit support the work of other Government Departments to deliver sustainable improvements in the most disadvantaged areas, and of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit in co-ordinating and leading strategy centrally.

The nine Government Offices for the Regions have particular responsibility for neighbourhood renewal at regional level, supporting local strategies, administering funds and reporting on local activity.

## DEFENCE

### Naval Vessels

**Mrs. Ann Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the nature, time scale and cost of repairing the defect which was discovered on HMS Sceptre, HMS Sovereign and HMS Superb. [24913]

**Mr. Ingram:** Indications of small original fabrication imperfections discovered during routine ultrasonic inspection of the Reactor Pressure Vessel (RPV) in HMS

Sceptre identified the need for more detailed analysis to support the existing safety case for reactor plant operation. Inspection of Sceptre will be undertaken as part of her refit at Rosyth Dockyard. While imperfections have not been identified in either Sovereign or Superb, they have similar Reactor Pressure Vessel design. An acceptable safety case was produced for Superb and she has now returned to operations, pending further inspection later this year. Precautionary inspection of Sovereign is now taking place during her on-going maintenance at Clyde Submarine Base. The time scale and cost of work to return Sceptre and Sovereign to operations is subject to acceptable inspection results and the complexity of the associated safety case, so cannot be provided with accuracy at this stage.

### British Forces (Deployment)

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops are serving overseas and in which countries; and what proportion of United Kingdom military forces are *(a)* overseas and *(b)* in the United Kingdom. [24986]

**Mr. Ingram:** The following table shows the number of UK regular forces serving overseas as at 1 November 2001 broken down by service.

| *Location/proportion* | *Naval Service* | *Army* | *RAF* | *Grand total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grand total | 41,840 | 109,775 | 53,211 | 204,826 |
| United Kingdom (84 per cent.) | 35,317 | 77,682 | 47,535 | 160,543 |
| Overseas total (16 per cent.) | 6,523 | 32,093 | 5,676 | 44,292 |
| *Overseas split by location:* | | | | |
| Continental Europe | 3,069 | 15,465 | 1,801 | 20,335 |
| Cyprus | 6 | 2,460 | 1,094 | 3,560 |
| Gibraltar | 223 | 65 | 112 | 400 |
| Other Mediterranean, Near East and Gulf | 1,514 | 5,921 | 1,369 | 8,804 |
| Far East | 15 | 243 | 20 | 278 |
| Other locations | 1,696 | 7,939 | 1,280 | 10,915 |

*Source:*
DASA (Tri-Service)

### Hearing Loss (Compensation)

**Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many retired members of the armed forces have claimed compensation for service-related Noise Induced Sensorineural Hearing Loss since 1990; how many claims were accepted; how many claimants appealed to the pensions appeal tribunals; and how many claims were rejected. [25324]

**Dr. Moonie:** The information requested is not available in relation to War Pension claims for disablement arising from Noise Induced Sensorineural Hearing Loss and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims by retired members of the armed forces for compensation for service-related noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss since 1990 were disallowed for the reason that *(a)* hearing loss at the time of claiming was less than 50 dB averaged over one, two and three kHz, *(b)* hearing loss at the time of leaving the armed forces was less than 50 dB averaged over one, two and three Khz, *(c)* hearing loss exceeding 50 dB after leaving the service but at the time of leaving the armed forces the hearing loss was less than 50 dB averaged over one, two and three kHz, *(d)* hearing loss exceeding 50 dB averaged over one, two and three kHz after leaving the service but there was no evidence of hearing loss at the time of leaving and *(e)* claims were made more than seven years after leaving the armed forces. [25323]

**Dr. Moonie:** The information requested in items *(a)* to *(d)* is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Claims to war disablement pensions are not disallowed if lodged more than seven years after leaving the armed forces. There are no time limits for claiming.

### Missile Defence

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made since 11 September on the potential value of national missile defence for the United Kingdom. [25451]

**Mr. Hoon:** The position remains unchanged. We understand the potential role missile defence can play as one element of a comprehensive strategy to tackle a ballistic missile threat. What the events of 11 September show is that there are those who will seek to threaten with whatever means are available the US, its friends and allies.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what considerations he is giving to the development of a ballistic missile defence system for the UK. [25790]

**Mr. Hoon:** We continue to assess the threat posed by ballistic missiles. We also continue to assess ballistic missile defence technology, which is evolving rapidly. We do so in the context of needing to tackle the threat with a comprehensive strategy and broad range of defensive measures. We fully support the continuing NATO Theatre Missile Defence Feasibility Studies, and we have a long-standing technical dialogue with the US on the subject of ballistic missile defence. We believe that it remains premature to decide on acquiring a ballistic missile defence capability for either deployed forces or defence of the UK. But we recognise the role ballistic missile defence can play, and our options remain open.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the NATO theatre ballistic missile defence feasibility studies to conclude. [25794]

**Mr. Hoon:** The studies are due to end in December 2002.

### Warship Repair Facilities

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for *(a)* increased efficiency in and *(b)* modernisation of the UK's warship repair facilities. [25427]

**Mr. Ingram:** The UK's warship repair is provided at Devonport by Devonport Management Ltd., at Rosyth by Babcock Rosyth Defence Ltd. and at Portsmouth by Fleet Support Ltd. The Ministry of Defence is currently seeking to modernise arrangements for warship support across the UK's Naval Bases and Dockyards. Within this initiative, as well as pursuing efficiencies at the Naval Bases, the MOD is seeking to increase the proportion of the programme for surface warship repair that is opened up to competition, with the aim of helping the dockyard companies to drive out excess capacity and increase efficiency.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints have been reported in his Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999, and how many of them related to special advisers. [25332]

**Dr. Moonie:** None.

### Call-out Orders

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many call-out orders he signed during 2001; what plans he has for further call-outs; and if he will make a statement. [25702]

**Dr. Moonie:** I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Reserve Surgical Teams

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made by his Department in exploratory talks with the NHS on the provision of sponsored reserve surgical teams. [25791]

**Dr. Moonie:** Officials from the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Health (DoH) and the National Health Service (NHS) met in November 2001 to discuss the provision of sponsored reserve surgical teams. The meeting was very useful and we are encouraged by the drive and enthusiasm shown by DoH and NHS colleagues. Initial scoping work is currently being undertaken on a pilot project which we expect to be finalised in the course of the current year.

### Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he will place an unclassified version of the report of the Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment in the Library; [25796]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 661W, when he will place the summary of Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme in the Library. [25705]

**Mr. Hoon:** An unclassified summary of the Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme is at an advanced stage of preparation. I expect to place copies of it in the Library of the House within the first quarter of 2002.

### Smallpox

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to immunise the armed forces from smallpox and its variants. [25697]

**Dr. Moonie:** We have no immediate plans to immunise members of the armed forces against smallpox or its variants. We continually review the package of defensive measures against chemical and biological attack available to our armed forces, which includes immunisation, commensurate with an assessment of the threat. The Ministry of Defence has in place a series of research, development and procurement programmes aimed at ensuring that personnel are afforded optimum protection against chemical and biological warfare agents, including against smallpox.

### Falcon

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Falcon project. [25696]

**Dr. Moonie:** Falcon will provide a formation level communication system for UK forces including the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps. Falcon remains a significant component of an on-going programme of continuous improvements in Army communications that also includes projects Bowman and Skynet V. Current plans remain on schedule to begin delivery of Falcon in 2006–07.

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have taken place in forecast expenditure on Falcon since 30 October. [23337]

**Dr. Moonie:** No changes have occurred to the forecast expenditure on Falcon since 30 October 2001. Falcon remains a significant component of an on-going programme of continuous improvements in Army communications systems that also includes projects Bowman and Skynet V. Current plans remain on schedule to begin delivery of Falcon in 2006–07.

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when, and for what reason, a decision was taken to reduce expenditure on the Falcon project. [23344]

**Dr. Moonie:** No decision has been taken to reduce expenditure on the Falcon project.

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what expenditure is forecast for the Falcon project in *(a)* 2004, *(b)* 2006 and *(c)* further phases; and if he will make a statement. [23343]

**Dr. Moonie:** Falcon is currently nearing the end of the concept phase and in keeping with the principles of smart acquisition decisions on precise timing and levels of expenditure will be informed by work both in concept and assessment phases. Current plans remain on schedule to begin delivery of project Falcon in 2006–07.

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement outlining the extent to which Bowman is dependent upon replacing the current Ptarmigan system with Falcon. [23338]

**Dr. Moonie:** As a tactical radio system designed for use from Divisional level and below, effective operation of Bowman is not dependent upon replacement of the current Ptarmigan system with Falcon. Falcon will provide a highly capable communication infrastructure to enable the rapid passage of data between Bowman networks thus contributing significantly to the programme of planned improvements for Army communications.

### Chemical and Biological Warfare

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new expenditure he plans for defence against chemical and biological warfare in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [25799]

**Mr. Hoon:** Expenditure on new equipment for defence against chemical and biological warfare in 2001–02 is estimated, in resource terms, to be in the region of £26 million. Expenditure planned for 2002–03 and 2003–04 has yet to be finalised.

### European Security and Defence Policy

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what review of the ESDP will be conducted to establish if it meets the needs of the changed international climate. [25804]

**Mr. Hoon:** While there are no plans formally to review the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), EU governments will wish to discuss the implications of the changed international climate as their responses to international terrorism are developed. Our work on producing a "new chapter" for the Strategic Defence Review will include an assessment of the role that international organisations, including the EU, might play.

Most of the capabilities being developed under ESDP can also play an important part in a military response to international terrorism.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the operations in which he expects the new ESDP to operate. [25802]

**Mr. Hoon:** The European Council agreed at Helsinki in December 1999 that EU member states should be able by 2003, where NATO as a whole is not engaged, to deploy military forces, capable of conducting the full range crisis management operations known as the Petersberg tasks. These include humanitarian and rescue tasks; peacekeeping tasks; and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace making. The European Council at Laeken in December last year agreed that the EU is now able to conduct some crisis-management operations within this definition. The EU will be progressively more able to take on increasingly demanding operations as the assets and capabilities available to it continue to develop and improve. Decisions to launch and participate in operations will be taken by national governments, on a case by case basis, in light of the circumstances at the time.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he had at Laeken about the application of qualified majority voting to EU defence policy. [25795]

**Mr. Hoon:** None. The European Security and Defence Policy falls under Pillar Two of the European Union. Decisions are taken on an intergovernmental basis by unanimous consensus.

### Topmast Inquiry

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what issues are being assessed by the Topmast inquiry; and when he plans to publish the Topmast recommendations. [25633]

**Mr. Ingram:** Topmast (Tomorrow's Personnel Management System) is developing the manpower management systems needed by the future Navy. It will provide a flexible and responsive system for the management and deployment of manpower which will meet operational needs while providing attractive employment conditions and career progression for Royal Navy personnel. Topmast is also planned to contribute to the reduction of overstretch and the achievement of manpower balance. Following successful trials, Topmast will be rolled out on a phased basis beginning in April 2002. Topmast has already received publicity within the Naval Service, and a comprehensive communication and information programme will ensure that members of the service are fully aware of its purpose and impact.

### Army Personnel

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that there is no reduction in the planned size of the Army. [25692]

**Mr. Ingram:** Whole Army strength has increased over recent months and we predict a strength figure of between 103,000 and 104,000 by 2005. We remain committed to delivering the military capability required of the Army in the Strategic Defence Review. Work is ongoing into how best to achieve this taking into account evolving doctrine, new technology and equipment.

### Defence Programme

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the total value of bids submitted for the 2002 short-term programme; and what resources will be available for STP 02; [25677]

(2) what was the total value of bids submitted for the 2002 Equipment Programme; and what resources will be allocated for funding EP 02. [25634]

**Mr. Ingram:** The resources available for the Defence programme are in the case of 2002–03 and 2003–04 set out in the Government's Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04 published in April 2001 (Cm 5109) and in the case of subsequent years depend on the outcome of the 2002 and successive Spending Reviews. Specific allocations to budget holders in 2002–03 will be published in Main Resources Estimates 2002–03. Details of individual budget holders' proposals for expenditure are withheld under exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

### Defence Planning Structures

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when ESDP and NATO planning structures will be assimilated. [25805]

**Mr. Hoon:** There are no plans to assimilate NATO planning structures with the EU. Arrangements are being developed for assured access by the European Union to NATO planning capabilities.

### Defence Ministers (Greece and Turkey)

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to meet the *(a)* Turkish and *(b)* Greek Defence Minister. [25800]

**Mr. Hoon:** I am in regular contact with my Greek and Turkish colleagues and often meet them in the normal course of defence business. I expect to meet both Mr. Çakmakoglu and Mr. Papantoniou again in the first half of 2002.

### War Graves

**Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with the Belgian Government about the impact on British war graves of the plans to build the A19 road through the Pilckem Ridge. [25495]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ministry of Defence has had no discussions with the Belgian Government about proposals for a new road through Pilckem Ridge, nor would the Department expect to do so. Any approach to the British Government from the Belgian Government would follow established protocols and, in the first instance, would be to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office through the British Embassy in Brussels.

However, I am advised by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which has the responsibility for the maintenance of war graves of British and Commonwealth troops in Belgium, that they have had local discussions with the Belgian authorities seeking further clarification of the proposals. They have been assured that while the proposed route has not been finalised, it will not interfere with any Commission-maintained cemetery.

### Laeken Summit

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on *(a)* the defence and security implications of the Laeken summit and *(b)* on the operationality of ESDP within the agreement of NATO for automatic access to NATO capabilities. [24950]

**Mr. Hoon:** The Laeken European Council concluded that the EU is now able to conduct some crisis-management operations and that it will be in a position to take on progressively more demanding operations as the assets and capabilities at its disposal continue to develop. This is entirely consistent with the UK's emphasis on the need to improve European military capabilities.

This represents useful progress towards the aim set out in the Helsinki Headline Goal, but recognises that capabilities are currently limited. We welcome the commitment reaffirmed by member states at Laeken to continue their efforts to meet the Headline Goad.

There has been considerable progress towards an agreement on arrangements for EU access to NATO assets and capabilities, but this is not yet fully concluded. Once these agreements are in place, the scale and complexity of the operations that the EU could lead will be considerably increased.

### Territorial Army

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is undertaking to improve numbers in the TA. [25694]

**Dr. Moonie:** The current strength of the Territorial Army (TA), including those mobilised on operations and on Full Time Reserve Service, almost exactly matches the overall target size of the TA set as a result of the Strategic Defence Review. It is therefore in good shape, although there are some specific areas where numbers fall short of target, most notably the Army Medical Service (TA). The current "Time to get fitTA" campaign, launched on 28 December 2001, and a further recruiting campaign to be launched in the spring, are intended to keep the TA in its current healthy state.

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many TA Intelligence Corps personnel he is mobilising; and if he will make a statement; [R] [25143]

(2) where he plans to deploy TA Intelligence Corps personnel under mobilisation order; and if he will make a statement; [R] [25144]

(3) what arrangements are being made to ensure that mobilised TA personnel will enjoy make up of civilian pay plus other allowances; and if he will make a statement; [R] [25145]

(4) which Territorial Army units are under mobilisation orders. [R] [25146]

**Dr. Moonie:** I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Allied Rapid Reaction Corps

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the possibility of transferring the running of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps to France or Germany. [23336]

**Mr. Hoon:** As the Framework Nation, the UK has invested heavily in manpower, resources and training to ensure that the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) is the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's primary land forces tool for crisis management. We believe that it will remain so for the foreseeable future. There are no plans to transfer the Framework Nation role for the ARRC to France or Germany.

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the importance of modernising Army communication systems to maintain UK running of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in the face of competition from Germany and France. [23340]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) remains a key component of the UK's commitment to NATO. This commitment is reflected in current plans to provide a range of strategic communication enhancements to the ARRC from 2002 so ensuring it can meet NATO requirements as a high readiness force. In addition, the ARRC will benefit

directly from the planned programme of continuous improvements to Army communication systems delivered through projects Bowman, Skynet V and Falcon.

### Army Communications

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason the budget for modernising army communications has been reduced. [23341]

**Dr. Moonie:** No decision has been taken to reduce the budget for modernising army communication systems. On the contrary, significant plans are in place to deliver a programme of continuous improvement to army communication systems through projects Bowman, Skynet V and Falcon.

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many telephone lines are being rented to make good deficiencies in the Army Ptarmigan system. [23342]

**Dr. Moonie:** Subject to operational considerations, geographically separate Ptarmigan systems may be connected by local telephone networks to provide interconnectivity and communications infrastructure resilience over substantial distances. In addition, elements of the UK civil telephone network can be used to facilitate low level Ptarmigan training. The number of telephones used at any given time is not recorded centrally.

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional equipment is being provided by signal requirements to make good deficiencies in the Army Ptarmigan system. [23339]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ptarmigan system continues to meet the operational requirement for which it was originally procured. In response to the changing and wide ranging demands now placed upon the armed forces, a number of Ptarmigan enhancements are being procured to ensure the system remains fully effective in the modern environment. Improvements include an enhancement to the mobile communications capability and an update of the Electronic Repair Vehicle. Post design services tasks, such as generator replacement, also continue to ensure Ptarmigan remains fully effective. In the longer term, the Army's trunk communication's requirement will be met by project Falcon, due to replace Ptarmigan from 2006–07.

### Decontamination Equipment

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what NBC *(a)* detection and *(b)* decontamination equipment is available to (i) RAF bases, (ii) naval bases and (iii) Army bases; what plans he has to upgrade it; what arrangements he has made for that equipment to be made available to the civil authorities; how deployable it would be in the event of an NBC attack on mainland Britain; and if he will make a statement. [25151]

**Mr. Ingram:** Sufficient detection and decontamination equipment is held by armed forces to ensure that they can maintain their effectiveness against the threat from NBC weapons on deployed operations. There are constant improvements in these capabilities.

The civil authorities have a detection and decontamination capability and are responsible for detection of NBC weapons in the UK and for decontamination if there is an attack. The Ministry of Defence would be available to provide support to civil authorities depending on circumstances.

### Service Pensioners

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service pensioners there are; and if he will make a statement. [25838]

**Mr. Ingram:** As at 31 March 2001, there were 269,135 service pensioners.

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many non-commissioned officers and enlisted personnel have served more than 10 years but less than that required for a full pension, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [25837]

**Mr. Ingram:** Full pension for other ranks is payable after completion of 37 years service. The figures in the table show those who have left having served more than 10 years but less than 37 years in the 12-month period up to 1 April in the specified years.

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1 April 2001 | 78,823 |
| 1 April 2000 | 79,412 |
| 1 April 1999 | 78,638 |

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service widows qualify for service pensions; and if he will make a statement. [25835]

**Mr. Ingram:** As at 31 March 2001 there were 65,282 widows and widowers receiving service pensions.

### Training Exercises

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many training exercises have been carried out by the armed forces in and from *(a)* Spain, *(b)* Portugal, *(c)* the Netherlands, *(d)* Germany, *(e)* Norway and *(f)* the United States in the last 12 months. [25793]

**Mr. Ingram:** The table indicates the number of unilateral or bilateral training exercises carried out in the last 12 months.

| | *Number of training exercises* |
|---|---|
| *UK forces abroad* | |
| Spain | 6 |
| Portugal | 1 |
| The Netherlands | 1 |
| Germany | 14 |
| Norway | 10 |
| United States | 29 |
| *Foreign forces in UK* | |
| Spanish | 0 |
| Portuguese | 2 |
| The Netherlands | 6 |
| German | 5 |
| Norwegian | 0 |
| United States | 16 |

### Harassment

**Mr. Oaten:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the internal complaints procedure for harassment experienced by armed forces personnel during training; and if he will make a statement. [25317]

**Mr. Ingram:** The armed forces take their obligations as an employer very seriously. The Armed Forces Code of Social Conduct sets standards of personal behaviour and we uphold a policy of zero tolerance towards any incidents of harassment, victimisation, unlawful discrimination or bullying. The well established procedures for dealing with harassment complaints within the Services do not differentiate between those under training and those who are trained.

### Nuclear Base

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future *(a)* operation and *(b)* organisation of Britain's nuclear base on the River Clyde. [25426]

**Mr. Ingram:** The Ministry of Defence is seeking to modernise arrangements for warship support and achieve best value for money for the Defence budget. At the Clyde, as at the other Naval Bases at Devonport and Portsmouth, we have received proposals from the Dockyard Companies for potential partnering arrangements. We have also received alternative proposals from the Trades Unions for the pursuit of efficiencies at the Naval Bases. All options are currently being considered, and decisions on the way ahead will be made in the near future. We have no plans to privatise the facilities.

The Naval Base Commander will remain in charge of the operation of the Base and in control of all the outputs. The proposals for partnering at the Clyde would entail Babcock Rosyth Defence Ltd. taking on the management of engineering support, facilities and estates management and certain logistics functions at the Naval Base. There would be no change to the overall operation of the Base. The proposals will not affect nuclear authorisation, or safety and security at the Naval Base.

### Heavy Equipment Transporter

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to take receipt of the first heavy equipment transporter; and who is the prime contractor. [25695]

**Dr. Moonie:** I expect the first 20 heavy equipment transporters to enter service in 2003. The equipment will not be the property of the Ministry of Defence but will be owned and operated by the Fasttrax consortium, led by Brown and Root, under the privately financed service contract placed on 14 December 2001.

### Armoured Vehicles

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Challenger II tanks, *(b)* Warrior, *(c)* Saxon, *(d)* FV430, *(e)* Sabre, *(f)* Scimitar, *(g)* Striker, *(h)* Spartan, *(i)* Sultan, *(j)* Samson and *(k)* Samaritan armoured vehicles were operational in (i) October and (ii) November. [25699]

**Mr. Ingram:** The information requested is held quarterly and not monthly. The information for the quarter ending 31 December 2001 will be available at the end of this month. I will write to the hon. Member at that stage and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

### WEU

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military planning officials from the WEU will be transferred to the EU military planning section. [25797]

**Mr. Hoon:** The WEU military staff ceased to function in June 2001. EU military staff posts are filled by national secondees. There has been no formal transfer of WEU military staff to the EU, although some individuals have been transferred.

### A400M

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many A400M's have to be ordered by EU member states for the programme to be cost effective. [25801]

**Dr. Moonie:** The A400M contract signed on 18 December 2001 was for an initial order of 196 aircraft, well above the notional programme viability level of 180 aircraft. An offtake of less than 180 would impact on programme costs, which would clearly need to be considered by partner nations.

### Aircrew Retention

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the series of issues affecting retention that the working party on Aircrew Retention has been examining. [25703]

**Mr. Ingram:** The main issues identified by the Aircrew Retention Review as to why aircrew leave the Services were:

(a) The pull of a buoyant external employment market (while current difficulties being experienced by the civil sector may result in a short-term reduction in the pull factor, long-term solutions will be needed.

(b) A push effect arising from a diminution in faith/belief in the influence of senior leadership (this phenomenon has also been detected by other nations' armed forces).

(c) A host of "quality of life" issues, including the level of operational tempo and some career-management issues.

(d) The push of a gratuity/pension being available should aircrew decide to leave in their late 30s.

Action to address some of these issues was already in hand (such as the creation of a Defence Leadership Centre); for others it will take longer to make an impact but, under the direction of the Defence Management Board, plans are being drawn up to address each of the issues raised by aircrew. In some cases the retention-negative factors are an integral part of life in the armed forces and, as an acknowledgement of this, Service pay is augmented by the "X" factor (currently 13 per cent.).

### Royal Navy Ships

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the present deployment of Royal Navy ships. [25798]

**Mr. Ingram:** As at 7 January 2002, 21 Royal Navy ships were deployed from their home ports. HMS Illustrious, HMS Fearless, HMS Cornwall and HMS Southampton are deployed in the Gulf region in support of Operation Veritas. The Armilla Patrol Ship HMS Kent is also in the Gulf. The survey vessel HMS Scott is deployed in the Arabian Sea. HMS Montrose, HMS Leeds Castle and the Ice Patrol Vessel, HMS Endurance, are in the South Atlantic. HMS Exeter, allocated to NATO's Standing Naval Forces Atlantic, is currently in the mediterranean as is the survey vessel HMS Beagle. HMS Chatham left Devonport on 6 January to rejoin NATO Standing Force Mediterranean. Other ships away from their home ports are HMS Cumberland, HMS Portland, HMS Campbeltown, HMS Somerset, HMS Middleton, HMS Dulverton, HMS Lindisfarne, HMS Dumbarton Castle and HMS Alderney. These vessels are deployed in or around UK waters, either on patrol, trials or transit.

HMS Sutherland is alongside at Devonport at 14 days notice to move to the Caribbean.

For completeness, as at 7 January 2002, a total of 14 Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships were also deployed in support of the Royal Navy ships.

### Strategic Defence Review

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish the new chapter of the Strategic Defence Review. [25803]

**Mr. Hoon:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 5–6W, to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock).

### Submarines (Female Personnel)

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he proposes to allow female personnel to serve in submarines. [25690]

**Mr. Ingram:** We are committed to equality of opportunity in the armed forces, and all posts are open to women unless there are specific reasons to the contrary. Women are not presently permitted to serve in submarines because of medical concerns for the safety of a foetus and hence of the mother. These concerns arise from the contaminants which build up in the atmosphere of our submarines, all of which are nuclear powered and may remain submerged for up to 90 days for operational reasons. These contaminants include carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and about 30 other substances potentially harmful to a foetus. Medical studies have shown that these contaminants may occur at levels which, while they are not harmful to adults, exceed those considered safe for the foetus of a pregnant woman. There is no reliable test for detecting pregnancy in its very early stages.

The medical advice on this issue has recently been subjected to independent review by the Defence Scientific Advisory Council and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists; both have supported the key conclusions of the earlier research work. Accordingly, I have agreed that women should continue to be excluded from service in submarines for the time being. However, the medical research and advice will be kept under active review, together with other relevant factors such as the experience of other Navies.

### Departmental Homes

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's homes have been empty in each year since 1990; what action is being taken to reduce their numbers; and if he will make a statement. [25813]

**Dr. Moonie:** Data for service family accommodation in UK for 1990 and 1995–2001 are given in table 3.31 of UK Defence Statistics 2001, which is available in the Library of the House. The data for the period 1991 to 1994 is available in earlier editions of Defence Statistics. A summary is given in the table:

*Thousand*

| *Year to April* | *Vacant service family accommodation* |
|---|---|
| 1990 | 11.8 |
| 1991 | 10.3 |
| 1992 | 9.4 |
| 1993 | 9.2 |
| 1994 | 9.9 |
| 1995 | 9.9 |
| 1996 | 13.5 |
| 1997 | 13.2 |
| 1998 | 13.5 |
| 1999 | 14.0 |
| 2000 | 14.7 |
| 2001 | 10.4 |

Over many years, the continuing decline in service families' demand for married quarters has offset reductions in the Defence housing stock. However, the Defence Housing Executive is making good progress with a substantial programme of surplus property disposal. Over 6,700 houses were disposed of in the 15 months to 31 March 2001, and a further 3,500 have been identified for disposal by 31 March 2002.

### Kosovo

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 349W, on Kosovo, what plans he has to investigate the failure on 6 November to meet the target time in which priority one casualties require to be repatriated. [25206]

**Mr. Ingram:** A priority one patient is defined as somebody for whom speedy evacuation is necessary to save life or limb, to prevent serious illness or to avoid serious permanent disability. The Royal Air Force aim to return such patients to the UK within 24 hours of a request for medical evacuation. The actual time taken to return a patient to the UK will reflect a number of factors, including the stability of their condition—to move a patient too soon can be as dangerous as to move them too late—the distance to be travelled and the weather.

Of equal importance is the treatment the patient receives pending their return. In the case to which you refer, all the procedures followed have been, as always in such cases, subject to close scrutiny to ensure all was done that could be done to provide the best levels of medical care as quickly as possible. The patients were properly cared for within the intensive treatment unit of the integrated US/UK medical unit at Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo, and there were no delays in the return leg of the aeromedical evacuation flight.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Bushmeat

**Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what plans her Department has to tackle the trade in bushmeat; [25812]

(2) what funding *(a)* has been granted by her Department to projects connected to the trade in bushmeat in West and Central Africa in each year since 1999 and *(b)* is projected for (i) 2002, (ii) 2003 and (iii) 2004. [25808]

**Hilary Benn:** Responsibility for addressing the international trade in bushmeat lies with HM Customs and Excise, who implement the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

In this context, DFID is involved in various initiatives that contribute to the conservation of wild animals and their habitats (see Annexe 1). We fund projects and studies that address sustainable forest management and bushmeat production where this is key to tackling poverty. We currently fund three projects in West Africa with direct links to bushmeat. Part of the Mount Cameroon Project (MCP) is supporting local communities to manage forest resources sustainably; this accounts for an estimated £50,000 p.a. of the projects funds. The Cameroon Community Forestry Development Project has been assisting government to develop protocols for community timber management; now that these are in place, the project team is working to establish community wildlife protocols for sustainable bushmeat harvesting. Both projects will finish this year, though we expect to contribute to a forestry sector programme in 2003, which will include a substantial community natural resource management element.

In Ghana we are funding the Natural Resources Institute (NRI) to undertake research into bushmeat production, and particularly into the distribution of the value of bushmeat between producers and traders and how this affects poverty. This study will be completed in 2002, when we will consider the value of an extension into at least one other West African country in 2003–04, with estimated funding of £50,000 to £100,000 p.a.

DFID also supports some 155 initiatives in developing countries to help them manage their forests sustainably, and is also working to help reduce illegal logging. These initiatives promote sustainable forest management and thereby should have an indirect positive impact on wildlife. DFID's main efforts are directed at combating illegal logging at source and addressing the other underlying causes of poor forest management, since most illegally harvested timber (up to 80 per cent. in some countries) is consumed domestically.

*Annexe 1: Examples of DFID-supported bilateral projects, and research and studies, that have a strong focus on wildlife/bushmeat species*

| *Name of project* | *Country* | *Period of support* | *Amount (£000)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mbomipa Community Wildlife Project | Tanzania | 1997–2001 | 1,973 |
| Wildlife Intensification for Livelihood Development (WILD) | Namibia | 1999–2002 | 1,040 |
| Madikwe Community Wildlife Management | South Africa | 1997–1999 | 622 |
| Amboro Rural Development | Bolivia | 1996–2000 | 3,200 |
| Mount Cameroon Project | Cameroon | 1995–2002 | 10,602 |
| Community Forest Development Project | Cameroon | 1999–2002 | 1,049 |
| Indonesian Multi-Stakeholder | Indonesia | 1998–2005 | 25,150 |
| Cross River State Community Forestry Project | Nigeria | 1996–2001 | 2,000 |
| Forest Sector Development Project Phase II | Ghana | 2000–04 | 11,963 |
| Joint-funding scheme with WWF: | | | |
| Gashaka-Gumpti/Kupe | Nigeria/Cameroon | 1991–2001 | 6,289 |
| Coastal forests/Bogoria/Udzungwa | Kenya/Tanzania | 1990–2001 | |
| Kunene/Caprivi | Namibia | 1998–2001 | |
| Mamiraua/Varzea | Brazil | 1991–2000 | |
| Studies and research: | | | |
| Livestock-wildlife interactions | Africa | 1997–2001 | 575 |
| Illegal hunting in Serengeti NP | Tanzania | 1997–2000 | |
| Bushmeat in rural livelihoods of West Africa | Ghana/Cameroon | 2000–02 | |

**Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has held with representatives of African Governments regarding the trade in bushmeat. [25786]

**Hilary Benn:** We fund two bilateral projects in Cameroon related to the issue of bushmeat. Since 1995, the Mount Cameroon Project team has been working closely with the Cameroon Ministry of Environment and Forests to establish field level community management of timber and wildlife resources. The Community Forestry Development Project in Cameroon has been drawing on this experience to help communities manage their wildlife resources under the Forest Law. We also assisted with discussions with the Government of Cameroon over the preparation of an Emergency Action Plan following the 1999 Yaounde Heads of State Declaration, which included measures to ensure that an EC-funded road maintenance project did not lead to unsustainable harvesting of forest and wildlife resources.

**Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has held with logging and mining companies operating in West and Central Africa that operate in areas of high bushmeat trade. [25807]

**Hilary Benn:** Through our country office in Cameroon we have been holding a series of ad hoc discussions with logging company representatives on how to promote sustainable forest management. These discussions recently culminated in a workshop to review a draft logging manual that pulls together the diverse pieces of legislation into a single coherent text, that the private sector and government can then apply.

In the upcoming few months we will be financing further specific meetings with logging companies in the context of preparing for a Forest and Environment Sector Programme.

**Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what assessment she has made of the impact Department-funded infrastructure projects in West and Central Africa have on the trade in bushmeat; [25819]

(2) what mitigation measures are taken to prevent the trade in bushmeat on Department-funded infrastructure projects; and what assessment has been made of their effectiveness. [25815]

**Hilary Benn:** Our Department's procedures require that any new infrastructure project be screened for its potential impact on the environment. If initial screening indicates that the project could have significant impacts on the environment, then further investigation such as Environmental Analysis or a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) must be undertaken. All projects funded by this Department must comply with in-country guidelines or legislation. While we check the need for an EIA and the adequacy of them where they are required, the assessment itself is often financed and carried out by others.

With regard to bushmeat, we held intensive discussions with the Government of Cameroon over the preparation of an Emergency Action Plan following the 1999 Yaounde Heads of State Declaration, which included measures to ensure that an EC-funded road maintenance project did not lead to unsustainable harvesting of forest and wildlife resources.

### Trypanosomiasis

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what her Department is doing to support research and development into new drugs to combat African trypanosomiasis; [25260]

(2) what her Department is doing to ensure that treatment for African trypanosomiasis is more widely available in Africa; [25261]

(3) what action her Department is taking to support efforts to raise awareness of trypanosomiasis in Africa. [25262]

**Hilary Benn:** The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that "sleeping sickness" or trypanosomiasis occurs in 36 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with 300,000 new cases annually, but poor data and diagnosis make it difficult to estimate the full extent of the problem. Recently there have been epidemic outbreaks in central and eastern Africa, especially in countries experiencing civil war and social upheaval.

We are committed to improving the health of poor people in developing countries, including by improving access to essential drugs and vaccines to combat the diseases that most affect them. Part of this commitment is to make safe and effective essential drugs available at an affordable price. We look to WHO to help raise the awareness of this issue and to ensure that this is achieved through international collaborative efforts. We provide significant resources to WHO to support this work.

WHO is currently working with Medecins Sans Frontieres and pharmaceutical manufacturers to ensure drug supplies for the treatment of sleeping sickness free of charge for the next five years. it will also increase surveillance teams and undertake research on better treatment regimens. We, along with other donors are working in partnership with the pharmaceutical industry and research organisations to support the development of new drugs. The Gates Foundation is currently funding the development and trials of a promising new drug for treatment.

We also recognise the need to ensure that existing drugs are available, particularly to the poorest. This requires strengthening systems of delivery for quality assured drugs. We work with countries in improving systems to procure and distribute drugs, manage drug supplies and encourage appropriate drug use.

### Refugee Camps (Pakistan)

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on *(a)* the provision of aid to and *(b)* the standards in refugee camps in Pakistan. [25273]

**Hilary Benn:** In addition to those who have moved into Pakistan from Afghanistan since 11 September, Pakistan has been shouldering the burden of some 2 million refugees from Afghanistan for many years. Over the last 20 years, these refugees have been hosted in camps in Pakistan or absorbed into local communities. The majority of the camps in Pakistan pre-date the agreement of the international Sphere standards.

The international community is giving Pakistan all possible support in coping with this burden and making progress towards improving standards in camps, including ensuring that all refugees are properly cared for.

So far DFID has committed £3 million to UNHCR's operations, in response to the current crisis, to support its operations for refugees. This has included technical personnel, material and financial support. At the request of UNHCR, we have provided three relief flights to Iran and Pakistan transporting tents, shelter material and communications equipment. We have also provided a specialist site planner to UNHCR in Pakistan to assist with the setting up of new refugee camp sites. In addition we have provided £6 million to NGOs, much of which has been directed towards Afghans in neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, and £11 million to support communities in Pakistan most affected by the influx of refugees.

### Afghanistan

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on food distribution in Afghanistan. [25271]

**Hilary Benn:** The World Food Programme (WFP) continues to make good progress in transporting food aid to Afghanistan. It delivered a record 116,000 metric tonnes of food during the month of December alone, using a network of some 2,000 trucks, as well as air and barge operations. It is working to keep routes open over the winter using all-weather vehicles and specialised snow teams.

As part of its operations, WFP is also targeting vulnerable people in urban centres. Last month, some 1.3 million people received food rations in Kabul. Food aid will be distributed to a further 0.25 million people in Herat this week. There are, however still pockets of insecurity where access is difficult, particularly in the south and east, around Kandahar and Jalalabad.

### Displaced People (Tora Bora)

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the number of displaced people in Tora Bora region; and what assistance is being provided to those people. [25272]

**Hilary Benn:** Continuing insecurity in the Tora Bora area means that it is difficult to provide accurate figures. However, UN agencies and NGOs estimate that between 1,000 and 2,000 families have moved from the area to stay with relatives in neighbouring districts, including Jalalabad city.

United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs are providing the displaced in those districts with food, shelter and other essential supplies.

### Palestine

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what proportion of her Department's *(a)* bilateral and *(b)* multilateral spending in the Palestinian territories goes towards furthering peace and security in the region; [25270]

(2) how much of her Department's *(a)* funds disbursed though the European Union and *(b)* bilateral aid budget go to the Palestinian territories. [25269]

**Hilary Benn:** In the current financial year we expect to spend about £14 million bilaterally to support development in the Palestinian territories. Our multilateral contributions comprise: £25 million in 2001 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA); 5 per cent. of the World Bank's resources (about £13 million since 1994); and 17 per cent. (about £30 million in 2001) of the European Commission's development budget which includes our share of the EC contribution to UNRWA. All these efforts are designed to contribute towards peace and security in the region by helping to build capacity in the Palestinian Authority, and meeting the basic needs of the local people.

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the *(a)* charities and *(b)* NGOs she funds which work in the Palestinian territories. [25268]

**Hilary Benn:** It is not possible to distinguish precisely between NGOs and charities. We currently fund development projects with the following organisations:

Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees
Medical Aid for Palestinians
Save the Children Fund
Gaza Community Mental Health
Oxfam
Palestinian Hydrology Group
Healthlink Worldwide
Tamer Institute for Community Education
Teacher Creativity Centre
Islamic Relief
World University Service
Middle East Non Violence and Democracy
World Vision
Multipurpose Resource Centre
Near East Foundation
Palestinian Agriculture Relief Committees
Islah Charitable Organisation
Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation
Ard El Insan Organisation
Palestine Red Crescent Society
National Foundation for Investment and Development
Sunbula Organisation
National Society for the Visually Handicapped
Family Defence Society
Palestinian Law Society.

### Transnational Crimes

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is providing to developing countries wishing to *(a)* ratify and *(b)* implement the UN convention against organised trans-national crimes. [25264]

**Hilary Benn:** We are working with the international community and governments in many countries to address the poverty caused by weaknesses in the areas covered by the convention. We give support to: international measures against the trafficking of women and children, for example, assistance and training for withdrawing them from such exploitation and reintegrating those affected into the community; strengthening legislative measures against corruption; improving controls against money laundering (including regional and international collaborative mechanisms); developing mechanisms for asset seizure and recovery (including international co-operation); assisting countries in accessing mutual legal assistance from the UK; and helping to build capacity in enforcement authorities (in particular, the judiciary, the police and customs services).

### Ethiopia

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department provides to displaced people in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia. [25267]

**Hilary Benn:** Since March 2001 we have committed £6 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross for their operations in Ethiopia. This support includes assistance to internally displaced persons in Tigray.

### Cities Alliance

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department has *(a)* allocated and *(b)* given to Cities Alliance. [25265]

**Hilary Benn:** DFID has supported the Cities Alliance since its inception. We have allocated £700,000 per annum for the core budget over the three years starting in 2000. The first year's allocation has been fully utilised. To date the total amount given to Cities Alliance is £1,050,000. In addition we have made provision for some non-core technical assistance in connection with Cities Alliance.

### European Council (Laeken)

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department had at the European Council's meeting in Laeken; and if she will make a statement. [25274]

**Hilary Benn:** The European Council meeting at Laeken on 14–15 December 2001 was attended by the Prime Minister. The conclusions of the meeting were deposited in the House Library and the Prime Minister made a statement to the House on 17 December.

Paragraphs 53–56 of the conclusions deal with development co-operation. The UK strongly supports EU work to improve the co-ordination of European and international development policies, as a contribution to the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development in March and the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development in September. We also support EU efforts to encourage progress towards the target of providing 0.7 per cent. of gross national income as official development assistance. We are prepared to examine the proposal to establish a Euro-Mediterranean Development Bank but believe that the first step in improving the effectiveness of EU financial support to countries of the Mediterranean region must be to deliver funds from the EC's MEDA programme more effectively.

### Ebola

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department has taken in response to *(a)* the recent outbreak of ebola in Gabon, and *(b)* the cases reported in Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. [25266]

**Hilary Benn:** We have supported the World Health Organisation (WHO) in building up capacity to respond effectively to ebola fever by supporting the creation of the global outbreak alert and response network under which outbreaks such as these are dealt with.

An international team from the network is currently working closely with teams from the respective Ministries of Health in the countries affected.

### Great Apes Survival Project

**Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department is offering to the Great Apes Survival Project. [25806]

**Hilary Benn:** The main UK Government support for the Great Apes Survival Project (GrASP) will be provided through the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Our Department's work on poverty reduction and the promotion of sustainable forest management in range states is expected to make a positive contribution to ape conservation. To this end we will continue to liaise closely with United Nations Environment programme, DEFRA and other GrASP stakeholders.

### Infrastructure Projects

**Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if an environmental impact assessment is carried out on every infrastructure project funded by her Department. [25816]

**Hilary Benn:** Our procedures require that all projects are screened for their potential impact on the environment. If initial screening indicates that an activity could have significant impacts on the environment, further investigation such as Environmental Analysis or a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) must be undertaken. While our Department checks the need for an EIA and the adequacy of them where they are required, the assessment itself is often financed and carried out by others. Where we are funding the improvement of an existing enterprise or facility, an environmental audit would be undertaken rather than an EIA. All projects funded by our Department must comply with in-country guidelines or legislation. These may require an EIA to be carried out.

### Sierra Leone

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is on the future delivery of United Kingdom humanitarian aid in Sierra Leone; and if she will make a statement. [25412]

**Hilary Benn:** We stand ready to respond quickly to new humanitarian requests from the UN and other agencies as they emerge. We have committed £12 million for humanitarian activities in Sierra Leone and neighbouring countries over the last 18 months.

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her assessment is of links between Sierra Leone and Liberia and the effect of these on the delivery of United Kingdom humanitarian aid; and if she will make a statement. [25410]

**Hilary Benn:** Formal diplomatic links between Sierra Leone and Liberia have improved of late, and both countries remain members of the Mano River Union. The state of the relationship does not affect our ability to deliver humanitarian assistance to either county. We have committed £12 million to humanitarian activities in Sierra Leone and other countries in the region over the last 18 months.

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what level of representation by her Department in Sierra Leone she considers appropriate. [25409]

**Hilary Benn:** DFID's day-to-day representational interests in Sierra Leone are looked after by the British high commission in Freetown, which is headed by a senior-grade high commissioner drawn from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Development Section is headed by an experienced DFID officer. We consider this level of representation to be appropriate for our needs.

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will respond to the request from the Army to have a senior official from her Department at the same senior decision-making level as the Army officers in the field in Sierra Leone. [25414]

**Hilary Benn:** We have received no formal request. Officials discussed the proposal informally with UK military representatives in Sierra Leone last year, but concluded that there was not a strong case for having a dedicated senior grade DFID person posted to Sierra Leone.

### Departmental Officials

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is on the need for her Department's officials in-country to have equivalent decision-making powers and be at the equivalent decision-making level as military and diplomatic counterparts. [25411]

**Hilary Benn:** The heads of department for International Development offices overseas have substantial delegated authority. In some cases this may exceed that of their diplomatic and military counterparts. These posts are graded using standard job evaluation, relying on job weight analysis. It would not be possible or appropriate to apply any general policy based on equivalence of authority, the nature and comparability of which vary greatly from post to post.

### Vietnam

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to link future aid to Vietnam to improvements in human rights. [25294]

**Clare Short:** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights sets out every person's entitlement to social, economic, political and civil rights. Our work to support the reduction of poverty is focused on improving the human rights of the poor. Our expanding programme in Vietnam reflects the Vietnam Government's strong track record in reducing poverty from 74 per cent. of the population in 1984 to 37 per cent. in 1998. We are working to address the root causes of disadvantage, for example through rural livelihoods programmes in areas of remaining high poverty and large ethnic minority populations, and through work in primary education aimed at disadvantaged groups.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many complaints have been reported in her Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; and how many of them related to special advisers. [25339]

**Clare Short:** None.

### Angola

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial assistance is provided to Angola; what proportion is used to promote reconciliation in that country; and if she will make a statement. [25751]

**Hilary Benn:** The Department for International Development's bilateral aid budget to Angola for this financial year (2000–02) is £3.7 million, of which £2.5 million has been earmarked for development assistance. Support is mainly provided through international NGOs, to encourage trust, collaboration and partnerships between community organisations and local government. Such community co-operation and organisation contributes toward the strengthening of civil society, which is a prerequisite to future peace and stability in Angola.

Our major commitment to Angola is the Luanda Urban Poverty Programme (£6.65 million over three years). It began in July 1999, and aims to improve the economic livelihoods and access to basic services for the urban poor. In addition, it will enhance the capacity of communities and national NGOs to work with local government to meet basic needs.

We also provide limited support to the Government of Angola to assist with the development of its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

In addition to our bilateral aid programme, the Civil Society Challenge Fund (CSCF) is supporting civil society-strengthening programmes in Angola. In Luanda we are implementing a £250,000 project that will strengthen the capacity of local NGOs to disseminate human rights and peace-building information. The CSCF is also supporting peace-building and democratisation through raising the awareness of crucial target groups (teachers, local leaders, community workers, journalists, etc.) about human rights, the rule of law and promoting citizenship.

In 2000, EU aid to Angola totalled £26.05 million. The UK contributed 19 per cent. toward this total (£4.95 million). The figure for 2001 is not yet available.

### Tanzania

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received from the World Bank and Oxfam regarding the impact of the pending sale of a military air control system by BAE Systems to the Government of Tanzania on that country's economic development; and if she will make a statement. [25457]

**Clare Short:** In my capacity as UK Governor of the World bank I am fully aware of bank concerns about the proposed sale of the BAE air traffic control system on the development of Tanzania. The concern relates to the system's technical applicability and value for money. These concerns were discussed with donors and undertakings made by the Government of Tanzania prior

to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank board meetings at the end of November 2001. The Government of Tanzania undertook to work with the International Civil Aviation Organisation in identifying Tanzania's civil aviation requirements and to explore possible modification of the contract with BAE to meet these requirements. On this basis the bank and fund boards agreed that Tanzania would reach Completion Point under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative at their November meetings.

I raised the World Bank concerns with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is responsible for decisions on export licence applications.

I have received no representations from Oxfam.

## TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

### Rents

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of rent increases in 2003–04 as a result of the formula rent on the pension credit arrangements to be brought in in 2003. [20839]

**Ms Keeble:** Under the Pension Credit, which replaces the minimum income guarantee from October 2003, all housing benefit recipients in the social sector will, as now, have any increases in their rent paid for in full.

In addition, DWP Ministers have announced that the starting income threshold for housing benefit will be raised in line with the pension credit, so that no pensioner loses housing benefit as a result of the more generous pension credit.

### London Underground

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 102W, for what reason it is not possible to estimate what cost might be involved if he decides not to proceed with PPP for the London Underground. [25132]

**Mr. Jamieson:** It is too early at this stage to say how much grant London Underground would require if the Tube modernisation plans were not to proceed. However, it is possible to state the compensation that London Underground has agreed to pay bidders if it should cancel the competitions for reasons other than value for money. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 19 December 2001 *Official Report*, column 503W.

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the system-wide average mean distance between failure figures for trains operated by London Underground for each year between (a) 1990–91 and 1993–94 and (b) the latest figure for 2001–02. [23269]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is a matter for London Underground who inform me that the system-wide average mean distance for 1993–94 and 2001–02 is 4,146 km and 6,472 km respectively. Unfortunately London Underground would need to undertake detailed archive research to obtain comparative data for 1990–91 and this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library a detailed breakdown of the 48 per cent. of costs not subjected to sensitivity analysis in the assessment by London Underground Limited of the PPP and private sector comparison; and if he will make a statement. [24891]

**Mr. Jamieson:** London Underground is carrying out a thorough evaluation of the value for money of bids, including a wide range of sensitivity tests. I understand that London Underground intends to publish this evaluation, but not until it has concluded its negotiations with bidders. To publish the evaluation any earlier would reveal London Underground's negotiating position and so undermine its ability to achieve best value.

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the reliability of the Circle line. [25385]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Day to day management of the Circle line is a matter for London Underground. This line, like other parts of the underground, has suffered historic under-investment and the service provided has encountered problems arising both from this and from staff shortages which affected the reliability of operations particularly in 2001–02. I am satisfied that these problems are in the process of being rectified in the short term, in particular through London Underground's programme of work to improve reliability across the network. In the medium and long term, the problems of under-investment will be resolved by the large-scale investment that will be brought into the system through our tube modernisation plans, which will deliver increased capacity, improved reliability and higher quality.

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on how many days in 2001 platform announcements were made advising passengers awaiting Circle line services to take a District line train and change elsewhere because of failure to adhere to the timetable. [25386]

**Mr. Jamieson:** This is an operational matter for London Underground who inform me that this information is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the cost of maintaining the Charing Cross branch of the Jubilee line since it was closed to passenger traffic. [25384]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I understand from London Underground Ltd. that the Jubilee line track between Green Park and Charing Cross and the old Jubilee line areas of Charing Cross station are maintained at an annual cost of £155,000.

Although the track is not used by customers, it is still part of the underground's operational capability and is used by Jubilee line trains, eg for turning trains when necessary.

### Departmental Expenditure Limit

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the reasons for the difference between the final voted departmental expenditure limit and provisional outturn for financial year 2000–01, as listed in the Treasury document, Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn, for Vote III, Environment, Transport and the Regions, subcategories *(a)* 1 Housing, construction, regeneration, regional policy, planning and countryside and wildlife, England, *(b)* 2 Roads, local transport and transport industries and *(c)* 4 Local government: England; and if he will make a statement. [24110]

**Dr. Whitehead:** Full details of outturn against 2000–01 voted provision will be published in the appropriation accounts to be presented to the House of Commons by 31 January 2002. The departmental resource account on an accruals basis will also be presented to the House of Commons before 31 January. Updated estimates of the outturn for departmental expenditure limits in 2000–01 on an accrual basis were published in the 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318), Table B16.

### Bull Bars

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment the Government have made of *(a)* the benefits associated with the fitting of bull bars to vehicles in the UK and *(b)* the cost of removing bull bars from vehicles fitted with such bars in the UK; [24291]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact the European Commission recommendations on safer car fronts will have on deaths and serious injuries associated with bull bars. [24290]

**Mr. Jamieson:** A draft regulatory appraisal was prepared in 1997 in connection with a consultation on possible national action on bull bars. Although this identified the benefits of removing bull bars, it did not identify benefits associated with fitting them. The cost to owners of removing bull bars was estimated at £110 per vehicle, being £35 for physical removal and £75 related to assumptions linked to loss of utility.

We have not made a separate assessment of the benefits expected from the bull bar aspect of the European Commission's proposal on pedestrian protection.

### Mobile Phones

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment the Government have made of the number of people using mobile phones while driving, since the publication of the White Paper "Tomorrow's Road—safer for everyone". [24297]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Three observational surveys of mobile phones use while driving have been carried out for the Department by TRL Ltd. The latest survey, carried out in October this year, showed that 2 per cent. of the 27,900 drivers observed were using a mobile phone. 85 per cent. of the phones observed in use were hand-held.

The surveys are carried out at road junctions at the same time as the seat belt wearing surveys and may not be representative of the extent of mobile phone use by drivers on all roads. Proposals for more detailed surveys are currently being considered.

### Housing Stock Transfers

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish rules of conduct for stock transfer ballots that include rules to govern the issue of lists of tenants who have yet to vote. [24435]

**Ms Keeble:** Stock transfer ballots are carried out by independent organisations who have their own rules and procedures in place to ensure that the ballot is conducted properly. It would not therefore be appropriate for the Department to publish rules of conduct.

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the legal status of offer documents sent to council tenants prior to a ballot on the transfer of housing to a registered social landlord is; and to what extent the offer made is legally binding on the new landlord. [24434]

**Ms Keeble:** The offer document forms the first stage of the formal consultation requirements set out in section 106 of and Schedule 3A to the Housing Act 1985 (as inserted by section 6 of and Schedule 1 to the Housing and Planning Act 1986), which a local authority must follow prior to a housing stock transfer. The offer document should contain full details of the transfer proposals and the implications for tenants. Tenants have 28 days during which to comment. The local authority may then revise the proposals to reflect these comments. If, following a positive tenants' ballot, the transfer subsequently goes ahead, the promises made in the offer document are incorporated into the transfer agreement between the local authority and the new landlord which is a legally binding contract.

### Council Tax

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the change in Band D council tax in the last four years. [24622]

**Mr. Raynsford:** In the last four years, English local authorities have set average Band D council tax increases of 8.6 per cent. (1998–99), 6.8 per cent. (1999–2000), 6.1 per cent. (2000–01) and 6.4 per cent. (2001–02). Decisions on council tax are for local authorities to take, after consulting with their local electorate and taxpayers.

### Taxis

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries were caused by (i) taxi drivers and (ii) mini-cab drivers in each of the last 10 years. [25123]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The number of people *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in road accidents involving taxis in each of the last 10 years is shown in the table. It is not

possible to give the proportion of these accidents which were caused by the taxi driver. Information on mini-cabs is not available.

*Casualties in road accidents involving taxis—Great Britain*

| | Severity of casualty | |
|---|---|---|
| *Accident year* | *Killed* | *Seriously injured* |
| 1991 | 36 | 599 |
| 1992 | 31 | 578 |
| 1993 | 17 | 554 |
| 1994 | 32 | 665 |
| 1995 | 31 | 616 |
| 1996 | 31 | 564 |
| 1997 | 34 | 524 |
| 1998 | 31 | 629 |
| 1999 | 39 | 646 |
| 2000 | 50 | 600 |

In 1994 the definition of taxi was changed to include all vehicles registered as hackney carriages, regardless of construction.

## Disabled Facilities Grants

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many disabled facilities grants have been made, and how much has been spent on average in each of the past five years. [24953]

**Ms Keeble:** The number and average value of disabled facilities grants paid in England over the past five financial years are given in the table. These grants were made under section 1 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and section 101 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to private owners and tenants.

| | *Numbers paid* | *Average grant paid (£)* |
|---|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 23,263 | 4,270 |
| 1997–98 | 23,917 | 4,200 |
| 1998–99 | 24,135 | 4,480 |
| 1999–2000 | 25,189 | 4,880 |
| 2000–01 | 27,655 | 4,650 |

## Chemicals

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the chemical industry on the implementation of the proposed amendments to the Chemicals (Hazard and Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 1994. [25306]

**Dr. Whitehead:** While there have been no formal discussions at ministerial level, officials at the Health and Safety Executive have had extensive discussions with the chemical industry and with the relevant trade associations about the Regulations.

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the time scale for companies in the chemicals industry to implement the proposed amendments to the Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 1994. [25729]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Health and Safety Commission has recently completed a public consultation exercise on these Regulations with a view to introducing them in the first half of 2002.

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received from companies in the chemical industry about the impact of the proposed amendments to the Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 1994. [25308]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Health and Safety Commission has recently completed a three-month consultation exercise on these regulations and has received some 45 responses which are currently being analysed. I also received a letter about the proposed regulations from the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on behalf of a constituent.

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the costs to the chemistry industry of implementing the proposed amendments to the Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 1994. [25307]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Health and Safety Commission's recent consultative document, a copy of which is in the Library, contained an initial estimate of a range of costs and sought further information from consultees.

## Westminster City Council

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with Westminster city council concerning the recovery of the money due from Dame Shirley Porter and David Weeks; and if he will make a statement. [25382]

**Dr. Whitehead:** No such discussions have taken place. Recovery of the surcharge is a matter for Westminster city council.

## A14

**Mr. Djanogly:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Highways Agency is *(a)* to start and *(b)* to finish its review of the plans on the A14 road improvements; when he will start consultation on the plans; whether the proposed public transport element of the plans will cover from Huntingdon to Cambridge; when he will complete the public transport element of the plans; and whether he will provide financing to complete the road element of the plans. [25147]

**Mr. Spellar:** I have asked the Highways Agency to carry out preparatory work on the major A14 improvements included in the Preferred Plan of the Cambridge to Huntingdon Multi-Modal Study with a view to an early entry to the Targeted Programme of Improvements. The Highways Agency will begin this work in January 2002 with the aim of finishing it within six months. Public consultation on the route can be expected within 12 months of the scheme's entry into the Targeted Programme of Improvements.

We have endorsed the general approach that the public transport elements of the Preferred Plan should be in place before extra road capacity is provided. The Preferred Plan proposed that a guided bus system should extend from Cambridge through to the centre of Huntingdon, though capacity on existing roads to allow a dedicated bus corridor from St. Ives to Huntingdon would only be available following the opening of the new A14 bypass. We have encouraged Cambridgeshire county council as the local transport authority to come forward with a full appraisal of the guided bus project within six months. Its completion will depend upon an order under Transport and Works Act 1992 powers.

The 10-Year Transport Plan provides the resources for implementing decisions arising from the multi-modal studies.

### Social Housing

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 225W, on social housing, if he will list the sources of funding for the remaining new social housing new build units. [25539]

**Ms Keeble:** 98.71 per cent. of social housing new build units approved for building in 2000–01 were funded by a combination of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme; public subsidy from a body such as a local authority or health authority (which may consist of free or discounted land or cash contributions); private sector borrowing; and registered social landlords' own reserves.

### European Transport Policy

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the European Union White Paper, "European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to Decide". [25365]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The European Commission published its White Paper "European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to Decide" on 12 December 2001. The White Paper itself has no legislative or executive force at this stage but it indicates areas where the Commission intends to initiate action over the next few years.

The Government set out their initial view on the White Paper in an Explanatory Memorandum (11932/01) to the Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees. To help inform the Government's position further, the Department launched a formal consultation exercise on 1 November 2001, seeking views on the White Paper and its potential impacts upon the transport sector from the transport industry, the devolved Administrations and other interested parties. The deadline for responses is 31 January 2002.

### Regional Assemblies

**Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many written representations he has received in the last 12 months from people in the Wealden constituency expressing support for an elected regional assembly in the South East of England. [25615]

**Dr. Whitehead:** None.

### Housing Fitness

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost was of the development and piloting of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and of version 1 of the guidance between when the Legal Research Institute at the University of Warwick was commissioned to undertake this work; when the report on the system's development and the guidance were published; and what is the estimated cost of the further research projects designed to refine the system due to be completed during 2002. [25544]

**Ms Keeble:** The development and piloting of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System cost about £740,000 including VAT from the appointment of the University of Warwick in January 1998 up to publication, in July 2000, of the Report on Development and Version 1 of the Guidance. The estimated cost of further research and evaluation from August 2000 until December 2002 is £560,000 including VAT.

### Local Government Finance

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the local authorities subject to capping in the local government finance settlement; the amount forgone by each of those authorities and the average reduction to all local authorities if the cap had not been introduced; and if he will make a statement. [25748]

**Dr. Whitehead:** We did not use our reserve capping powers in 2001–02. We will consider the position for 2002–03 when local authorities have set their budgets.

### Corporate Governance

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the methodology used to carry out corporate governance reviews of local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [25741]

**Dr. Whitehead:** For the purposes of inspecting corporate governance arrangements in local authorities, these are defined as:

> The systems and processes by which local authorities lead, direct and control their functions and relate to their communities and partners.

This definition and the framework to inspect these arrangements are based on the framework for developing a local code of corporate governance published in 2001 jointly by the Chartered Institute for Public Finance Accountants (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE). This has five main themes: Community Focus; Structures and Processes; Risk Management and Internal Control; Service Delivery Arrangements; and Standards of Conduct. In addition, a corporate governance inspection will address other, cross-cutting elements or indicators of corporate performance, such as people and their relationships, the role of Information and Communications Technology, e-services and political and managerial leadership, among others.

Corporate Governance inspections build directly on the methodological approach developed for best value inspections of local authority services, including the

collection of evidence from an assessment of key council documents, interviews with key personnel, group discussions with staff, the public and stakeholders. Inspections last one week or two weeks, in lower and upper tier authorities respectively and as with best value service inspections, councils are briefed throughout the inspection process and have the opportunity to respond to the inspection findings, presented to them shortly after the on-site phase has ended, and on the draft report.

Corporate Governance inspection teams will generally comprise one from each of the following personnel:

Managing Inspector (a senior inspector from the Audit Commission)

Best Value Inspector (from the Audit Commission)

District Auditor/Audit Manager, or alternative financial specialist

Chief Executive (or ex-CEX), or senior manager in a council

Council Leader, or senior member

Benefit Fraud Inspector

Ofsted Inspector (in inspections of upper tier authorities)

Social Services Inspector (in inspections of upper tier authorities).

The Local Government White Paper, published on 11 December, will require all upper tier authorities to be subject to a comprehensive performance assessment. These assessments will be informed by the experience of using the corporate governance inspection methodology.

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those local authorities who have *(a)* completed, *(b)* are undergoing and *(c)* will start in the year to the end of April 2002 a corporate governance review; and if he will make a statement. [25738]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The information is as follows:

*(a)* Hackney, Walsall, Hillingdon, Enfield

*(b)* Corby, Mendip, Bromsgrove, Rotherham, Bristol

*(c)* Torbay, Merton, Rossendale, Hull, Harlow.

The Audit Commission is finalising its wider approach to the comprehensive assessment of performance in councils, initially for all 150 upper tier authorities in England, as required by the recent Local Government White Paper. It will use the experience from these early corporate governance inspections to develop an approach that enables inspectors—including experienced practitioners from local government—to assess key features of corporate governance arrangements.

### Social and Economic Regeneration

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements are in place to ensure joined up working to deliver the social regeneration and economic regeneration in the most deprived communities; and if he will make a statement. [25523]

**Ms Keeble:** The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) was established to spearhead delivery of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and to bring a joined up approach to neighbourhood renewal. NRU's staff have been recruited from a range of Government Departments, as well as from the other parts of the public, voluntary, community and private sectors.

At ministerial level, the work of the NRU is overseen by a Cabinet-level Ministerial Committee, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. This Committee will work closely with a Steering Group of Permanent Secretaries.

At regional level, Government Offices (GOs) join up Government policy in the regions and act as a voice for the regions in central Government. GOs have particular responsibilities for neighbourhood renewal, including helping the NRU to oversee local renewal strategies in their region.

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are the Government's umbrella mechanism for linking local service providers with local authorities, business and the community and voluntary sector to provide a strategic view of local priorities. LSPs will prepare the local neighbourhood renewal strategy, which will clearly set out a local strategic framework for action that responds to neighbourhood needs and puts them in the context of the area as a whole.

### Parish Polls

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to restrict the subjects raised in parish polls to matters for which the council organising the poll has responsibility. [25616]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Local Government Act 1972 already restricts the subjects raised in parish polls to questions, raised at a parish meeting, on parish affairs.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to increase the threshold of the numbers of voters required to request a parish poll in large parish and town councils; and if he will make a statement. [25401]

**Dr. Whitehead:** As part of our initiatives, following the Rural White Paper (Cm 4909), to strengthen local democracy at parish level we will be reviewing the operation of parish polls including the threshold of the number of voters required to request a poll in large parish and town councils. Any change to the current requirements will require primary legislation.

### Enron

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 800W, on Enron, if new ownership of the former Enron power station at Teesside qualifies for investigation. [25437]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The change of ownership of a company is not, normally, a prompt for an investigation by Health and Safety Executive Inspectors. Any consideration and decision concerning whether or not to carry out an inspection or investigation would depend on the circumstances of the change of ownership including the likely effect on the operation of the plant.

### Departmental Publicity

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list each *(a)* public relations and *(b)* advertising firm that has been

employed by his Department and its predecessor since 1997, indicating the subject area and campaign they worked on in each case. [25710]

**Mr. Byers:** The following public relations and advertising companies have been employed by DETR/DTLR since 1997:

(a) Public relations:

Fishburn Hedges: "are you doing your bit?" environmental publicity campaign

The Forster Company: Noise Awareness day

Charles Bailey: Mayor and Assembly for London

Central Office of Information: Fire safety.

(a) Advertising:

Abbot Mead Vickers/BBDO: Road Safety and "are you doing your bit?" campaigns

D'Arcy: road safety, focussing primarily on education for children

WCRS: Mayor and Assembly for London

BDH TWBA: Quality Mark scheme

The Leith Agency: Rough Sleepers Unit's Change a Life campaign

Ogilvy and Mather: Foot and Mouth Public information

Euro RSCG Wnek Gosper: Fire Safety.

## Councillor Complaints

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what is the average length of time taken by district auditors to respond to complaints by councillors in the latest year for which figures are available; [25709]

(2) how many cases of complaints from councillors to district auditors are outstanding; and how many of these have been outstanding since *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000. [25708]

**Mr. Byers:** The Audit Commission does not distinguish in its monitoring of matters raised with auditors either between statutory objections and other matters, nor between those raised by councillors and members of the public. The total number of matters raised with, and disposed of by, auditors in any one year is in excess of 100. The majority of all such matters tend to relate to small sums of money in local councils. The Audit Commission does monitor complex and high-value audit cases. There are currently 11 such cases. In six of these the auditors' investigations have been ongoing for more than two years. In the other five cases, the investigation has been on-going for less than two years.

## Local Government Settlement

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the GLA precept on the council tax of London boroughs in reaching the local government settlement for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [25707]

**Mr. Byers:** London boroughs set their own council tax, to which a GLA precept is added when bills are sent to council taxpayers in London.

The London boroughs and the GLA should seek the views of their local electorate and taxpayers on the trade-off between changes in tax and changes in service levels.

From next spring, council taxpayers in London will be able to see clearly by how much their council tax has changed for their borough and for the GLA. This will be shown up-front on the bill, not hidden away in the leaflet.

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, (1) pursuant to his oral answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 137, what impact the change in grant to shire districts will have on the overall local government settlement; and from which budget the additional funding required will be taken; [25842]

(2) pursuant to his oral answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 137, if he will set out the adjustments which will be made to the 2001–02 baseline for shire districts and the basis of the new calculation; [25841]

(3) pursuant to his oral answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 137, if he will list *(a)* the alternative baseline for 2001–02 for each shire district, *(b)* the increase in grant based on 2.3 per cent. increase on the (i) original baseline and (ii) revised. [25840]

**Mr. Byers:** In my answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 137 I announced that I would introduce an alternative baseline for 2001–02 which, in effect, adjusts only for the transfers of service for which shire districts are responsible and that, in order to guarantee a minimum 2.3 per cent. increase for shire districts, I would ensure that all shire districts received a minimum grant increase of whichever increase is the greater—2.3 per cent. on the original baseline, or 2.3 per cent. on this alternative baseline.

I will provide further details as part of the final settlement announcement towards the end of January once the consultation period has ended.

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his oral statement of 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 168, if he will set out his reasons for introducing a minimum level of grant increase for the Greater London Authority; and what assessment he has made of the impact of that decision. [25843]

**Mr. Byers:** In both 2000–01 and 2001–02 the Greater London authority was guaranteed a minimum level of grant increase of 0 per cent. under the Central Support Protection Grant scheme, as were other authorities without education and social services responsibilities.

For 2001–02 we replaced the Central Support Protection Grant for authorities with education and social services responsibilities by the floor and ceiling damping mechanism which operates directly on the amount of Revenue Support Grant payable to an authority.

For 2002–03 we have extended floor and ceiling damping to cover all local authorities who are entitled to receive Revenue Support Grant, and have also raised the minimum level of grant increase for authorities without education and social services responsibilities from 0 per cent. to 2.3 per cent.

Providing a minimum level of grant increase, based on a like-for-like comparison of grants in 2002–03 with what they would have been in 2001–02 if the transfers and responsibilities applying in 2002–03 had been in place in 2001–02, provides stability and so helps local authorities to plan effectively. The floor and ceiling damping mechanism is fairer and more transparent than the damping previously provided through the Central Support Protection Grant scheme.

### Sewage Workers

**Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he is taking to monitor health and safety standards for sewage workers. [25446]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is responsible for monitoring health and safety standards for those at work, including sewage workers.

HSE's Utilities National Group, is represented on Water UK's national health and safety committee and contributed to "Water Ahead" a joint strategic plan for improving health and safety in the industry.

HSE is also working with Water UK on "Clearwater 2010", the industry's project to improve occupational health over the next 10 years. This forms a part of this industry's contribution to the Government's initiatives to reduce accidents and occupational ill health problems over the next 10 years, namely "Revitalising Health and Safety" and "Securing Health Together".

### Speed Cameras

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will encourage police and highways authorities to post on their websites details of the location of speed cameras; and if he will make a statement. [25388]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Handbook of Rules for entry to the netting-off camera funding scheme provides advice on publicising all aspects of camera operation locally. The development and use of local websites is one recommended local communications vehicle.

### Rough Sleepers

**Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made by the Social Exclusion Unit to reduce the number of rough sleepers. [23455]

**Ms Keeble:** The Rough Sleepers Unit was established in April 1999 following a recommendation of the Social Exclusion Unit in their 1998 report into rough sleeping. The unit was tasked by the Prime Minister to reduce the number of people sleeping rough in England to as near to zero as possible and by at least two thirds by 2002.

The Rough Sleepers Unit published its strategy on tackling rough sleeping, "Coming in from the Cold", in December 1999. The strategy outlined a raft of new policies and services to deliver the target, which are now all in place across England. These services include helping people sleeping rough on the streets with drug, alcohol and mental health problems; helping former rough sleepers rebuild their lives through education, training and employment; and preventing a new generation of rough sleepers particularly those leaving care, the armed forces and prison.

The Prime Minister announced on 3 December 2001 that his target had been met and figures show that there are now 532 people sleeping rough in England, compared with around 1,850 in June 1998. This represents a reduction of 71 per cent.

The success has been due to the RSU's strategy and the hard work of key partners in central and local government and the voluntary and private sector. The RSU's second progress report, published in summer 2001, shows the significant impact the "Coming in from the Cold" strategy has made to individual lives.

My noble Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning announced on 3 December that a new Homelessness Directorate would be established in January to bring together and invigorate exiting work to help homeless people and to develop new work to prevent homelessness and investigate its underlying causes. The directorate will also continue to help vulnerable people sleeping on the nation's streets to come inside, help people to rebuild their lives and prevent tomorrow's rough sleepers from hitting the streets in the first place.

The new directorate will be responsible for taking forward the Government's strategic framework for homelessness in the new year.

### Railtrack

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department has taken to encourage Railtrack to reverse its decision to withdraw from the redevelopment of Gourock station. [25434]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Department has not taken any such steps. The future funding of redevelopment of Gourock station is under discussion between Railtrack, the Scottish Executive and the Strategic Rail Authority.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) whether the proposed company limited by guarantee will need to secure adequate commercial loan facilities to enable it to repay the commercial loan agreement between the Department and the Administrator simultaneously with the ending of the Railtrack administration; [24174]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 1014W, on Railtrack, from what potential sources the proposed company limited by guarantee would make a payment to the administrator on the final day of administration; and if he will make a statement. [24254]

**Mr. Jamieson:** It is for the CLG bid team, established under the sponsorship of the Strategic Rail Authority, to put a proposal to the Administrator. The repayment of the commercial loan from the Department to Railtrack plc in administration is a matter which all potential bidders will need to address in their proposals. It is for the Administrator to put a proposal for a transfer scheme before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State based on any propositions he receives.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 1014W on Railtrack, if the Government's policy is to permit the disposal of Railtrack assets to secure the funds listed. [24255]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The cash advances of £1,228 million referred to in my answer of 13 December 2001, on Railtrack, are to be recouped from new debt, not from the realisation of assets.

**Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to bring forward proposals to establish a company limited by guarantee to take over the functions previously undertaken by Railtrack. [24138]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The timing of a proposal to the Administrator is a matter for the CLG bid team, established under the sponsorship of the Strategic Rail Authority. It is for the Administrator to put a proposal for a transfer scheme before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State based on any propositions he receives. All potential bidders will be aware that both the Administrator and the Government are keen to keep the period of administration as short as possible.

**Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps Railtrack plc is taking to ensure that structural faults, with particular reference to the masonry of the Glottenham Lane overpass in Robertsbridge, are identified and repaired on the south eastern rail network. [22923]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I understand that Railtrack engineers will inspect the relevant overpass as soon as possible.

**Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many signal failures were reported in November on *(a)* the UK rail network, *(b)* Railtrack's southern zone, *(c)* the south eastern network and *(d)* Kent and Sussex; what the figures were for November 1997; and what steps have been taken to ensure that faults are identified and repaired before serious incidents arise. [22924]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I understand from Railtrack that the comparative information requested is not available.

### Passenger Rail Franchises

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many passenger rail franchises he estimates will be contracted in line with the original timetable for renewals. [22896]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Strategic Rail Authority has reviewed its plans for renewing franchises in light of the Secretary of State's Policy Statement on Passenger Rail Franchising. It announced its new franchising programme on 19 December 2001.

### Railways (Winter Estimates)

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the change in gross provision for other railways in the winter estimates. [24122]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The change in gross provision for other railways in the Winter Supplementary Estimates 2001–02 is explained in Section lvii on page 8 of those estimates.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the change in gross provision for the Strategic Rail Authority in the winter estimates; [24121]

(2) if he will make a statement on the increased provision in section lxviii of the winter estimates. [24120]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The change in gross provision for the Strategic Rail Authority in the winter supplementary estimates 2001–02 is explained in section lxviii on page 9 of those estimates.

### European Directive (Railways)

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the implications of Directive 91/440/EEC for the future structure of railways; [24173]

(2) if he will make a statement on the implications of Directive 2001/14/EC on the future management of the UK rail infrastructure. [24172]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Directive 91/440/EEC, as amended by Directive 2001/12/EC, and Directive 2001/14/EC include a number of requirements concerning the relationships between the member state, managers of railway infrastructure, railway undertakings and a regulatory/appeal body. The Government are taking these fully into account in decisions on the future management of railway infrastructure and any changes to railway regulation in the UK.

### Channel Tunnel Rail Freight

**Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representation he has made of the European Commission concerning the impact on intra-community trade of the SNCF restriction of channel tunnel rail freight services. [24098]

**Mr. Jamieson:** As a result of contacts made directly by the freight operators, the European Commission has twice asked the French Government in the context of Regulation 2679/98 on the free movement of goods, what steps they are taking to resolve the problems caused by people entering the channel tunnel which has led to the disruption of freight traffic through it. The Government are monitoring developments and urging the French to take all necessary steps to resolve this issue.

### Rail Safety

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who has responsibility for *(a)* setting and *(b)* enforcing the maximum capacity of railway carriages in order to protect public safety. [24874]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Responsibility for monitoring overcrowding on commuter services rests with the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA). The responsibility for the day to day safety, welfare and convenience of passengers using the railway rests with railway operating companies.

There are no Health and Safety Regulations or absolute limits set on the numbers of passengers who may be carried as all rolling stock is designed to run safely at maximum capacity. Some train operating companies are required to carry out passenger counts on commuters to meet the passengers in excess of capacity (PIXC) limits set by the SRA.

### Rail Privatisation

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the analysis that his Department has undertaken regarding the proportion of the cost and efficiency gains envisaged when the railways were first privatised that were eventually realised. [24910]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Department has not undertaken such an analysis.

### Train Drivers

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the minimum time is after which a newly recruited train driver would be permitted to drive a train *(a)* at present and *(b)* five years ago; in each case, whether they would be supervised; and for how long. [24992]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The current requirements recommend between 26 and 29 weeks of driver training before a newly recruited train driver is permitted to drive a train. The driver training period includes a minimum of 225 hours of practical driving under the constant supervision of a qualified instructor driver. Once a driver is deemed competent a two-year supervisory regime is put in place.

Five years ago, companies were training drivers on the basis of British Rail's training programme. In terms of duration, this programme was slightly shorter than now, although the basic components were similar to now.

### Rail Services (Scotland)

**Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what representations he has received relating to the vertical integration of rail services and the railway network within Scotland; [24139]

(2) what representations he has received regarding vertical integration of sections of the rail system. [25914]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Representations have been received both for and against vertical integration from a number of train operating companies and in general correspondence. It is clear that the apparently simple notion of vertical integration subsumes a range of options about which there is no consensus in the rail industry or elsewhere, whether in regard to Scotland or otherwise.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Export Licences

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many export licence applications were received by her Department from companies based in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997; how many were *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused each year; and what the (i) average and (ii) maximum time taken to process applications was in each year. [24841]

**Nigel Griffiths:** These records are not kept on a constituency basis.

Details of all export licensing decisions together with information on performance in processing standard individual export licence applications are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what weight she places on the protection of jobs in areas of high unemployment when considering *(a)* Form 680 applications and *(b)* export licence applications. [25734]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The processing of Form 680 applications for the advance approval for promotion prior to formal application for an export licence is the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence.

All relevant export licence applications are considered on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, including the potential effect on the UK's economic, financial and commercial interests. I refer the hon. Member to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) on 26 October 2000, *Official Report*, columns 199–203W.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the value of business covered *(a)* by Form 680 applications and *(b)* by export licence applications (i) granted and (ii) turned down each year since 1 May 1997. [25735]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The processing of Form 680 applications for the advance approval for promotion prior to formal application for an export licence is the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence.

The value of standard individual export licence (SIEL) applications for which a licence was issued is published by destination in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

It would entail disproportionate cost to establish the value of business covered by SIEL applications refused in each year since 1 May 1997.

### Fuel Poverty

**Mr. Berry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many and what proportion of people over 60 years of age live in households that are fuel poor; [17468]

(2) what her estimate is of the number of *(a)* people and *(b)* households that are in fuel poverty; [17469]

(3) how many and what proportion of those disabled people who receive the middle higher rate of the disability living allowance care component or the higher rate of the mobility component live in households that are fuel poor. [17467]

**Mr. Wilson:** It is estimated that in 2000 there were 2.8 million households in England in fuel poverty (based on income including housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest), or 3.9 million households (based on income excluding housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest), representing falls of 15 per cent. and 13 per cent. respectively compared to 1998. More detailed breakdowns of fuel poverty in 2000 are not available as the estimates for 2000 are broad estimates based on changes in incomes and fuel prices, rather than being based on survey data. Some more detailed breakdowns are available for 1998; however, for some particular analyses the latest information relates to 1996.

The latest available figures indicate that in England 1.9 million (29 per cent.) households headed by an older couple or a single person over the age of 60 were in fuel poverty in 1998. This is based on fuel poverty being defined as when a household needs to spend more than 10 per cent. of its income (including housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest) on fuel in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime. When fuel poverty is defined using income excluding housing benefit or income support for mortgage interest 2.3 million (35 per cent. of) households headed by an older couple or a single person over the age of 60 were in fuel poverty in England in 1998.

The table presents estimates of the number of people and the number of households in England in fuel poverty in 1998, the latest year for which estimates of the number of people in fuel poverty are available.

*Fuel poverty in England in 1998*

*Million*

| | *People* | *Households* |
|---|---|---|
| Fuel poverty defined using income including housing benefit and ISMI[1] | 6.2 | 3.3 |
| Fuel poverty defined using income excluding housing benefit and ISMI[2] | 8.7 | 4.5 |

[1] Fuel poverty defined as when a household needs to spend more than 10 per cent. of its income (including housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest) on fuel in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime.

[2] Fuel poverty defined as when a household needs to spend more than 10 per cent. of its income (excluding housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest) on fuel in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime.

*Source:*

1998 Energy Follow Up Survey to the English House Condition Survey

Information on fuel poverty is not available split by the rate of disability living allowance. However, the latest available information (relating to 1996) on figures for households receiving the different components of the disability living allowance that are in fuel poverty, is available from the Libraries of the House.

An analysis of fuel poverty in England in 1998 was published in August 2001 by DTI and DEFRA, and is available at www.dti.gov.uk/energy/fuelpoverty/index.htm.

Fuel poverty is a devolved matter and therefore it is for the respective Assemblies and Parliament to report on the situation in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

### Instruments of Torture

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what controls she places on the *(a)* manufacture and *(b)* export of instruments of torture; and if she will make a statement. [24553]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The manufacture of electric-shock weapons is regulated by the Firearms Act 1968 as amended.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the then Foreign Secretary, to my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Syd Rapson) on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns 65–66W, which announced a ban on the export or transhipment from the UK of certain specified equipment that has been used for torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

### Steel Industry

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the factors which underlay the recent loss of jobs in Newport at Corus and Alcan plants, with particular reference to the value of *(a)* sterling and *(b)* the euro. [24909]

**Mr. Wilson:** The Government fully understand the difficulties that the weakness of the euro has caused for British industry, particularly manufacturing. However decisions by Corus and Alcan to rationalise their operations, which have unfortunately resulted in job losses, are based on many factors, including the slowdown of the world economy, which are not limited to the value of sterling and the euro.

### Miners' Compensation

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average time scale is between an application by a miner for compensation and the awarding of compensation; and if she will make a statement. [24945]

**Mr. Wilson:** The Handling Agreement for respiratory disease was formally signed on 24 September 1999 and claims could not be processed before this date. The average time scale from this date, or date of claim if after 24 September 1999, to settlement by expedited payment, following spirometry testing, is seven months. The average time scale, as set out above, for settlement via the full Medical Assessment Process is 1 year 11 months.

This does not take into consideration interim payments that the Department has been making since May 1998. These payments are made as soon as IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, are in receipt of the relevant documentation.

Following the resolution of the main outstanding issues for respiratory disease, the number of full and final offers made has risen sharply. The Department continues to identify parts of the process which can be improved and it is envisaged that the volumes of offers should increase as the Department and its contractors continue to ramp up operations.

The Handling Agreement in respect of Vibration White Finger, VWF, was formally signed on 22 January 1998 and claims could not have been processed before this date. The average time scale from this date, or date of claim if after 22 January 1998, to settlement is 1 year 4 months. This also does not include interim payments made.

It is envisaged that all existing claimants will be medically assessed by spring 2002.

Taken together with compensation for respiratory disease, the Department made 7,000 offers, worth £47.7 million in November alone.

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many miners have applied for compensation; how many have been given compensation; how much has been given in compensation to date; and if she will make a statement. [24944]

**Mr. Wilson:** In respect of respiratory disease, IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have registered 173,600 claims, to date. 58,273 individual payments have been made totalling £238.8 million.

With regards to Vibration White Finger, VWF, 133,662 claims have been initiated. 71,954 individual payments have been made amounting to £438.5 million.

Following resolution of the main outstanding issues, IRISC are now making significant numbers of final offers. In November alone, for both respiratory disease and VWF, 7,000 offers were made worth £47.7 million.

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in assigning a job code to those working as instructors and training officers in relation to mineworkers' compensation claims for respiratory disease. [24737]

**Mr. Wilson:** The issue of the appropriate job dust factor for training officers was recently referred to the Dust Reference Panel (DRP), an expert body that is jointly instructed by the claimants' solicitors' co-ordinating group (CG) and the Department. The DRP's report concludes that training officers would spend the majority of their time in a surface non-dusty environment, with only occasional visits underground, and as such should be classified as 'surface non-dusty'. The Department is in discussion with the CG about the DRP's conclusions. If both parties accept the DRP's report, training officers will not be eligible for compensation under the scheme. The category of mining instructor has not yet been referred to the DRP, and no request has been received from the CG for such a referral. The Department proposes to put the category to the DRP as soon as possible, subject to the CG's agreement.

## Coal Industry

**Mr. Denis Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the total amount paid in operating aid to the UK coal industry under the current scheme; and if she will give details of how it is allocated. [24450]

**Mr. Wilson:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 653W. The details in that reply are still up to date.

## Sellafield

**Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when Commission Regulation 3227/76 on nuclear facility safeguards came into force in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement on how it has been implemented in respect of Sellafield, with particular reference to the oversight of civil nuclear materials; [25176]

(2) in what year the Euratom Safeguards Directorate first inspected the mixed civil military reprocessing plant at Sellafield; what verification Euratom has made of net loss of quantity or quality of the nuclear materials subject to Euratom safeguards in the period since the first inspection; and if she will make a statement. [25177]

**Nigel Griffiths:** Commission Regulation (Euratom) No. 3227 came into force in 1977. The first Euratom safeguard inspection visit to the BNFL Sellafield facility took place in 1973 but, as was announced to Parliament in 1986, on 4 June 1986, *Official Report*, columns 594–95, the simultaneous processing of civil and non-civil material meant that, until then, Euratom safeguard inspectors had not had access to mixed civil/non-civil areas of the facility. However, the co-processing of civil and non-civil material was ended in 1986, since when safeguards procedures have been in place to enable Euratom safeguard inspection of all civil material at the Sellafield facility. The verification activities involved are designed to detect the possible diversion of civil nuclear material from its declared use. There are regular inspections to confirm that information provided by the facility operator pursuant to Commission Regulation (Euratom) No. 3227 is correct (i.e. that the facility, its inventories of nuclear material and changes in these inventories are as reported). Euratom safeguard inspection activities at places such as Sellafield include access to confirm the facility's design, extensive access to and evaluation of plant and process operational data, and independent verification of the nuclear material itself—either by means of direct sampling and/or measurement, or by the application of "containment" and "surveillance measures" (e.g. sealing containers or stores of material, or video surveillance of plant areas) to confirm that previously measured material remains unchanged.

## Ofgem

**Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 303W, on Ofgem, if he will place copies of the consultation responses in the Library. [22354]

**Mr. Wilson:** I have placed a list of those who responded in the Libraries of the House. The responses can be viewed in the library of the Department of Trade and Industry.

## Central Asia Pipeline Ltd.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the United Kingdom companies which hold an interest in the Central Asia Pipeline Ltd. (CentGas) Consortium. [24415]

**Mr. Wilson:** I am not aware of any UK company involvement in the proposed Central Asia Pipeline Ltd. consortium.

## Small Businesses

**Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress of the "Think Small First" strategy for supporting small businesses. [25728]

**Nigel Griffiths:** All Government Departments have been encouraged to 'Think Small First'. The Small Business Service (SBS) has consulted across Whitehall to ensure all Departments consider the impact their actions have on small businesses. Significant progress has been made in the Government's three priority areas of:

(i) entrepreneurial culture and environment;

(ii) regulatory framework for business; and

(iii) support for business.

Examples of progress are as follows: an independent cross-departmental Review of Enterprise and the Economy in Education, led by Sir Howard Davies. The review is expected to report by the end of January 2002; enterprise and entrepreneurial skills are now included in the national curriculum; the launch of the Enterprise Insight "Enterprising Schools" initiative which encourages businesses to get involved in enterprise programmes; SBS consulted at an early stage by all Government Departments when UK regulatory policy issues affecting small businesses are being considered and their comments included in the final Regulatory Impact Assessment; implementation periods introduced for new legislation, which will give business clear guidance on new legislation 12 weeks before it comes into force; the Business Link Operator network re-structured and the national information and advisory service launched to provide a more consistent and customer focused service to small businesses. SBS working with other Government Departments to promote the Business Link Operator network as the route to market for business support services; 'NHS Plus' launched, which will enable a national network of NHS Occupational Health Departments to provide services specifically to small businesses.

SBS have developed a range of performance indicators to measure the impact and benchmark the success of "Think Small First" (available on the website www.sbs.gov.uk/consultations.) SBS intend to publish the initial findings early this year.

## BNFL

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements she is proposing for the transfer of contracts held by BNFL to the Liabilities Management Authority; and if she will make a statement. [25408]

**Mr. Wilson:** The proposals outlined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 990, will not affect BNFL's existing contractual commitments to its customers in any way. Details on how the Liabilities Management Authority is expected to operate in practice will be set out in the White Paper to be published next spring on the Government's overall approach to discharging the UK's public sector civil nuclear liabilities.

## Specific Interest Swap Transactions

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date and on whose advice the decision was taken by the Export Credits Guarantee Department to purchase the interest swaps referred to in paragraphs (i) and (ii) of the introduction to the Export Credits Guarantee Department Winter Supplementary Estimates. [25213]

**Nigel Griffiths:** ECGD began to purchase the interest rate swaps referred to in paragraph (i) in 1986 and for (ii) in March 2001.

ECGD has an agreed risk management policy for managing and controlling interest rate risk. All of these swaps were transacted in accordance with this policy.

ECGD assesses its own hedging requirements and enters into or unwinds interest rate swaps through an auction process with banks with an investment grade of AA- or better.

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will provide a breakdown of the details of the specific interest swap transactions which were used to hedge the cost of interest make-up on fixed rate export finance loans, as referred to in paragraph (i) of the introduction to the Export Credits Guarantee Department Winter Supplementary Estimates. [25212]

**Nigel Griffiths:** Individual details of swap transactions are commercially confidential, but in summary we have 128 dollar interest rate swaps and 34 sterling swaps currently outstanding with a total notional value of US$4.6 billion and £804 million respectively.

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will provide a breakdown of the details of the specific interest swap transactions which were used to hedge potential interest make-up costs on pipeline large aircraft sector understanding cases, as referred to in paragraph (ii) of the introduction of the Export Credits Guarantee Department Winter Supplementary Estimates. [25211]

**Nigel Griffiths:** Individual details of swap transactions are commercially confidential, but in summary we have transacted 53 interest rate swaps with a total notional value of US$935 million of which US$325 million is currently outstanding.

## Tanzania

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what basis the decision was made to grant an export licence to BAE Systems for its Military Air Traffic Control system to be sold to the Tanzania Government; and if she will make a statement. [25830]

**Nigel Griffiths:** All relevant export licence applications are considered on a case by case basis against the Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. I refer the hon. Member to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) on 26 October 2000, *Official Report*, columns 199–203W.

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the World Bank's study into the technology of the Military Air Traffic Control System; and if she will make a statement. [25829]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation considers all relevant information available at the time when assessing export licence applications against the Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. Where appropriate, this includes considering the views of international organisations like the World Bank.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with other Government departments regarding the sale by BAE Systems to the Government of Tanzania of an air traffic control system. [24975]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation circulates all relevant export licence applications to other Government Departments with an interest as determined by those Departments in line with their policy responsibilities. These include the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Ministry of Defence.

Details of discussions with other Government Departments are exempt from disclosure under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

### Regeneration

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what schemes targeting urban regeneration needs are managed by her Department; how much each scheme has available to invest; what issues each scheme aims to tackle; and how much has been spent annually since 1997 *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in Teesside, *(c)* in Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough Councils and *(d)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [25473]

**Alan Johnson:** The Department does not operate schemes which explicitly target urban regeneration, although most of those we operate are concerned with competitiveness and jobs, which contribute towards the regeneration of urban areas. In the majority of cases, it is not possible to disaggregate these schemes by area, since they are available nationally in both urban and rural areas.

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements are in place to ensure joined up working to deliver the social regeneration and economic regeneration of the most deprived communities; and if she will make a statement. [25522]

**Alan Johnson:** I have nothing to add to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for Transport, Local Government and the Regions today at column 854W.

### Renewable Energy

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government's forecast is for growth in each type of renewable energy generation. [25631]

**Mr. Wilson:** The Government do not make forecasts for growth in each type of renewable energy generation. How each type will contribute to overall targets for renewable energy will be a matter for the market. An assessment of various possible scenarios for the growth of different renewable energy technologies is made in a report produced for the Department of Trade and Industry in March 1999 entitled "New and Renewable Energy: Prospects in the UK for the 21 Century: Supporting Analysis." A copy is in the Libraries of the House.

The Government have made projections for the total quantity of electricity they expect to be generated from all forms of generation eligible to benefit from the Renewables Obligation in years between now and 2010–11. That information is set out on page 23 of the Statutory Consultation Document on the Renewables Obligation published by my Department in August. A copy of that document, too, is in the Library.

A list of the sources of energy eligible for the Renewables Obligation is on page 13 of the Statutory Consultation Document.

### NETA

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Ofgem review of NETA on small generators' *(a)* profit and *(b)* output since the introduction of the scheme. [25630]

**Mr. Wilson:** Ofgem's report to DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators issued on 31 August 2001, indicated that prices for the export of power from smaller generators had reduced by around 17 per cent. since the introduction of NETA. Ofgem also found export volumes reduced by 44 per cent. compared to a year previously. Ofgem suggested the lower export prices for electricity were one factor, but that higher costs (especially gas prices) may also have contributed.

On 1 November 2001, I issued a consultation document in response to Ofgem's reports "The New Electricity Trading Arrangements—Review of the First Three Months" and "Report to the DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators" of 31 August 2001. This consultation closed on 1 December 2001.

The Government's key proposals are, broadly,

To ensure imbalance prices are genuinely cost reflective; and

ensure that effective consolidation services emerge.

Responses to the Government's consultation on NETA and smaller generators showed widespread support for the proposal to form a Consolidation Working Group. On 20 December 2001, I announced the formation of the Consolidation Working Group to look urgently at obstacles to consolidation services under the new electricity trading arrangements (NETA). I have asked the Consolidation Working Group to provide a final report by 31 January 2001.

The Government are carefully considering responses on other proposals set out in their consultation document.

### Regional Development Agencies

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish biographical details of each

board member of each RDA in England, giving in each case the *(a)* party political links and *(b)* trade union links that each board member has had. [25788]

**Alan Johnson:** I announced the reappointed RDA board members to the House on 24 October 2001 and the new appointments to the RDA boards on 11 December 2001. I refer the hon. Member to the answers given in columns 250W and 758–59W respectively and to the biographical details of the board members I placed in the Libraries of the House in connection with those answers. These include details of any party political or trade union links the board members have.

### Serco Assurance

**Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representation she has received from employees of Serco Assurance at Winfrith, Dorset, about the loss of full index linked pensions that they enjoyed while working for the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. [25391]

**Mr. Wilson:** None. This is a matter for Serco Assurance and AEA Technology.

### Aerospace

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research her Department has conducted into Government research and technology support offered to the aerospace sector in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* the USA, *(d)* Canada and *(e)* France; and if she will make a statement. [25313]

**Mr. Wilson:** In the UK, the DTI's civil aeronautics research programme supports long-term research in key aeronautics technologies by providing grants to industry, research organisations and universities. In March 2001, the then Secretary of State announced the continuation of this programme for five years covering the period from April 2001 to March 2006. Funding for 2001–02 is expected to total £20 million. Future funding of the Department's civil aeronautics research programmes will be determined alongside the funding of other DTI budgets as part of the Department's business support review and the Government's Spending Review 2002.

Additionally, funding for the science base provided through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and related to aerospace research totalled around £14 million in 2000–01.

The DTI also invests in the design and development of major civil aerospace programmes through launch investment. The most recent examples have been for Airbus UK to design and develop the wings for the Airbus A380 superjumbo programme (a Government investment of up to £530 million) and for Rolls-Royce to design and develop the Trent 900 engine for the A380 and the Trent 600 engine for potential future Boeing large aircraft (a Government investment of up to £250 million).

As part of its Applied and Corporate Research Programmes and associated technology demonstrators, the Ministry of Defence spends about £120 million per annum on aerospace-related work for specific defence needs.

We have no directly comparable information for the other countries listed but our best estimate of expenditure on civil aeronautics research equivalent to the UK's civil aircraft research programme is about £60 million for France and £100 million for Germany. These nations also provide Launch Investment for new civil aerospace developments.

In the USA, aeronautical research activity funded through NASA totals several hundred million pounds annually though the USA does not provide Launch Investment for aerospace developments. Canada, under the "Technology Partnerships Canada" programme, has made repayable investments worth around £500 million in the last five years in aerospace and defence projects.

## WALES

### Departmental Expenditure Limits

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the total unallocated funds within his departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against his departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19438]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** My Departmental report, published in March 2001, shows the following allocation of spending for 2001–02 which has not changed since.

| | £ |
|---|---|
| Pay bill and general administrative expenditure | 2,279,000 |
| Lord Lieutenants' expenditure | 30,000 |
| North Wales Child Abuse tribunal wind-up costs | 546,000 |
| Receipts | – 9,000 |
| Capitals | 766,000 |
| Total | 3,612,000 |

At the mid year point my Department did not anticipate any appreciable underspend.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on progress in 2001–02 with the target for response to correspondence within 15 days of receipt. [24758]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** I have taken a number of measures, including better monitoring of performance; more rigorous enforcement of internal deadlines; and the appointment of an additional member of staff.

### Fuel Poverty

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many homes in Wales are defined as fuel poor households; and how many of these include (i) pensioners and (ii) children. [23950]

**Mr. Paul Murphy** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* Housing issues in Wales are generally a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. However, the Government and devolved Administrations are working in partnership to tackle fuel poverty throughout the UK through the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy. One of the Government's initiatives in this area is the payment of winter fuel payments, now at £200 a year, helping up to 460,000 pensioner households in Wales.

The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy did not provide statistics on households in Wales in the form requested. However, using a proxy of households in Wales eligible for the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (based on the Welsh House Condition Survey 1997–98), the strategy estimated that of the approximately 222,000 such households in Wales, 117,000 contain at least one person over the age of 60; 40,000 are lone parents; 32,000 contain at least one person who is sick or disabled and 33,000 are other forms of households with children.

The Assembly are considering a possible general household survey in 2003 which will contain one element to cover fuel poverty.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many complaints have been reported in his Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; and how many of them related to special advisers. [25327]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** None.

## SCOTLAND

### Local Bodies

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list those local bodies which were set up under legislation which is the responsibility of her Department since May 1997. [17605]

**Mrs. Liddell:** For the period between May 1997 and 30 June 1999 there were no local public spending bodies set up under legislation which was the responsibility of the former Scottish Office.

The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. There have been no local public spending bodies set up since that date.

### New Deal (Young People)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21313]

**Mrs. Liddell:** The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Out of five staff employed under the new deal, the Department has employed one person under the new deal for young people but there are currently no staff in post in this category. New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the subsidy to the Scotland Office was £2,860. The cost of training and development cannot readily be identified.

### Departmental Staff (Home Working)

**Mr. Challen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps her Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21834]

**Mrs. Liddell:** A number of alternative working patterns, including home working, are available to staff in the Scotland Office. Currently no staff within the Scotland Office work permanently from home, although some do so on an occasional basis. In a recent survey staff were invited to declare an interest in alternative working. My Department is considering the survey results with a view to setting up pilot studies into a number of alternative working patterns.

### Channel Tunnel

**Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the effects on Scotland of the SNCF restriction of channel tunnel rail freight services. [24099]

**Mrs. Liddell:** I refer my hon. Friend to the written answers given by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 225W.

This is a matter of considerable concern to the Government. It is having a severe impact on cross-channel rail freight operators and their customers in Scotland and in other parts of the UK.

The Government are working at all levels with the French authorities to try and resolve this matter as quickly as possible.

### Golden Jubilee

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has for celebrating the Queen's Golden Jubilee in Scotland. [25428]

**Mrs. Liddell:** All of Scotland, including myself, will celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee. Details of Her Majesty's programme in Scotland will be made available to the House in due course.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints have been reported in her Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; and how many of them related to special advisers. [25326]

**Mrs. Liddell:** The procedures for making complaints under the civil service code are set out in the Department's staff handbook. Civil servants are encouraged, in the first instance, to raise complaints made under paragraph 11 of the civil service code with their line manager. IF for any reason this is not felt to be possible, perhaps because the line manager is part of the complaint, individuals may take their complaint to a nominated official (or officials). It is not possible to provide a comprehensive figure for the number of complaints made within this Department under paragraph 11 of the code as there is no requirement for managers to report to the centre details of complaints made under the civil service code which are resolved within the management line.

### "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland"

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date she received the Scottish Executive document, "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland"; and on what date she publicised its contents. [25540]

**Mrs. Liddell:** A joint Scottish Executive/Scotland Office News Release was issued, along with the Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland (GERS) Report, on 17 December 2001.

Consistent with normal practice, advance copies of the final text of the GERS report were available prior to publication, on 12 December.

## SOLICITOR-GENERAL

### Ministerial Duties

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Solicitor-General in what matters she deputises for the Attorney-General. [23683]

**The Solicitor-General:** The Law Officers Act 1977 provides that any function of the Attorney-General may be exercised by the Solicitor-General. I therefore deputise for the Attorney-General across the range of his responsibilities.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Euro

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what arrangements are being made for the use of euro notes and coins in restaurants and souvenir shops in the House. [24387]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** Many UK businesses, particularly those serving tourists from overseas, already accept payment in foreign currencies, including the euro. However, the House's restaurants and souvenir shops provide services primarily to Members and staff who work here, and to constituents visiting the House. The Refreshment Department is therefore not planning to accept payment for its catering or retail services in euros or any other foreign currency.

However, the hon. Member will have noted from the Administration Committee's First Report on the 2001 trial opening of the Summer Line of Route (HC 433 of Session 2001–02) that at least 50 per cent. of the 86,000 visits last year came from overseas. If the Committee's recommendation that the summer opening of the Line of Route become a permanent feature is accepted, the potential benefits, costs and risks of accepting payment for tickets, souvenirs and refreshments in foreign currencies, including the euro, will be considered for this project.

### Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

**Peter Bottomley:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 2001, to what extent the commitment to provide the resources required to support the role of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards will be judged by *(a)* the Commission, *(b)* by the internal auditors and *(c)* by the Commissioner. [25149]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** The Commission will base its judgment on the findings of the review which it has asked the Internal Review Service to carry out. In reaching that judgment, the Commission will take full account of the views both of the Chairman of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, and of the incoming Commissioner for Standards, as to the expected workload and the resources required.

**Peter Bottomley:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 2W, on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, when the Chairman of the Commission was first told the letter dated 28 November had been openly made available to the media on the afternoon of Tuesday 4 December; and when he was first told that some of its contents had been confirmed on the forenoon. [25037]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** The Speaker knew on the morning of 4 December that his office was confirming media reports that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards had written to him informing him that she did not wish to apply for reappointment but that his office was also making clear that the text of the letter would not be released. The Speaker was informed later that day that the text had become available to the media from other sources.

### Parliamentary Proceedings (Webcast)

**Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Chairman of the Broadcasting Committee how the pilot project to webcast parliamentary proceedings on the internet may be viewed within the parliamentary estate. [26017]

**Mr. Lepper:** The House of Commons and House of Lords are starting to webcast coverage of some debates on the internet. This is a pilot project, to be assessed at the end of 2002, aimed at making the work of Parliament more accessible to people unable to visit Westminster. The webcasts largely duplicate the coverage already available on the internal Annunciator system and in this test environment, during the pilot project, they will not be accessible via the Parliamentary Data and Video Network (PDVN). However, from next week viewing facilities will be available in the e-library of the House of Commons and, I understand, also in the Queen's Room in the Library of the House of Lords.

### Portcullis House (Water Feature)

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee on how many days since Portcullis House opened the water feature has been *(a)* operational and *(b)* out of operation. [25383]

**Derek Conway:** A leak developed last summer after the water feature had operated successfully for some 12 months. This has resulted in the water feature being switched off for most of the time since the summer recess. Following protracted discussions a way to resolve the problem has now been agreed with the company that has

taken over the responsibilities of the original contractor, who is no longer in business. This will lead to the leak being repaired at the least possible cost to the House.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Departmental Staff

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many employees of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* agencies sponsored by his Department work in (i) London, (ii) areas benefiting from EU Objective 1 status, (iii) areas with objective 2 status and (iv) other areas. [16116]

**Jane Kennedy:** As at January 2001, based on full-time equivalents, there were 1,539 staff from the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) employed by the Department and 195 staff from the Home Civil Service (HCS). These figures can be broken down as follows:

*(a)* the Department

(i) there were 8 NICS staff and 119 HCS staff in London;

(ii) there were 727 NICS staff and 63 HCS staff in areas benefiting from EU Objective 1 status;

(iii) there were no staff in areas benefiting from EU Objective 2 status;

(iv) there were 2 NICS staff and 2 HCS staff in other areas

*(b)* agencies sponsored by the Department

(i) there were 0 staff in London;

(ii) there were 622 NICS staff and 11 HCS staff in areas benefiting from EU Objective 1 status;

(iii) there were no staff in areas benefiting from EU Objective 2 status;

(iv) there were no staff in other areas.

### Rubber/Plastic Bullets

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* rubber and *(b)* plastic bullets have been used since their introduction; how many have been purchased in each year and at what cost; and how many have been purchased since publication of the Patten report and at what cost. [17758]

**Jane Kennedy:** The tables give details of the number of baton rounds used by the police, since separate police recording began in 1981.

| *Year* | *Police use of baton rounds* |
|---|---|
| 1981 | 19,649 |
| 1982 | 335 |
| 1983 | 545 |
| 1984 | 1,503 |
| 1985 | 906 |
| 1986 | 1,462 |
| 1987 | 1,908 |
| 1988 | 2,292 |
| 1989 | 836 |
| 1990 | 211 |
| 1991 | 235 |
| 1992 | 39 |
| 1993 | 497 |
| 1994 | 214 |
| 1995 | 273 |
| 1996 | 6,949 |
| 1997 | 2,527 |
| 1998 | 1,236 |
| 1999 | 111 |
| 2000 | 22 |
| 2001 (21 November) | 89 |

The Chief Constable has informed me that details of the costs in relation to the purchase of baton rounds, and the number purchased prior to 1995, are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The following table gives details of the number of baton rounds purchased by the Royal Ulster Constabulary each year from 1995:

| *Year* | *Baton rounds purchased by police* |
|---|---|
| 1995 | 25,200 |
| 1996 | 60,875 |
| 1997 | 33,900 |
| 1998 | 75,227 |
| 1999 | 50,400 |
| 2000 | 76,320 |
| 2001 | 46,000 |

Since publication of the Patten Report the Royal Ulster Constabulary has purchased 122,320 baton rounds, and to date the Police Service of Northern Ireland has not purchased any baton rounds.

### Omagh Bombing

**Lady Hermon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress he has made in seeking to identify the source of the leak of the Northern Ireland police ombudsman's unfinished report into the Omagh bombing; and if he will make a statement. [23320]

**Jane Kennedy:** We have no plans for such an investigation.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Freedom of Information Act

**Hywel Williams:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action he has taken to co-ordinate the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 by Government Departments. [23469]

**Mr. Wills:** Overall responsibility for implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 rests with the Lord Chancellor as Head of the Department with lead responsibility for the legislation. The Lord Chancellor chairs the Cabinet sub-committee on Freedom of Information and Data Protection, of which Ministers from all central Government Departments are members.

Two interdepartmental officials groups have been set up to support the Ministerial committee. The Senior Group on Freedom of Information and Data Protection consists of those senior officials from across Whitehall, and the devolved Administrations, who have responsibility for implementing Freedom of Information and Data Protection in their organisations. The group meets every three months and has been set up to look at major implementation questions affecting central Government.

The senior group is supported by the Practitioner's Group on Freedom of Information. It consists of officials with day to day knowledge of open Government and implementation of the Freedom of Information Act in their respective Departments. The function of this group is to address common issues related to the implementation of the legislation. The group also acts as a forum for sharing best practice and helps to ensure consistency in approach across central Government.

### Private Landlord Evictions

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what figures he has collated on how many people have been *(a)* legally and *(b)* illegally evicted by private landlords in each of the last 10 years. [25034]

**Mr. Wills:** Information concerning the number of evictions by private landlords, either legally or illegally, is not collected and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. For information purposes, figures concerning the number of possession orders granted by the courts to private landlords during the last 10 years are provided in the table. It should be noted however, that these orders would not necessarily have resulted in an actual eviction.

*Possession orders granted to private landlords*[1]

| | *Suspended* | *Immediate* |
|---|---|---|
| 2000 | 5,116 | 8,265 |
| 1999 | 6,381 | 8,568 |
| 1998 | 8,753 | 8,586 |
| 1997 | 8,881 | 8,495 |
| 1996 | 8,296 | 8,970 |
| 1995 | 6,785 | 8,833 |
| 1994 | 5,553 | 8,258 |
| 1993 | 4,048 | 7,562 |
| 1992 | 4,094 | 9,739 |
| 1991 | 5,074 | 10,361 |

[1] Does not necessarily result in an eviction

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Staff Numbers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people were employed in her Department in each of the last four years. [23800]

**Dr. Howells:** The average number of staff employed in the Department is set out in the table.

| *Year* | *Staff employed* |
|---|---|
| 1998 | 365 |
| 1999 | 388 |
| 2000 | 397 |
| 2001 | 420 |

The figures for 2001 include staff transferred from the Home Office and Cabinet Office as part of Machinery of Government changes.

### Public Libraries

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many libraries *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the Buckingham constituency are linked to the National Grid for Learning; [23746]

(2) how many library service points *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the Buckingham constituency are internet connected; and what the figures were in 1997. [23745]

**Dr. Howells:** All public libraries connected to the internet have access to the National Grid for Learning. Currently 2,782 public libraries are connected to the internet, which constitutes 67 per cent. of all public libraries in the UK. 100 per cent. will be connected by the end of 2002. In Buckinghamshire library authority all 36 public libraries are connected to the internet, of which eight are in Buckingham constituency. Figures for Buckingham in 1997 are unavailable, but nationally 184 libraries had public internet access in that year.

### J. M. W. Turner

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans there are to commemorate the 150th anniversary of J. M. W. Turner's death; and what plans there are to create a single national collection of his works. [24175]

**Dr. Howells:** To commemorate the 150th anniversary of J. M. W. Turner's death, Tate Britain staged an exhibition from 5 March to 15 July 2001, focusing on the contents of Turner's own gallery. To mark the anniversary Tate Britain is also currently featuring in its anniversary display area an example of Turner's views of Venice, which was also one of the first of his works to enter the national collection.

The Royal Academy held a major commemorative exhibition of Turner's finished watercolours from 2 December 2000 until 18 February 2001 to commemorate the anniversary. Most of the exhibits were lent by other national and international institutions with over 40 works on loan from private collections.

A single holding of the works from Turner's bequest to the nation was made possible with the opening of the Clore Wing at the Tate Gallery (now Tate Britain) in 1987. Although other collections in the UK continue to hold and display works by the artist, this represents the largest single national collection of Turner's work, where works may be viewed and studied in depth.

### Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, "Winning the Generation Game", *(a)* what progress her Department has made and *(b)* what future plans her Department has for acting on them; and if she will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24203]

**Dr. Howells** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 335W. We have recently replied to Cabinet Office requests for

information, and our position in respect of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the PIU report will be included in the report of the overall situation.

### Euro

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what efforts her Department *(a)* has made and *(b)* is planning to put into effect to assist the English tourist industry to deal with the effects of the introduction of the euro. [24416]

**Dr. Howells:** The British Tourist Authority (BTA), working with the UK's tourism industry, issued guidance entitled "The Euro and your Business". The guide contains information on the euro, a checklist of action points and advice on authenticating banknotes.

The leaflet was revised in November as "The euro—A guide for small tourism businesses". Copies are available from the BTA and it is published on their website www.tourismtrade.org.uk/home.htm. Further guidance will be issued if we find it is needed.

### Hotel Charges

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how she monitors prices charged by private hotels for accommodation in different regions of the United Kingdom. [24413]

**Dr. Howells:** Pricing policy is a commercial decision for each hotel operator in light of prevailing market forces. Therefore, DCMS does not monitor prices charged by individual accommodation providers. However, my Department is concerned with price transparency and the need for guests to be able to form a judgment about how much it will cost them before purchasing a room. The Tourism (Sleeping Accommodation Price Display) Order 1977 requires hotels to display in their reception areas or entrances the highest and lowest prices for each type of room (e.g. single, double etc.) and those prices must include, where appropriate, any service charge or meals and whether VAT is included.

### Sports Strategy

**Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the implications of the proposed restriction on coaching set out in the Charity Commissioners' Guidelines at paragraph 18 of Annex B in the Treasury's Consultation Document, "Promoting Sport in the Community for the Government's Sports Strategy". [25396]

**Mr. Caborn:** The Government are currently consulting on their view that the Charity Commission's decision on charitable status would appear to offer better prospects for community amateur sports clubs than a tax relief package the Government had been considering. Responses to that consultation are requested by the Treasury by 1 February 2002. I intend to meet representatives of the Charity Commission shortly to discuss the extent of applications from sport for charitable status and the fuller guidance the Commission intends to issue on this subject in due course. These discussions will include the need for greater clarity on a range of issues in the current guidance including the treatment of different levels of skill among participants at sports clubs seeking charitable status.

It is the Government's understanding that all skill levels can be catered for by a sports club promoting healthy recreation which obtains charitable status but that such a commitment will not rule out selection of teams on merit and/or different coaching offered to different ability levels. The Commission recognises that the provision of coaching to regional, national and international standards often acts as an incentive to other less able players to improve and/or to attract new people to the club.

### Online Gambling

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the Budd report recommendation to prevent under-age online gambling will be implemented; who will police it; how it will be policed; what the role of Ofcom will be; and how a child's age can be verified online. [25521]

**Mr. Caborn:** We have not yet reached decisions on the recommendations contained in the report of the Gambling Review Body. We are fully aware of the potential risks of underage gambling and will take them into account before announcing our conclusions.

### Max Mosley

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what dates *(a)* she and *(b)* others in her Department have (i) met, (ii) spoken by telephone to and (iii) written to the President of the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile; and if she will place a copy of the notes of such communications in the Library. [25619]

**Mr. Caborn:** I met Max Mosley, President of the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile, on 12 December 2001 to discuss arrangements for the 2002 British Grand Prix at Silverstone as well as wider proposals for the long-term development of the circuit. I have had no other recent contact with Mr. Mosley. This was a private discussion at which a range of motor racing issues was discussed, and I do not propose to place the notes of the meeting in the House Library.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will give a substantive answer to a letter from Dr. Paul Arnison-Newgass of Dartmouth, Devon, a constituent, and which was forwarded to her parliamentary correspondence unit for reply. [24954]

**Mr. Caborn:** I received the hon. Gentleman's letter on 13 December 2001 and I replied to him on 5 January 2002.

## TREASURY

### Manufacturing

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs in manufacturing were lost between the second quarter of 1997 and the latest date for which figures are available. [25293]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 9 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about the reduction in the number of manufacturing jobs since the second quarter of 1997. I am replying in his absence. (25293).

The table below shows the number of employee jobs in manufacturing for the second quarter of 1997 and August-October 2001 (three-month rolling averages) for comparative purposes.

| *Seasonally adjusted* | *Thousand* |
|---|---|
| *UK* | *Number* |
| April to June 1997 | 4,166 |
| August to October 2001 | 372 |
| Change between April to June 1997 and August to October 2001 | −374 (-9.0%) |

These estimates are based on the results of regular sample surveys of employers which count the number of employee jobs. The data are published in Statbase on the National Statistics website under series identifier LOMN.

## Analytical Methodology

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the different methods of analysis of gross domestic fixed capital formation used by *(a)* the Treasury and *(b)* the Central Statistical Office in the national accounts. [25299]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 9 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about the different methods of analysis of gross domestic fixed capital formation used by (a) the Treasury and (b) the Central Statistical Office in the national accounts. I am replying in his absence. (25299)

The Office for National Statistics compiles estimates of gross fixed capital formation for the national accounts in line with international guidance and definitions as set out in the European System of Accounts 1995. The Treasury use these estimates in their forecasts and other analyses.

## Shareholders

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the total value of shares were owned by individuals and what the total value was *(a)* in the latest year for which figures are available and *(b)* in each year since 1992. [25298]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 9 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the ownership of shares. I am replying in his absence. (25298)

The Office for National Statistics conducts a Share Ownership survey. The most recent available data is for the 31st December 2000, and was published in "Share Ownership", which can be downloaded free from the National Statistics Website (www.statistics.gov.uk). This publication gives details of the value of shares held by private individuals (table B) and the percentage of the total stockmarket owned by value (table A) for all years in which a survey was conducted (1989–1994 and 1997–2000).

## Revenue Report

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the annual report by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue for the year ending 31 March 2001 will be published. [25205]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Inland Revenue annual report for the year ending 31 March 2001 was published on 18 December 2001.

## Tax Credits

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 199W, if the impact on business of the Tax Credits Bill will be known before he has announced the relevant rates and tapers in the 2002 Budget. [25820]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** A Regulatory Impact Assessment was published, together with the Tax Credits Bill, on 29 November.

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 199W, when he will publish the evaluation of the updating of the impact of the working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit. [25346]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Evaluation findings will be published in due course.

## Export Credits Guarantee Department

**Mr. Flight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on where the Treasury will source the funding for the increase in the net cash requirement of the Export Credits Guarantee Department in the Winter Supplementary Estimates. [25210]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Funding for the increase in the net cash requirement of the Export Credits Guarantee Department in the Winter Supplementary Estimate will be from the Consolidated Fund.

## Working Families Tax Credit

**David Cairns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the working families tax credit on the income levels of the poorest working families in the Greenock and Inverclyde constituency. [25424]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The working families tax credit (WFTC) is a success in making work pay for families with children. At August 2001 WFTC was helping 1,270,000 families. This is 52 per cent. more families than were benefiting from family credit at its peak, and families were receiving on average around an extra £35 per week. In the Greenock and Inverclyde constituency 1,893 families with children were benefiting from WFTC at August 2001.

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 33W, on working families tax credit, how many families had an increase in net income due to the working families tax credit regime of *(a)* 0 to

10 per cent., *(b)* 10 to 20 per cent., *(c)* 100 to 110 per cent., *(d)* 110 to 120 per cent., *(e)* 120 to 130 per cent., *(f)* 130 to 140 per cent. and *(g)* 140 to 150 per cent. [25207]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** It is estimated from the Family Resources Survey that, under the working families tax credit (WFTC) regime applying to awards starting from June 2001, the numbers of such families are about *(a)* 400,000 and *(b)* 270,000. The sample size is too small to yield any reliable estimates for *(c)* to *(g)* except those provided in the answer given to my right hon. Friend on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 203W.

*Notes:*

1. Estimates are derived from 1999–2000 FRS with incomes projected forward to 2001–02 and assuming the 2001–02 regimes for income tax and national insurance contributions. They are subject to sampling error.

2. Increase in net income is defined as final net income less initial net income, assuming no behavioural change. Final net income is income as projected, including estimated entitlement to WFTC, housing benefit (HB) and council tax benefit (CTB). Initial net income is this less the estimated entitlement to WFTC, plus any consequent increase in estimated entitlement to HB and CTB.

### International Tax Recoveries

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answers of 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 374W, 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 360W, 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1217W, and 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 28W, on international tax recoveries and with specific regard to the table analysing recoveries, 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 375W, how much was recovered in total under all heads of recovery in the year ending 31 March 2000 from taxpayers falling in all the bands from less than £1 million to £10 million to £50 million inclusive. [25204]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** International tax recoveries are analysed as follows:

*£ million*

| *Band* | *Recovered* |
|---|---|
| Less than £1 million | 21 |
| £1 million to £10 million | 117 |
| £10 million to £50 million | 244 |
| £50 million to £100 million | 210 |

The written answer of 25 October indicated that there were no cases in the £50 million to £100 million category: in fact there were three.

### Urban Regeneration

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what schemes targeting urban regeneration needs are managed by his Department; how much each scheme has available to invest; what issues each scheme aims to tackle; and how much has been spent annually since 1997 *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in Teesside, *(c)* in Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough councils and *(d)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [25478]

**Ruth Kelly:** No schemes targeting urban regeneration needs are currently managed, or have been managed since 1997, by the Chancellor's Departments and agencies.

### Biofuels

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to lower the duty on biodiesel to the same rate of tax as that levied on road fuel gases; and if he will make a statement; [25688]

(2) what plans he has to lower the duty on bioethanol fuel; and if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on encouraging the use of biofuels. [25687]

**Mr. Boateng:** Duty rates are reviewed annually as part of the Budget process. We have already announced that, subject to European agreement, we will introduce a lower rate of excise duty on biodiesel later this year, to be set at 20p per litre below the rate for ultra-low sulphur diesel.

### Film Industry

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who the beneficiaries were of tax breaks to the film industry in the last 12 months; and what sums were involved. [25284]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The estimated tax cost of relief provided to British qualifying films in 2000–01 under section 48 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1997 was £90 million. We estimate that a further £50 million was provided under section 42 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1992. Without sections 48 and 42 we estimate that the amount of tax relief given to the film industry would be halved. The names of the recipients of the tax relief cannot be disclosed on the grounds of taxpayer confidentiality.

### Industrial and Provident Societies

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by local authority area those industrial and provident societies with registered addresses in London. [25456]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information is not readily available.

### Oils Fraud (Northern Ireland)

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met his Irish counterpart to discuss action against oils fraud in Northern Ireland; and what the outcome of those discussions was. [25740]

**Mr. Boateng:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 266W.

### Bushmeat

**Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment HM Customs has made of the volume of trade into the United Kingdom of bushmeat. [25809]

**Mr. Boateng:** Import controls designed to protect animal and human health are the responsibility of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, port, airport and local health authorities, and the Food Standards Agency. Customs supports and co-operates with these lead agencies both in joint exercises and by seizing illicit meat when discovered in customs checks. Customs statistics do not distinguish between bushmeat and other meat imports, but the total amount of illicit meat

seized by Customs in the year ending 31 March 2001 was 2.655 metric tonnes. This does not include seizures by the lead agencies in joint exercises with Customs.

### Tobacco Smuggling

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the Customs target for 2000–01 for asset seizures resulting from action against tobacco smuggling; what was the sum total of such asset seizures in that year; and if he will make a statement. [25739]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** As part of the Tackling Tobacco Smuggling strategy, Customs were set a target for the level of asset seizures for 2000–01 of £15 million. Customs' performance against this and other subsidiary targets of the Tackling Tobacco Smuggling strategy will be set out in Customs annual report for 2000–01.

### Euro

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider the flexibility to cope with economic change of EU institutions and economies within the euro zone in his assessment of the economic tests for UK adoption of the euro. [25312]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Government have set out five economic tests which must be met before any decision to join can be made. An assessment of the five tests will be made within two years of the start of this Parliament. The assessment will be comprehensive and rigorous.

### African Trypanosomosis

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the tax exemptions for research into diseases of the developing world announced in the 2001 Budget will include African trypanosomosis. [25263]

**Mr. Boateng:** The Chancellor announced consultation on a new tax credit to stimulate research into the development of vaccines and drugs to combat malaria, TB and strains of AIDS/HIV most prevalent in the developing world in Budget 2001. During the consultation period, a number of other diseases—including trypanosomosis—were suggested as suitable candidates for the proposed new tax credit. All such suggestions have been fully considered and an announcement on the scope of the proposed tax credit will be made in Budget 2002.

Companies undertaking research into trypanosomosis will be eligible for either the relief for research expenditure by small and medium sized companies (SMEs) introduced in Finance Act 2000 or for the new relief for research expenditure by companies other than SMEs to be introduced in Finance Bill 2002.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many written parliamentary questions to his Department in the past 12 months had not received a full answer within five weeks of the question being tabled. [25300]

**Mr. Boateng:** Treasury Ministers answered 3,070 written questions in the House of Commons in 2001, 73 per cent. on or before the due date. In 23 cases (0.7 per cent. of the total) full answers were not provided within five weeks of the question being tabled.

### Tax Fraud

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many investigations for tax fraud were carried out in each year since 1997; and what was the success rate of those investigations. [25301]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Inland Revenue carries out inquiries, as opposed to investigations, into tax returns as part of its work in tackling non-compliance. At the outset of any inquiry there is no assumption as to whether a return is incorrect and/or incomplete and, therefore, no assumption about the existence or otherwise of fraud or negligence. While the majority of inquiries are undertaken on the basis of a perceived compliance risk this is not true of all inquiries and a successful inquiry is one that is carried out thoroughly and in accordance with appropriate codes of practice.

Detailed information about the number of inquiries undertaken in each year and the additional liabilities established as a result of the Revenue's work in tackling non-compliance is set out in the Inland Revenue annual report for each year, available in the House of Commons Library.

### Treasury Publications

**Mr. Howard:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to make all Treasury publications available to hon. Members through the Vote Office. [25613]

**Ruth Kelly:** All significant documents which are published by the Treasury are made available to Members through the Vote Office and are also deposited in the Library of the House. Members can also obtain these and other Treasury publications from the Treasury, if they wish.

### VAT

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many VAT inspection visits are planned for *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2001–02. [24794]

**Mr. Boateng:** Customs plan to make 245,000 inspection events during 2001–02. These risk-based inspections may take the form of a visit, or contact by telephone and fax to resolve specific issues arising.

Plans for 2002–03 are not finalised.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer from how many businesses Customs and Excise have withdrawn use of the VAT cash accounting scheme in each of the last five years for which statistics are available; and how many businesses entering the scheme in each year have withdrawn from it at the order of Customs and Excise. [24802]

**Mr. Boateng:** Businesses do not require approval from Customs to use the cash accounting scheme. Customs may withdraw use of the scheme in cases of abuse or to protect the revenue, but these instances are rare. No record is kept of the number of businesses removed from the scheme.

### Terrorist Organisations

**Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will freeze the assets of organisations in

the United Kingdom that finance *(a)* Hamas, *(b)* Fatah and *(c)* other Palestinian and middle east terrorist organisations. [25459]

**Ruth Kelly:** The Government are committed to the fight against terrorism and since the events of 11 September 2001 have led by example in issuing asset freeze lists against individuals and organisations. A total of £72 million has been frozen in connection with groups involved in financing terrorist activities.

The Government imposed a freeze on the assets held in the UK for the Holy Land Foundation, which is suspected of financing terrorist activities of Hamas, on 6 December 2001.

Where there are "reasonable grounds to suspect" that any organisation is involved in the financing of terrorism the Government will not hesitate to add their name to the 328 individuals and organisations who have already been targeted with assets freezes.

### Earnings Statistics

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average earnings of full-time employees were in the Buckingham constituency in the most recent years for which figures are available. [24869]

**Ruth Kelly:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 9 January 2002:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the average earnings of full-time employees in the Buckingham constituency. I am replying in his absence. (24869)

The New Earnings Survey (NES) shows that in April 2000, the average weekly earnings for full-time employees on adult rates, whose pay was not affected by absence, were £412.3 in the Buckingham constituency.

For previous years' data, I refer you to the NES Part E, Table E18, available in the House of Commons Library.

### Pensions

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the savings to the Exchequer which would result from restricting the tax relief to individuals on *(a)* defined benefit, *(b)* defined contribution, *(c)* group personal and *(d)* personal pensions to a level that would provide an income in retirement just above benefit levels; and if he will make a statement. [25736]

**Ruth Kelly:** The number of assumptions that would need to be made and the complexity of the modelling procedures involved means that a robust estimate could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are being held in Northern Ireland in each *(a)* prison and *(b)* other location permitted to do so. [18855]

**Angela Eagle:** The latest available information on the number of persons detained under Immigration Act powers relates to 30 September 2001. As at that date, the only establishment in Northern Ireland that held Immigration Act detainees who had claimed asylum at some stage was Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry, at which less than five such persons were being held.

Information on immigration detainees as at 31 December 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been detained for more than six months in Northern Ireland. [18856]

**Angela Eagle:** The available information relates to persons detained under Immigration Act powers as at 30 September 2001. As at that date, there were no persons who had sought asylum at some stage who have been detained for more than six months in Northern Ireland.

Information on immigration detainees as at 31 September 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals seeking asylum in the UK have been located in the Buckingham constituency since the introduction of the Government's dispersal policy. [22657]

**Angela Eagle:** Figures are not available by constituency for those asylum seekers accommodated by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

Statistics from NASS for the end of September 2001, show that 600[1,2] asylum seekers (including dependants) were being supported in NASS accommodation in the South Central region, which includes the Buckingham constituency

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 10

[2] Cases which have had their support ceased are excluded from this figure.

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people under the age of 16 years from overseas countries have entered the UK during the last 12 months and have claimed political asylum on entry. [22480]

**Angela Eagle:** During the last 12 months (September 2000 to August 2001), 2,002 applications for asylum were lodged at United Kingdom ports by unaccompanied children, under the age of 18. I regret that this information is not available for children under the age of 16.

Reliable information on the number of children who have entered the United Kingdom as asylum seekers, accompanied by an adult, is not readily available and could be obtained only by examination of individual case records and is, therefore, available only at disproportionate cost.

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of asylum seekers had degrees in each of the last 10 years. [25018]

**Angela Eagle:** The information is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only by examining individual case records and by consulting the asylum seekers themselves, and it is, therefore available only at disproportionate cost.

### Iranians

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances Iranian citizens with family in the United Kingdom are allowed to visit the country. [23135]

**Angela Eagle:** The Immigration Rules make provision for visits to the United Kingdom. To qualify for entry to the United Kingdom as a visitor, applications must demonstrate that they are genuinely seeking entry as a visitor for the period stated, that they have sufficient funds to support and accommodate themselves and any dependants without working or recourse to public funds, and that they will leave the United Kingdom at the end of the visit. The maximum period allowed for a visit is six months. Iranian nationals need to obtain a visa before travelling to the United Kingdom.

### UK Citizenship

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the standard of proficiency in spoken English from ethnic minorities who seek citizenship of the United Kingdom should attain as a norm of acceptability. [22850]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The British Nationality Act 1981 requires applicants for naturalisation, except where married to British citizens, to have sufficient knowledge of English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic. Applicants who are able to make simple conversation and communicate well enough to deal with everyday situations are considered to meet this requirement. The requirements for British nationality, including the language requirement, are currently under review and the Government will announce their conclusions in a forthcoming asylum, immigration and nationality White Paper.

### Legal Assistance (Russia)

**Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests for legal assistance in criminal investigations were received from Russia in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* to date; how many responses have been made to these requests to date; and if he will make a statement. [24738]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** In 2000, 24 requests were received from Russia. Of these, seven requests were executed, eight were transferred to other authorities to execute, six remain under consideration and three were returned as we were unable to execute them. 62 requests were received in 2001. Of these, nine requests have been executed, 26 remain under consideration, 24 were transferred to other authorities to execute and three were returned as we were unable to execute them.

### Tagging

**Mr. Denis Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners who were initially released from prison under the tagging system have committed further offences following their release from the tagging system; [24501]

(2) how many prisoners who have been released from prison under the tagging system have committed offences while tagged. [24459]

**Beverley Hughes:** As of 30 November 2001, a total of 42,853 prisoners had been released on Home Detention Curfew (tagging) since the scheme commenced on 28 January 1999. Of these, 893 (2 per cent.) are reported to have been convicted, cautioned or awaiting prosecution for offences committed while they were subject to the scheme. Information relating to the number of prisoners released on Home Detention Curfew and who commit offences after their period on the scheme has expired is not held centrally.

### Murder Victims (Young People)

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in the age groups *(a)* 0 to 7, *(b)* 8 to 13 and *(c)* 14 to 18 years were murdered in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and in each age group how many were killed by (i) a family member, (ii) someone known to them and (iii) a stranger. [24561]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** The information requested for England and Wales is given in the table. Data are given for currently recorded homicides. Family member includes current or former spouse, cohabitant or lover. Stranger includes those cases where the relationship is not known or where there is no suspect.

| *Relationship victim to suspect* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Age of victim 0–7 years* | | | | | |
| Family member | 50 | 43 | 53 | 45 | 65 |
| Someone known to them | 4 | 11 | 11 | 0 | 1 |
| Stranger | 6 | 5 | 8 | 8 | 11 |
| Total | 60 | 59 | 72 | 53 | 77 |
| *Age of victim 8–13 years* | | | | | |
| Family member | 6 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 10 |
| Someone known to them | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Stranger | 3 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 2 |
| Total | 10 | 8 | 9 | 13 | 14 |
| *Age of victim 14–18 years* | | | | | |
| Family member | 9 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 14 |
| Someone known to them | 12 | 11 | 27 | 13 | 16 |

| *Relationship victim to suspect* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stranger | 22 | 11 | 15 | 20 | 22 |
| Total | 43 | 29 | 48 | 36 | 52 |

*Note:*
As at 3 October 2001; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts, or as further information becomes available.

Homicide Statistics are published annually in Chapter 4 of 'Criminal Statistics England and Wales'. Data are published on a calendar year basis up to 1997 and a financial year basis from 1997–98. The latest statistics relating to 2000–01 were published in December 2001 in 'Criminal Statistics England and Wales 2000'.

### Prisoners (Drug Testing)

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total number of days added to sentences on the basis of positive mandatory drug tests on prisoners was in each of the last five years for *(a)* cannabis, *(b)* opiates, *(c)* cocaine and *(d)* benzodiazepines. [24282]

**Beverley Hughes:** Statistics on numbers of days added to sentence by different drug type are not collated centrally. The total number of added days awarded for prisoners found guilty of unauthorised use of a controlled drug are set out as follows:

| | *Number added days* |
|---|---|
| 1996 | 106,942 |
| 1997 | 106,824 |
| 1998 | 107,517 |
| 1999 | 103,786 |
| 2000 | 100,801 |

### Prostitution

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implications of the Jany *v.* Staatsecretaris van Justitie case of the European Court of Justice Case C 268/99 published on 11 December, with particular reference to *(a)* the implication of access to the United Kingdom of prostitutes from Poland and Czech Republic and Slovakia and *(b)* the implications of right of establishment under Article 43 of the Treaty. [24286]

**Angela Eagle:** This ruling, along with the cases of Gloszczuk, Kondova, Barkoci and Malik, was welcomed by the United Kingdom Government. A detailed assessment of its implications is being made but our view is that the United Kingdom can continue to apply its Immigration Rules in such cases (paragraphs 211–223 of HC 395). Importantly, the rulings support our view that those here illegally cannot benefit from the association agreements.

The provisions on self-establishment in the association agreements are subject to limitations justified on the ground of public policy. A member state is entitled to rely on the public policy limitation in relation to those seeking to establish themselves in its territory under the agreements as self-employed prostitutes where that member state has adopted measures designed to combat prostitution carried out by its own nations.

Living off immoral earnings (pimping) and soliciting for prostitution are criminal offences under United Kingdom law and will continue to be prosecutable by the courts regardless of the nationality of the prostitute in question. We will rely on the public policy limitation to prevent Polish, Czech or Slovak nationals from establishing themselves as self-employed prostitutes in the United Kingdom under the association agreements.

The right of establishment under the Article 43 of the EC Treaty is effected by EC Council Directive 73/148, which deals with the abolition of restrictions on movement and residence within the EU for nationals of member states with regard to establishment and the provision of services. Article 8 of that directive allows member states to derogate from the provisions of the directive on the grounds of public policy. We would seek to rely on that provision should a national of a member state seek to enter or live in the United Kingdom as a prostitute.

### Immigration and Nationality Directorate

**Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the Immigration and Nationality Department to be able to accept e-mails from hon. Members. [24503]

**Angela Eagle:** In accordance with guidelines of the Office of the e-Envoy the Home Office has published its e-Business Strategy on the internet. Progress by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate towards the e-Government targets on electronic information and service provision for 2005 are set out within that strategy and in Appendix A.

The body of the strategy can be found at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/ebusiness/stratmain.pdf. The appendices are at: http:///.homeoffice.gov.uk/ebusiness/stratapp.pdf.

MORI has recently been commissioned to survey the experiences and expectations, including preferences on electronic service provision, of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's customers. In the light of that survey, in which Members of Parliament will be invited to participate, further consideration will be given to the options and time scale for receipt of e-mail from hon. Members.

### People Trafficking

**Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how far the UK has fulfilled its commitments under the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. [23352]

**Angela Eagle:** The United Kingdom signed the Trafficking Protocol to the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organised Crime, which requires the specific criminalisation of trafficking in human beings in December 2000.

The Government are currently negotiating a European Union (EU) Framework Decision, which is a binding European Union instrument. It contains most of the provisions in the United Nations (UN) Protocol and in certain aspects is more wide-ranging. The Government are committed to making it a criminal offence to traffic in human beings for the purposes of labour or sexual exploitation and is currently examining suitable legislative vehicles to facilitate this and other new offences on people trafficking. Under the provisions of the EU Framework Decision, the United Kingdom will be required to have implemented the instrument within two years of its adoption.

The UK is also contributing to the EU STOP programme, which was set up by a joint action of the European Council in 1996. This programme provides support to member state organisations responsible for action against the trade in human beings and the sexual exploitation of children. A European Council decision of 28 June 2001 established a second phase of this programme (STOP II).

As part of a multi-faceted approach, the protocol also requires work to be done to prevent people trafficking. We are in the process of drawing up a cross-departmental strategic approach to people trafficking that will include a comprehensive programme on prevention and the care of potential and actual people trafficking victims. In the last year, the Government funded overseas projects to tackle people trafficking in Turkey, Thailand and Cambodia. We have also contributed £200,000 to an Organisation and Security Co-operation in Europe fund to help the victims of trafficking and raise awareness of the dangers among vulnerable groups.

In addition, we set up Project REFLEX last year, a multi-agency task force chaired by the National Crime Squad, to co-ordinate action against organised immigration crime, including people trafficking, and to develop the intelligence and strategic planning to underpin them. It is now well established and has already resulted in some major successes involving partners overseas, by disrupting organised criminal groups involved in bringing people to the United Kingdom.

**Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made in relation to the recommendations in his Department's report, "Stopping Traffic", published in 2000. [23353]

**Angela Eagle:** The Home Office report "Stopping Traffic" assessed the extent of trafficking in women for the purposes of sexual exploitation and the law enforcement responses to the problem in the United Kingdom. In response, the Government are currently drawing up a coherent and comprehensive cross-Departmental strategy to address people trafficking on a national and international scale. The Government response will go beyond the report to address both sexual and labour exploitation of victims of trafficking and will engage a broad range of Government Departments and law enforcement agencies with interest in this area.

The Government are committed to putting in place effective measures to combat the trafficking of human beings and to penalise those engaged in this abhorrent practice. To this end, the United Kingdom has signed the Trafficking Protocol to the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organised Crime, which requires the specific criminalisation of trafficking in human beings. The Government are also currently negotiating an EU Framework Decision, which is a binding European Union instrument and requires the criminalisation of trafficking in human beings for the purposes of labour or sexual exploitation. Under its provisions, the United Kingdom will be required to have implemented the instrument within two years of its adoption.

### Sexual Offences Review

**Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation based on the recommendations in the sexual offences review report, "Setting the Boundaries". [23351]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** The Government are concerned that the law should provide clear and coherent sex offences which protect individuals, especially children and the more vulnerable, from abuse and exploitation.

The recommendations of the sex offences review to Government on reforming the law on sex offences were published in "Setting the Boundaries" in July 2000. We are currently analysing more than 700 responses received during the consultation period, which closed on 1 March 2001, and are considering how to change existing sex offences, in the light of the recommendations and the responses to the consultation exercise. We will be bringing forward legislation when parliamentary time allows.

### Rape

**Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many rape *(a)* complaints, *(b)* prosecutions and *(c)* convictions there were (i) in total and (ii) in each county in England and Wales in (A) 2000 and (B) 2001. [23354]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** The number of rape complaints is not collected centrally, but the available information relating to the number of recorded crimes of rape, together with the number of persons proceeded against and convicted of rape, by police force area for 2000 are shown in the table.

All the figures in the table relate to the rape of males and females. The two sets of figures shown in the table are not directly comparable as recorded crime is offence based and court proceedings are person based.

Statistics for 2001 are not yet available.

*Rape—number of recorded offences and persons proceeded against and convicted by police force area in 2000*

| *Police force area* | *Recorded offences* | *Persons proceeded against*[1] | *Persons convicted*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Avon and Somerset | 175 | 59 | 13 |
| Bedfordshire | 87 | 31 | 5 |
| Cambridgeshire | 104 | 27 | 4 |
| Cheshire | 83 | 33 | 13 |
| Cleveland | 45 | 18 | 8 |
| Cumbria | 27 | 7 | 3 |
| Derbyshire | 116 | 37 | 11 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 178 | 29 | 15 |
| Dorset | 84 | 21 | 14 |
| Durham | 60 | 40 | 3 |

*Rape—number of recorded offences and persons proceeded against and convicted by police force area in 2000*

| Police force area | Recorded offences | Persons proceeded against[1] | Persons convicted[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Essex | 170 | 38 | 6 |
| Gloucestershire | 90 | 20 | 8 |
| Greater Manchester | 555 | 121 | 44 |
| Hampshire | 284 | 91 | 23 |
| Hertfordshire | 73 | 28 | 6 |
| Humberside | 152 | 26 | 6 |
| Kent | 178 | 50 | 20 |
| Lancashire | 172 | 73 | 15 |
| Leicestershire | 140 | 37 | 8 |
| Lincolnshire | 68 | 28 | 11 |
| London, City of | — | 1 | 2 |
| Merseyside | 212 | 68 | 9 |
| Metropolitan police | 2,217 | 340 | 110 |
| Norfolk | 106 | 14 | 5 |
| Northampstonshire | 49 | 4 | 6 |
| Northumbria | 239 | 94 | 19 |
| North Yorkshire | 54 | 15 | 7 |
| Nottinghamshire | 255 | 59 | 19 |
| South Yorkshire | 127 | 47 | 7 |
| Staffordshire[2] | 195 | — | 15 |
| Suffolk | 94 | 14 | 5 |
| Surrey | 119 | 19 | 4 |
| Sussex | 257 | 47 | 9 |
| Thames Valley | 273 | 45 | 15 |
| Warwickshire | 25 | 6 | 2 |
| West Mercia | 114 | 20 | 5 |
| West Midlands | 546 | 156 | 37 |
| West Yorkshire | 405 | 135 | 41 |
| Wiltshire | 73 | 9 | 4 |
| Dyfed Powys | 47 | 25 | 5 |
| Gwent | 106 | 25 | 10 |
| North Wales | 101 | 24 | 4 |
| South Wales | 125 | 65 | 22 |
| England and Wales | 8,580 | 2,046 | 598 |

[1] Data are given on a principal offence basis. Persons shown as convicted may have been proceeded against in earlier years.
[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against at magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.
*Source:*
Home office Crime and Criminal Justice Unit.

### Downview Prison

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons received prisoners from Downview between 17 July and 1 September. [25162]

**Beverley Hughes:** The main destinations for prisoners from Downview were:

Coldingley, a nearby category C training prison;

Ford, for those prisoners who were recategorised to D;

Elmley, a local prison in Kent;

Wormwood Scrubs, where former Downview prisoners were accommodated in a separate wing.

### Visas

**Mr. Gummer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average waiting time taken to renew a one year student visa was in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [23632]

**Angela Eagle:** Information about average waiting times for student applications is not held centrally and could be obtained only by scrutinising individual case files, at disproportionate cost. We aim to decide 70 per cent. of new general and settlement applications within three weeks but at present it is taking up to eight weeks on average to consider new straightforward applications. The reasons for this are (i) the exceptionally high number of new applications received this year, especially in recent months; and (ii) process changes that are being introduced. We are working to reduce this to three weeks or less as soon as possible.

**Mr. Gummer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to enable individuals to retain their passports while their visa renewal applications are being processed. [23634]

**Angela Eagle:** There are no plans to change the existing procedures requiring overseas nationals to provide their passports when applying for extensions of stay in the United Kingdom. But everything possible will be done to reduce the time scales for dealing with such applications and to improve the arrangements for handling applicants' passports while their applications are pending.

### Prisoners

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were released from prison without accommodation to go to in the last 12 months. [23905]

**Beverley Hughes:** Information on the accommodation of prisoners after release is not available centrally for all prisoners. However a prisoner resettlement survey is currently being carried out for the Prison Service. This involves interviews with a representative sample of about 2,000 prisoners shortly before discharge. It will provide information about the proportion reporting that they have no accommodation to go to on release. Results will be available in spring 2002.

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of women were refused bail by the courts in each of the last five years on the grounds that *(a)* they would fail to surrender to custody, *(b)* they would commit an offence while on bail, *(c)* they would interfere with witnesses or otherwise obstruct the course of justice, *(d)* they should be kept in custody for their own protection or welfare and *(e)* the case was adjourned for inquiries or a report. [23908]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** The information held centrally does not give a breakdown of the reasons why people are refused bail by the courts.

### Migrant Workers

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to sign and ratify the 1990 UN convention on the protection of rights of all migrant workers and their families. [23686]

**Angela Eagle:** We have no plans at present to sign and ratify the convention. The Government consider they have already struck the right balance between the need for immigration control and the protection of the interests and rights of migrant workers and their families in the United Kingdom. The rights of migrant workers and their

families are protected in United Kingdom legislation, including the Human Rights Act 1998, and the United Kingdom's existing commitments under international law.

### Court Cases

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many court cases have collapsed during the last five years because of technical law procedures. [23877]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** The number of court cases which collapsed because of technical law procedures cannot be identified by the Home Office from other early terminations or acquittals in the statistics collected centrally by the Department.

### Driving Offences (Mobile Phones)

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions for *(a)* dangerous driving, *(b)* failing to have proper control of the vehicle and *(c)* careless and inconsiderate driving have been brought because of the use of mobile phones in each year since 1995. [24296]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** There is no separate offence of driving a vehicle while using a mobile telephone and the circumstances of offences are not collected. In the main, prosecutions involving the use of mobile phones are likely to be for driving without due care and attention under section 3 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. The number of prosecutions for this offence within England and Wales since 1995 is given in the table.

*Proceedings at magistrates courts for offences of driving without due care and attention[1], England and Wales, 1995–2000*

| *Year* | *Number of offences prosecuted* |
|---|---|
| 1995 | 73,015 |
| 1996 | 66,858 |
| 1997 | 64,819 |
| 1998 | 60,505 |
| 1999 | 54,789 |
| 2000 | 49,971 |

[1] Offences under section 3 Road Traffic Act 1988

It is also possible for such drivers to be prosecuted or issued with a fixed penalty for not being in proper control of a vehicle (Regulation 104 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986), but such cases cannot be separately identified in the statistics collected centrally.

### Driver Improvement Scheme

**Mr. Pollard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the driver improvement scheme in reducing road traffic accidents; if he plans to assist those on low incomes with the fees and with loss of earnings while attending; and if he will make a statement. [25303]

**Mr. Jamieson:** I have been asked to reply.

National Driver Improvement Schemes are currently offered as an alternative to prosecution by the police. Research so far conducted shows improvement in driver attitudes and self-reported behaviour in the three months following attendance at courses. Further research is being undertaken to try to assess re-offending rates.

The matter of fees is for the police and for the course providers.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Forestry

**Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to review the options for further decentralising handling of forestry policy and management. [26399]

**Mr. Morley:** When I announced the completion of the first stage of the review of the Forest Enterprise executive agency on 10 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 301W, I said that we intended to review the options for further decentralisation of forestry policy and management. The Scottish and Welsh Forestry Ministers and I have decided that the review will start shortly and report to us in the spring. It will consider the current administrative arrangements for delivering sustainable forestry policies in England, Scotland and Wales and the UK's international forestry commitments, including options for further devolution of these arrangements. The review will be undertaken by officials from the Forestry Commission, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Scottish Executive, the National Assembly for Wales, the Cabinet Office and the Treasury. The Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will also be involved in the review. Views will be sought from interested parties during the course of the review.

### Timber Procurement

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent measures she has taken to ensure that the Government procure only sustainable and legally felled timber. [8285]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment announced to Parliament on 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, columns 947–48W, that central Government Departments and their agencies were committed to actively seeking to buy timber and timber products from sustainable and legal sources. In January 2001 the Office of Government Commerce wrote to departmental Heads of Procurement to confirm this policy. Departments have been asked to report annually on their timber purchases and the recent Greening Government report for the financial year 2000–01 includes a summary of the responses received. My Department, on behalf of an interdepartmental working group on timber procurement, has commissioned a study on the scale of central Government's timber requirements and the options available for developing the most effective implementation of this policy. An interim report is due to be published at the end of February 2002 with a final report due at the end of May 2002. My Department has consulted the Timber Trade Federation and environmental NGOs in pursuit of the Government's timber procurement policy and has been raising awareness among Departments and the wider public sector. In May 2001 a timber procurement workshop was held at the Greening Public Procurement conference organised by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and attended by a cross-section of the public

sector. In October 2001 my Department gave a presentation at the local government's Central Buying Consortium conference and took that opportunity to promote the purchase of sustainable and legally harvested timber. Recently my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment has met the Timber Trade Federation to discuss implementation of the Government's timber procurement policy and he addressed a wide cross section of stakeholders and answered questions at the WWF 95+ Group 10th anniversary celebration event. My Department has arranged to meet the Department for Transport, Local Government and Rural Affairs to discuss how local authorities may be encouraged to purchase timber from sustainable and legal sources where they are not doing so already. My Department is working closely with the Department for International Development and other Departments to develop bilateral agreements with producing countries that will help to halt the export of timber that has been felled illegally.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department is taking to promote the viability of *(a)* the hardwood and *(b)* the softwood timber growing industries; what recent discussions she has had with the Timber Growers Association; and if she will make a statement. [25187]

**Mr. Morley:** The Government's Forestry Strategy for England sets out our priorities and programmes for sustainable forestry in England. These priorities include supporting the strategic development of woodland resources. Specific actions include support for regional and local marketing initiatives, and ensuring the supply of timber from our woodland resource is available at levels indicated in long-term forecasts. In addition, through the Forestry Commission and in partnership with woodland owners and wood users we are supporting the Wood for Good campaign, the largest single timber promotion ever mounted in the UK. Other measures include purchasing research on timber use from the Building Research Establishment, the Timber Research and Development Association and other organisations. We are also working to ensure that small sized timber and woodland residues are recognised as a source of renewable energy. These measures will help to promote the viability of the hardwood and softwood industries.

I meet regularly with representatives from the Timber Growers Association (now known as the Association of Timber Growers and Forestry Professionals, following a merger with the Association of Professional Foresters, effective from 1 January 2002). The association is represented on the England Forestry Forum and I attended a parliamentary lunch with the Timber Growers Association and the UK Forest Products Association on 5 November 2001.

### LGC/Cellmark Diagnostics Ltd.

**Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the responsibility of LGC and Cellmark Diagnostics Ltd. was in relation to errors in tests of sheep and cow brains; and if she will make a statement. [24908]

**Mr. Morley:** Cellmark Diagnostics has had no involvement with the Government in this context. LGC performed the cross-checking genetic test of the brains in the flawed Institute of Animal Health experiment about which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a statement to the House on 22 October last year. LGC has performed an internal audit of this work and is satisfied that the samples were correctly handled and that the results can be traced back to the correct samples.

### Laboratories (Departmental Arrangements)

**Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to *(a)* review and *(b)* assess her Department's arrangements with (i) its own and (ii) other laboratories; and if she will make a statement. [24907]

**Mr. Morley:** As Executive Agencies of DEFRA the arrangement between the Department and its three science laboratories—Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA), Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) and Central Science Laboratory (CSL)—are governed by their respective Framework Agreements. Executive agencies are subject to quinquennial reviews which evaluate their performance and organisational arrangements. All three agencies are due quinquennial reviews this year. In accordance with best practice active consideration is being given to a joint exercise to ensure realisation of the full potential of these reviews to help improve the way service and functions are delivered. I hope to be able to announce further details soon. In addition the three agencies are the subject of periodic science assessments carried out by teams of independent and respected experts in the relevant fields. A science assessment was conducted on CEFAS in 1999 and similar assessments are currently under way at VLA and CSL.

DEFRA has concordats with the research councils, such as BBSRC, NERC and MRC, aimed at ensuring effective working arrangements. The research councils periodically assess their research institutes for scientific quality, strategic relevance of science and knowledge transfer; BBSRC are currently carrying out such an assessment. In addition to this Horticulture Research International, a DEFRA sponsored NDPB but included in the BBSRC assessment exercise, is to undergo a quinquennial review in 2002 which was announced in December 2001.

### Livestock Compensation

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 860W, on livestock compensation, for what reason the Government treats losses incurred on cattle which went beyond 30 months because they could not be moved during the foot and mouth crisis as an indirect loss. [R] [25150]

**Mr. Morley:** As that answer explained, the Government pay compensation only on property, including animals, seized or destroyed to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease. The Government do not compensate for other losses such as those resulting from inability to market agricultural products at an optimum time.

### Hills Task Force

**Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to all aspects of the Hills Task Force report; and if she will make a statement. [23696]

**Mr. Morley:** The Hills Task Force produced many wide-ranging and thoughtful recommendations which are being considered in the review of the Hill Farm Allowance, in the review of agri-environment schemes and elsewhere. The recommendations on helping hill farms to recover from foot and mouth disease have already informed our recovery strategy. The report also provides a timely contribution for the consideration of the Policy Commission on Food and Farming announced on 9 August and which we understand is due to report shortly.

### TB

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many TB breakdowns of cattle there were in the Gloucester Division in each year from 1990 to 2000; and what the projected figure is for *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002. [25348]

**Mr. Morley:** The Gloucester Animal Health Division covers the counties of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and the part of North Somerset which was formerly in the County of Avon. The total of new herd TB incidents from 1990 to 2000 and the number of those confirmed to be *M.bovis* TB are set out in the table.

| *Year* | *New herd incidents* | *Of which confirmed* |
|---|---|---|
| 1990 | 22 | 0 |
| 1991 | 69 | 0 |
| 1992 | 104 | 1 |
| 1993 | 151 | 5 |
| 1994 | 151 | 34 |
| 1995 | 189 | 108 |
| 1996 | 181 | 89 |
| 1997 | 229 | 132 |
| 1998 | 314 | 184 |
| 1999 | 333 | 221 |
| 2000 | 366 | 257 |

This information is taken from the IT system used by the State Veterinary Service in support of their TB control work and has not been checked against the quality criteria expected of 'national statistics'. Figures may therefore be unreliable (especially before 1996); they show trends rather than absolute numbers of new incidents.

Precise forecasts of the number of future incidents are not possible because of unknown variables including, in particular, the effect of the suspension of TB testing during 2001 in order to limit the spread of foot and mouth disease. We expect the total of new herd incidents in 2001 to fall within the range 95 to 150 (final figures will not be available until April). In 2002, if the rising trend of the last four years continues in the Gloucester Division, a new herd incident figure of around 400 may be possible, although it is not yet clear how measures taken in respect of foot and mouth disease may affect the incidence of bovine TB.

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when full TB testing of herds will resume; what the priority order is for testing cattle to monitor the spread of bovine TB; and what staffing implications there are in the resumption of full cattle TB testing. [25373]

**Mr. Morley:** It is not possible to predict when full TB testing of cattle will resume. This will depend on when veterinary resource can be released from FMD work.

Prioritisation of testing will vary according to local circumstances but in general tests will be ranked using two major criteria: likelihood of TB infection in a herd; and likely transmission of TB out of a herd. Top priority will be given to tests on herds where raw milk or raw milk products are manufactured and sold for human consumption or direct to consumers. Next in priority will be overdue tests on herds which have some association with an incident of TB. Of these, herds with high levels of movements other than direct to slaughter will be given priority.

The major part of routine TB testing is delivered for the Government by local veterinary practitioners who work for the State Veterinary Service (SVS) as local veterinary inspectors (LVIs). Non-routine TB testing is delivered by both SVS veterinary officers and (LVIs) depending on local circumstances. SVS administrative staff provide office support for the testing programme. The resumption of full TB testing and clearing the overdue test backlog will place significant demands on these resources for quite some time to come.

### Flooding

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evaluation has been made of the ability of the Environment Agency to undertake its statutory duties relating to flooding; and if she will make a statement. [25747]

**Mr. Morley:** The Environment Agency has permissive powers to undertake flood defence works on main rivers and against flooding from the sea. The agency also has a statutory duty to exercise a general supervision over all matters relating to flood defence.

The agency is able to carry out these functions satisfactorily.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what in the allocation of revenue support grant for 2002–03 reflects the cost of the floods in autumn 2000 for *(a)* North Yorkshire county council, *(b)* Humbleton district council, *(c)* Harrogate borough council, *(d)* Ryedale borough council and *(e)* City of York council. [25279]

**Mr. Morley:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 137W.

### Hunting

**Mr. Anthony D. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether departmental staff processing permits from hunts on Saturday 15 December usually work at weekends. [25484]

**Alun Michael:** Most of the sections processing hunt permit applications do not work at weekends.

**Mr. Anthony D. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many *(a)* fox and *(b)* hare hunts have applied for a temporary permit for hunting with dogs; and how many of these have been (i) accepted and (ii) rejected; [25487]

(2) if she will list the Forestry Commission land holdings where hunting permits have been issued under the temporary permits scheme; [25485]

(3) how many applications for temporary permits to hold hare coursing events have been received; and how many have been *(a)* accepted and *(b)* rejected. [25488]

**Alun Michael:** The current system is demand-led and temporary. DEFRA's animal health divisional offices will produce monthly statistics. A full copy of the statistics will be placed in the Library of the House when available.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what special conditions have been attached to licences giving permission to hunt to the *(a)* Worcestershire Hunt, *(b)* Croome and West Warwickshire Foxhounds and *(c)* North Cotswold Hunt; what the reason is for any such special conditions; and how long she expects such conditions will endure. [24454]

**Alun Michael:** Hunting with hounds is not governed by a licensing system. At present a temporary system sets out the requirements against which hunting can be allowed to take place within the requirements of disease control measures. Hunting was one of the activities that was banned in order to stop the spread of foot and mouth disease and assist its eradication. The Government's priority has been to eradicate FMD and then to enable the countryside to return to normal as quickly as it is safe to do so. For each of the activities that were banned or limited the decision on resumption and on any residual limitations on the relevant activity has been based on a Veterinary Risk Assessment. For low risk activities like walking, implementation of such decisions have been relatively straightforward. The same was found to be the case in respect of grouse shooting and falconry. In the case of hunting with hounds, the Veterinary Risk Assessment reflected a much more complex set of circumstances in which different forms of hunting, different conditions in different parts of the country and concentrations of FMD susceptible species such as deer and the presence of Form A and Form D farms all posed different risks and are factors that have to be taken into account.

On 15 November 2001 I published proposals for the way in which hunting might be allowed to resume, along with the Veterinary Risk Assessment on which the proposals were based. Essentially it was proposed that any hunt which wished to resume activity would have to show how they would observe the limitations which would be necessary to minimise the risk of starting another outbreak of FMD. Decisions were delegated to Divisional Veterinary Managers who would be familiar with local circumstances and would need to be satisfied that the hunt could meet the requirements of animal health controls. Hunts which met these requirements can be permitted to hunt within the defined limits.

On 13 December 2001 I published details of the permit arrangements which included practical amendments responding to representations by both hunting and non-hunting groups. Since then our Divisional Veterinary Managers have sought to apply local knowledge and common sense to approaches from hunts. They have been widely praised for the way they have undertaken this additional task and I would like to place on the record my thanks to the DEFRA staff involved.

It is against this background that the circumstances of the Worcestershire Hunt, the Croome and West Warwickshire Foxhounds and the North Cotswold Hunt have to be understood.

All these hunts have applied for and given a permit to hunt. Limitations on hunting will continue as long as care is needed to achieve the eradication of FMD and the general requirements—which require hunts not to meet or hunt within 8 km of a Form A or a Form D premise—will be reviewed as and when there is any change in the Veterinary Risk Assessment. As indicated earlier, the disease control requirements are being applied with common sense in the light of local circumstances. So in the case of the Worcestershire Hunt several exceptions have been granted to this criterion which is that it may hunt closer to a particular Form A premise as the M5 acts as a natural buffer between the Farm and five of the proposed meets. Two other proposed meets have also been permitted within an 8 km restriction due to the low risk of hunting near to the relevant Form A premise.

Special conditions have also been applied to the Croome and West Warwickshire Hunt forbidding it from hunting on the Ragley Hall Estate. This is in recognition of the estate having a large deer population.

These conditions will continue to apply as long as the threat of FMD remains. The permit section at Worcester Animal Health Office is constantly reviewing the restrictions on individual Form A and Form D premises and as soon as any are lifted, the relevant Hunts are being informed. The temporary permit system for hunting will continue as long as restrictions are necessary to achieve eradication of FMD and will be removed when FMD has been officially eradicated from the whole of Great Britain.

## Correspondence

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the question, ref 22779, tabled on 10 December, for what reason replies to letters from the hon. Member for the Vale of York were not received by 19 December. [25322]

**Mr. Morley:** The hon. Member has been sent responses to all the letters detailed in her question, ref 22779, tabled on 10 December, except the letter dated 21 June on behalf of Mrs. P. Crosby of Thirsk about FMD, which will be sent out as soon as possible.

## Organic Farming

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further steps the Government are taking to encourage the growth of organic farming. [23969]

**Mr. Morley:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 30 November, *Official Report*, column 1174W.

### Animal Experiments

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which household chemicals have been permitted to be tested on animals in live experiments in the UK in the next two years. [19423]

**Mr. Morley:** EU legislation requires testing, including animal testing, of all industrial chemicals produced in high volume (greater than 1,000 tons per manufacturer per year) and below this level, the generation of data on new chemicals according to the amount produced. Other chemicals may be required to be tested if there are justifiable concerns. Chemicals used for particular purposes, for example pesticides and biocides (including garden pesticides and household disinfectants) and pharmaceuticals, are also required to be tested before they are put on the market. We have no information about which chemicals will be coming forward for testing in future years. Animal tests are regulated by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 which is a Home Office matter. The Government's policy is to reduce the number of animals used in tests and we are currently supporting changes to Pesticides Directive 91/44/EC to prevent the replication of testing on vertebrate animals.

### Farm Assurance Schemes

**Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to encourage *(a)* supermarkets and *(b)* consumers to buy produce from farm schemes which are (i) environmentally and (ii) animal welfare friendly; and if she will make a statement. [23701]

**Mr. Morley:** The promotion of food produced in accordance with the standards laid down in farm assurance schemes is a matter for the individual scheme providers. The Department has, however, supported the development of farm assurance schemes and the inclusion within them of animal welfare and environmental standards. A significant proportion of farm produce in the UK is now produced in accordance with the standards laid down in such schemes. Much of this will be sold to consumers through supermarkets.

### Ministerial Meeting

**Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on *(a)* matters discussed and *(b)* points agreed and disagreed in her meeting on 17 December with her Norwegian counterpart. [25165]

**Margaret Beckett:** We had a useful and friendly discussion of issues of mutual interest, including climate change, the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the North Sea Conference, which the Norwegians will chair in March. The Norwegian Minister raised the issue of technetium-99 discharges from Sellafield, but I was unable to comment for legal reasons in advance of the statutory decision which the Secretary of State for Health and I have to take on the Environment Agency's proposed decision.

The meeting was held in order to exchange views rather than to seek agreement on any specific points.

### Common Agricultural Policy

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's discussions with EU institutions in the last six months regarding the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. [24962]

**Mr. Morley:** We have had a number of discussions with Commission representatives about the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy Agenda 2000 decisions and the Secretary of State will be meeting Commissioner Fischler later this month. Our understanding is that the Commission are likely to report to the Agriculture Council on the review in the summer.

### Skimmed Milk Powder

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the worldwide slump in skimmed milk powder consumption on the UK milk producing industry; and if she will make a statement on recent trends in milk prices. [25253]

**Mr. Morley:** The fall in world demand for skimmed milk powder has depressed prices. Low demand in the UK coupled with low prices could lead to an increase in public intervention. That is why the Government have supported moves by the Commission to stimulate markets both at home and abroad.

The producer price for milk reflects the position in the market and, therefore, has recently shown a downward trend following a very sharp recovery compared to a year earlier. The action already taken may help arrest this trend but the price will ultimately be determined by supply and demand.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in how many confirmed cases of foot and mouth disease samples were subjected to laboratory testing. [24090]

**Margaret Beckett** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]*: Samples were taken for laboratory testing from 1,728 premises which are confirmed as infected premises.

*Source:*

DEFRA Disease Control System database as at 17:00 17 December 2001.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Entertainment Budgets

**Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the entertainment budget for each British embassy and consulate for financial year 2000–01. [23778]

**Mr. MacShane:** Entertainment budgets are not held at embassy and post level. However, actual expenditure is recorded and the figures for 2000–01 are detailed in the table. A composite figure is shown where the FCO has more than one representation in a city.

| Post | £ Total |
|---|---|
| Paris | 305,231 |
| Tokyo | 302,731 |
| New York | 267,024 |
| Washington | 226,400 |
| Brussels | 205,744 |
| Berlin | 158,251 |
| Moscow | 127,739 |
| Hong Kong | 115,156 |
| Buenos Aires | 105,381 |
| Seoul | 105,117 |
| Geneva | 91,927 |
| Peking | 88,212 |
| Madrid | 82,297 |
| Rome | 78,985 |
| Vienna | 75,033 |
| Ottawa | 68,189 |
| Cairo | 63,938 |
| Dublin | 61,465 |
| Islamabad | 61,232 |
| Atlanta | 60,077 |
| Chicago | 59,426 |
| Warsaw | 59,009 |
| Santiago | 57,590 |
| Riyadh | 57,440 |
| Jakarta | 56,706 |
| Mexico City | 56,562 |
| New Delhi | 56,153 |
| Singapore | 55,951 |
| Tripoli | 52,383 |
| Lagos | 51,900 |
| Tel Aviv | 51,551 |
| Athens | 51,422 |
| Zagreb | 49,771 |
| Nairobi | 49,485 |
| Kuala Lumpur | 48,446 |
| Hague, The | 47,596 |
| Stockholm | 47,149 |
| Prague | 46,609 |
| Muscat | 46,536 |
| Copenhagen | 46,144 |
| Berne | 45,323 |
| Canberra | 44,720 |
| Houston | 44,576 |
| Brasília | 44,455 |
| Accra | 44,397 |
| Caracas | 44,116 |
| Sydney | 43,684 |
| Manila | 43,652 |
| Ankara | 42,517 |
| Nicosia | 41,841 |
| Los Angeles | 41,287 |
| Ljubljana | 39,812 |
| Budapest | 39,658 |
| Sarajevo | 39,347 |
| Helsinki | 39,273 |
| Oslo | 38,646 |
| Pretoria | 38,596 |
| Bangkok | 38,031 |
| Grand Turk | 37,912 |
| Taipei | 37,550 |
| Kuwait | 36,862 |
| Shanghai | 36,592 |
| Amman | 35,951 |
| Hanoi | 35,679 |
| Abuja | 35,644 |
| Bridgetown | 35,252 |
| Beirut | 34,790 |
| Baku | 34,423 |
| Lisbon | 34,393 |
| Kingston | 33,993 |

| Post | £ Total |
|---|---|
| Boston | 33,752 |
| Abu Dhabi | 33,174 |
| Dusseldorf | 32,547 |
| Havana | 32,128 |
| Doha | 31,905 |
| Dhaka | 31,679 |
| Bahrain | 30,235 |
| Plymouth | 30,096 |
| Bandar Seri Begawan | 29,826 |
| Osaka | 29,780 |
| Bogotá | 29,540 |
| Belgrade | 28,790 |
| Khartoum | 28,704 |
| Sanaa | 28,697 |
| São Paulo | 28,638 |
| Damascus | 27,804 |
| Gibraltar | 27,107 |
| Bucharest | 26,918 |
| Hamburg | 26,726 |
| Nassau | 26,480 |
| Luanda | 26,390 |
| St. Petersburg | 26,284 |
| Riga | 25,764 |
| Harare | 25,720 |
| Strasbourg | 25,235 |
| Lima | 24,963 |
| Freetown | 24,591 |
| Vancouver | 24,423 |
| Vilnius | 24,357 |
| Ho Chi Minh City | 24,328 |
| Bombay | 23,855 |
| Milan | 23,489 |
| Valletta | 23,369 |
| Abidjan | 23,358 |
| Brisbane | 23,289 |
| Dubai | 22,941 |
| Dakar | 22,904 |
| San Francisco | 22,543 |
| Colombo | 22,536 |
| Wellington | 22,412 |
| Lusaka | 22,387 |
| Tehran | 22,057 |
| Jerusalem | 21,713 |
| Kampala | 21,461 |
| Kinshasa | 21,012 |
| Yaounde | 20,853 |
| Maputo | 20,701 |
| Addis Ababa | 20,365 |
| Minsk | 20,023 |
| St. Helena | 19,821 |
| Sofia | 19,772 |
| Istanbul | 19,680 |
| Stanley | 19,576 |
| Port of Spain | 19,574 |
| Panama City | 19,402 |
| Tallinn | 19,384 |
| Montreal | 19,365 |
| Santo Domingo | 19,090 |
| Tunis | 18,790 |
| Cape Town | 18,544 |
| Toronto | 18,501 |
| Tortola | 18,485 |
| Reykjavik | 18,339 |
| Marseilles | 18,242 |
| Rabat | 17,722 |
| Kiev | 17,647 |
| Jedda | 17,475 |
| Almaty | 17,096 |
| Gaborone | 17,072 |
| Dar es Salaam | 16,999 |

| Post | £ Total |
|---|---|
| Madras | 16,885 |
| Ekaterinburg | 16,740 |
| Quito | 16,709 |
| Tirana | 16,468 |
| Karachi | 16,254 |
| Munich | 16,189 |
| Belmopan | 16,164 |
| Anguilla | 16,158 |
| Asunción | 15,920 |
| Port Louis | 15,537 |
| Luxembourg | 15,490 |
| Melbourne | 15,383 |
| Johannesburg | 15,216 |
| Lyon | 14,844 |
| La Paz | 14,760 |
| Montevideo | 14,601 |
| Pristina | 14,274 |
| Perth | 14,099 |
| Barcelona | 14,080 |
| Kigali | 13,871 |
| Vila | 13,854 |
| Port Moresby | 13,823 |
| Frankfurt | 13,676 |
| Lilongwe | 13,473 |
| Tegucigalpa | 13,318 |
| Ashgabat | 13,049 |
| San Salvador | 12,816 |
| Rio de Janeiro | 12,760 |
| Phnom Penh | 12,607 |
| Georgetown | 12,529 |
| Bratislava | 12,465 |
| Victoria | 11,853 |
| Kathmandu | 11,786 |
| Skopje | 11,460 |
| Managua | 11,247 |
| Suva | 11,180 |
| Alexandria | 11,043 |
| Tbilisi | 11,030 |
| Naples | 11,028 |
| Casablanca | 10,889 |
| Ulaanbaatar | 10,616 |
| San José | 10,564 |
| Algiers | 10,300 |
| Rangoon | 10,246 |
| Guatemala City | 10,021 |
| Bordeaux | 10,001 |
| Auckland | 9,928 |
| Yerevan | 9,927 |
| Chongqing | 9,843 |
| Seattle | 9,777 |
| Lille | 9,527 |
| Castries | 9,333 |
| Nuku Alofa | 8,814 |
| Dili | 8,649 |
| Calcutta | 8,565 |
| Banjul | 8,454 |
| Mbabane | 8,308 |
| Honiara | 8,248 |
| Tashkent | 8,149 |
| St. John's | 7,809 |
| Holy See | 7,758 |
| Windhoek | 7,537 |
| Amsterdam | 7,134 |
| Maseru | 6,987 |
| Antananarivo | 6,077 |
| Bilbao | 6,052 |
| Palma | 5,677 |
| Durban | 5,419 |
| St. George's | 4,249 |
| Kingstown | 3,821 |
| Conakry | 3,012 |
| Grand Cayman | 1,340 |
| Guangzhou | 621 |
| Pyongyang | 335 |
| Total | 7,347,976 |

## Gibraltar

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many commercial aircraft have been diverted en route to Gibraltar due to *(a)* inclement weather and *(b)* restrictions by the Government of Spain on overflying Spanish airspace. [R] [24512]

**Peter Hain:** In the period 1 January to 18 December 2001, 29 commercial aircraft en route to Gibraltar were diverted due to inclement weather. None were diverted due to restrictions on overflying Spanish airspace.

## European Security and Defence Policy

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the ESDP's readiness to take on *(a)* a peacekeeping role, and *(b)* a humanitarian aid relief role. [24939]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** At Laeken the EU assessed that it was now able to conduct some crisis-management operations. The EU will be in a position to take on more demanding operations as the assets an capabilities at its disposal continue to develop. Decisions to make use of this ability will be taken in the light of the circumstances of each particular situation, a determining factor being the military and civilian assets and capabilities at the disposal of the Union at the time.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the cost to the EU of EU structures that there have been created to support the ESDP in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* each of the next two years. [24988]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The budget of the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union contains a provision of £10.7 million to meet expenses related to the European Union Military Staff and infrastructure and meeting costs in support of the European Security and Defence Policy during the current EU financial year. There are no estimates currently available for these costs in future financial years.

The current year is the first in which the budget of the General Secretariat has included disaggregated figures for the costs of the European Security and Defence Policy. In the figure stated it has therefore been possible to include not only the costs of the infrastructure supporting ESDP, as estimated in the answer to the hon. Member's question of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 360W, but also the costs of meetings and of the European Union Military Staff, which will near full staffing this year.

## Western Sahara

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress he

expects to be made before the expiry of the MINURSO mandate by the UN on a referendum on the future of the Western Sahara. [25234]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We supported United Nations Security Council Resolution 1359 that extended the mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 28 February 2002.

Resolution 1359 reiterated full support for the on-going efforts of MINURSO to implement the Settlement Plan and the agreements of the parties to hold a free, fair and impartial referendum for the self determination of the people of the Western Sahara. The resolution expressed the UN's commitment to assist the parties in achieving a just and lasting solution to the question of the Western Sahara.

We continue to support the efforts of James Baker, the Personal Envoy of the United Nations Secretary General, who is currently engaged in an attempt to resolve the dispute. We look forward to the interim reports on the situation from the Secretary General, in January and again in February.

### Ukraine

**Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Britain's relationship with Ukraine with reference to the enlargement of the EU. [25376]

**Peter Hain:** The Government support a closer relationship between the EU and Ukraine and welcome recent progress including Ukraine's attendance at the enlarged European conference meeting in October and the agreement of an EU-Ukraine Action Plan on Justice and Home Affairs. The Government recognise the potential impact on Ukraine of the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union and support the European Commission's efforts to ensure that this is taken into account, eg by supporting joint programmes with EU candidates aimed at improving border management.

The Government consider that EU enlargement presents opportunities for Ukraine, particularly in the fields of trade and investment. The UK has urged Ukraine to continue with its political and economic reforms, so it is able to exploit these opportunities fully.

Accession to the World Trade Organisation—an area where the UK is giving bilateral technical assistance—will be a vital step in this direction.

### Sudan

**Mr. Dawson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria will be used in determining the date for resuming the EU-Sudan dialogue; if he will outline the criteria by which future progress will be measured; and if he will make a statement. [25374]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** At the end of 2001 the EU and the Sudanese Government agreed to continue and intensify the EU-Sudan dialogue, chaired by our ambassador during the latter half of the year, for a further 12 months. The dialogue is therefore on-going. The continued dialogue will allow for regular joint assessments of concrete and verifiable progress achieved with respect to democracy and human rights and in the peace process. For its part, the EU agreed to achieve the launch of the Humanitarian Plus programme.

We are pleased with the progress achieved during the course of the dialogue last year. There was some progress on human rights and democratisation. The Council of Ministers is somewhat more broadly based. The Umma Party is back and operating as a political party within Sudan. New newspapers are permitting a freer expression of political debate. There is some moderation of police and security activity, though abuses undoubtedly occur. Work continues to confront the problem of abductions. But in all these areas there is much more to do and we shall continue to address these issues during the course of this year.

### Telephone Bugging

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether hon. Members and peers have their office and home telephone conversations *(a)* recorded and *(b)* listened to on the instruction of the Foreign Office. [25007]

**Mr. Straw:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 366W.

The Secretary of State alone can sign an interception of communications warrant; the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 lists the authorities that may apply for such a warrant.

### Macedonia

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation on the borders of Macedonia and the progress of British forces there. [24973]

**Mr. MacShane:** We strongly support Macedonia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. British forces in Kosovo as part of KFOR have contributed significantly to successful operations on the Macedonia/Kosovo border in which over 5,000 weapons and 224,000 rounds of ammunition have been seized and over 1,200 people detained while illegally crossing the border.

### Fiji

**Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent decision of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group to readmit Fiji to the Councils of the Commonwealth and on the implications for UK policy on Fiji. [26094]

**Mr. MacShane:** The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group discussed developments in Fiji at its meeting in London on 20 December. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State represented the United Kingdom. The Group welcomed the holding of broadly free and fair elections in Fiji in August and September 2001. In recognition of this and the fact that the Fiji Government were now addressing the current uncertainty over their own constitutionality in a responsible manner, the Group decided that the conditions were now right to readmit Fiji to the Councils of the Commonwealth. However, in view

of the remaining uncertainty over the Government's constitutionality the Group also decided that Fiji should remain on its agenda and that the Secretary General's Special Envoy, Justice Pius Langa of South Africa should remain engaged.

In view of this we decided on 20 December to lift the targeted package of measures that the then Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) announced on 21 July 2000. We will once again consider applications for funding for small projects from the Fiji Government in the areas of good governance, human rights, conflict prevention and the environment. We have also ended our blanket ban on joint military exercises and visits to Fiji by Royal Navy ships—possible co-operation in this area will be considered on a case-by-case basis. And in keeping with national and EU criteria, we will continue not to issue export licences for military or security equipment where there is a clear risk that it will be used for internal repression. We will not hesitate to re-impose these measures, and even consider extending their scope, in the event that the Government of Fiji fail to meet their constitutional obligations to all of Fiji's citizens.

### Zimbabwe

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts his Department has had with UK nationals in Zimbabwe concerning their safety during the present unrest. [25420]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Our high commission is in regular contact with UK nationals in Zimbabwe through its network of 92 volunteer consular wardens.

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received concerning the arrest of Movement for Democratic Change leader Morgan Tsvangirai; and what action his Department is taking to investigate this matter. [25683]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Mr. Tsvangirai was temporarily arrested for allegedly possessing unlicensed radio equipment. We understand that he is challenging the validity of these charges.

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account he is taking of the Democracy and Economic Recovery Act 2001 in his policy towards Zimbabwe. [25693]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act asks the President of the United States to begin immediate consultations with other Governments on possible measures against the Government of Zimbabwe. We look forward to further discussions with the US authorities, when/if the Administration sign the Act into law.

### Israel

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have received from coalition partners concerning the decision by the Israeli Government to end diplomatic contact with Chairman Arafat. [25680]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Israeli Security Cabinet declared President Arafat to be "irrelevant" on 13 December. We and our EU partners have repeatedly made it clear, as stated at the Laeken European Council on 16 December, that

> "Israel needs the Palestinian Authority and its elected President, Yasser Arafat, as a partner".

It remains our view that President Arafat is the only figure with whom Israel can negotiate peace.

### Iraq

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has received concerning the development of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq since 1999; and if he will make a statement. [25681]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Since the withdrawal of United Nations weapons inspectors in December 1998 there have been no independent inspections of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programmes. While we cannot therefore make any categorical assessment of current Iraqi capabilities, we judge that since 1999 Iraq has pressed ahead with its chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programmes.

We continue to urge Iraq to allow UN weapons inspectors into Iraq to disarm and monitor its ballistic missile and other weapons of mass destruction programmes as required under UN Security Council resolution 1284.

### Drug Trafficking

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further measures he is proposing to combat international drug trafficking. [25432]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We will continue to work closely with Governments and law enforcement agencies in key counties on the main trafficking routes for illegal drugs to the UK.

The installation of the Interim Authority in Afghanistan on 22 December 2001 provides a fresh opportunity to eliminate opium poppy cultivation from Afghanistan, recently the world's major producer of opium. We will work to develop and sustain the Interim Authority's co-operation with the international community in the fight against terrorism, drugs and organised crime.

### EU Accession

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact on British *(a)* business and *(b)* jobs of the next wave of EU enlargement. [25731]

**Peter Hain:** The Government consider that the next wave of EU enlargement will have significant benefits for UK business and jobs. As a result of enlargement, UK business will have access to a single market comprising up to 450 million consumers—bigger than the US and Japan combined. This huge single market should boost trade, jobs and prosperity in all EU member states. Independent research estimates that enlargement will add around £1.75 billion to UK GDP and 1.5 per cent. to the GDP of each candidate country. It is also estimated by the

European Round Table of Industrialists that enlargement will create over 300,000 extra jobs across the EU and two million new jobs in the candidate countries.

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role Britain is playing in helping to prepare countries applying for accession to the EU. [25433]

**Peter Hain:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 576W.

### Kosovo

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent elections in Kosovo. [25430]

**Mr. MacShane:** Assembly elections were held on 17 November 2001. For the first time all the people of Kosovo were able freely to elect a representative Assembly, which met for the first time on 10 December.

Kosovo's elected politicians can now develop the new institutions of self-government in Kosovo, in partnership with the international community.

### Middle East

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what impact the recent conflict in the occupied territories has had on *(a)* the Lebanon, *(b)* Syria, *(c)* Jordan and *(d)* Egypt; and if he will make a statement. [25524]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The violence in Israel and the occupied territories continues to have a destabilising effect on the middle east, and remains a source of tension around the region. It is important that the countries of the region play a constructive role in efforts to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. We will continue to play a full part in these efforts.

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with President Bush's Administration about their present and future role in securing peace in the middle east. [25423]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary speaks to Secretary of State Colin Powell regularly on this issue, most recently on 3 January. US engagement remains central to efforts to secure a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. We support the work of US envoy General Zinni to bring the parties back to negotiations, and will continue to work with the US and our EU partners to this end.

**Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made towards the Israeli Government regarding the peace process in the middle east. [25461]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** On 19 December the Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Sharon. Lord Levy met Prime Minister Sharon in Israel on the same day. We have made clear to the Israeli Government that they should support the Palestinian Authority's efforts to enforce a ceasefire. Israel should also withdraw its military forces and stop extrajudicial killings, lift closures and restrictions, freeze settlement activity and end operations directed against the infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority.

**Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the recent meetings in the last 12 months that have taken place between British Government Ministers and the French ambassador to the United Kingdom at which the middle east was discussed. [25460]

**Peter Hain:** The French ambassador has frequent contact with Ministers and a variety of issues are discussed on an on-going basis.

**Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the individual terrorist organisations which operate within *(a)* Syria and *(b)* Iran. [25466]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Syria allows a number of terrorist organisations to operate from within its borders. These organisations include the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front for the Liberation—General Command. Hizballah also operates from within Syria. The UK has proscribed an element of Hizballah, its External Security Organisation, as terrorist. Syria is however co-operating with the international fight against terrorism and has taken some steps to rein in these organisations. Iran does not host terrorist organisations in the same way. However we have long-standing concerns about Iran's record of support for groups which use violent methods to oppose the Middle East Peace Process, including Hizballah.

**Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of which organisations were responsible for the terrorist attack on a bus in the West Bank on Wednesday 12 December 2001. [25465]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack on the bus in the West Bank on 12 December.

**Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of which organisations were responsible for the terrorist attack in the Israeli town of Afula on Tuesday 27 November. [25464]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the shooting in Afula on 27 November.

### Ivory Coast

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of the Ivory Coast to implement the recommendation of the Reconciliation Forum, to allow Alassane Ouattara to contest future elections by granting him a certificate of nationality; and if he will make a statement. [24362]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Government have followed the progress of the National Reconciliation Forum (NRF) closely. We noted with satisfaction that the main political figures attended the Forum and that several recommendations have been made to the Government of Côte d'Ivoire. We consider that the Forum has achieved

positive results and that it paves the way for further progress towards reconciliation and political stability in Côte d'Ivoire.

Nationality is a matter for each State to determine We note that the question of Mr. Ouattara's nationality has been referred to the Ivorian courts. Whatever their ruling, we consider it is important for democracy and stability in Côte d'Ivoire that Mr. Ouattara and the Rassemblement des Republicains should be able to play an active role in Ivorian politics.

### Romania

**Mr. Donaldson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Romanian Government regarding their embargo on inter-country adoption which prohibits United Kingdom citizens from adopting Romanian children. [25152]

**Peter Hain:** We have expressed our support for the one-year moratorium on international adoptions from Romania announced on 13 July following a recommendation from the European Parliament. There were allegations that the existing adoption system had become very corrupt, and the Romanians needed time to rewrite the law on adoption and get the necessary framework in place to support it. They are being helped in this by the UK Department for International Development, as well as UNICEF, the EU and USAID.

### Liberia

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest assessment is of likely political developments in Liberia; and if he will make a statement. [25422]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** In recent weeks the security situation within Liberia has deteriorated. In north-western Liberia fighting has escalated between Guinean backed dissident groups and Liberian forces loyal to President Taylor. There is a risk that this increased instability could destabilise the sub-region, including neighbouring Sierra Leone, and have serious humanitarian consequences. Regional peace is dependent on the restoration of stability in Liberia, and we will continue working towards that goal.

In March 2001 we co-sponsored United Nations Security Council Resolution 1343 imposing sanctions on Liberia. We are encouraged that Liberia has taken some positive steps, including rescinding the expulsion of the Sierra Leonean and Guinean ambassadors, and granting an amnesty to political opponents accused of treason. But as the UN Expert Panel Report on sanction made clear in October 2001, President Taylor has not fundamentally changed his behaviour. In response to this report, the UK is actively pursuing further actions in the Security Council. The EU recently held talks with Liberia to further increase pressure on President Taylor to stop backing rebel groups and start implementing democratic principles, good governance and respect for human rights. Through various diplomatic channels, including the EU presidency representative to the Mano River Union (MRU: Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone), the UN and ECOWAS, we are encouraging the leaders of the MRU countries to establish a meaningful dialogue.

### Sierra Leone

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is towards Sierra Leone; and if he will make a statement. [25406]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Baillieston (Mr. Wray) on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 582W.

### Colombia

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Colombian Government about the situation in Barrancabermeja and Magdalene Medio. [25363]

**Mr. MacShane:** I had comprehensive discussion about the situation in Barrancabermeja and Magdalene Medio with the Colombian Government during my visit to Colombia, which included Barrancabermeja, in October 2001. I specifically discussed the security situation in the town and its surrounds with the Chief of Police in Barrancabermeja, as well as with the church, NGOs and human rights groups. Staff from the British Embassy in Bogota visited Barrancabermeja on a number of occasions last year.

### Angola

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to support national reconciliation in Angola; and if he will make a statement. [25752]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We continue to urge all parties to the conflict to engage in dialogue, as an essential first step towards addressing the problems in Angola. We welcome the growing contribution of the Churches and Civil Society to efforts towards national reconciliation.

### Entry Clearance

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he intends to commission a formal study of the pre-sift system at overseas posts. [25686]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** I have instructed the Joint Entry Clearance Unit to arrange a review of the pre-sift process, as recommended by the Independent Monitor for entry clearance in his recent report.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if guidance has been sent to overseas posts about the authenticity of documents with *(a)* spelling and *(b)* grammatical errors as a result of the report of the Independent Monitor. [25685]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Entry Clearance Officers are trained to assess the authenticity of documents, including whether the standard of the English used in them is consistent with that which could reasonably be expected of the originator. In addition, further guidance on this matter is currently under consideration.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken in response to the proposal by the independent

monitor that future statistics on entry clearance applications should allow refusal rates to be ascertained by reference to *(a)* gender and *(b)* age group. [25684]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The entry clearance software at overseas posts cannot produce statistics by reference to gender and age group. We are considering whether a revised version of the software, capable of doing so, can be developed and provided to posts this year.

### Palestinian Authority

**Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to Chairman Arafat regarding terrorism emanating from within the Palestinian Authority. [25462]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Government have repeatedly condemned terrorism, wherever it originates. We have made clear to President Arafat that the Palestinian Authority must dismantle terrorist networks, and arrest and prosecute all suspects. Lord Levy met the Palestinian Authority leadership, including President Arafat, on 18 and 19 December, and reinforced these messages.

**Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the number of terrorist attacks carried out by members of the Fatah from within the Palestinian Authority since October 2000. [25463]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** It is not always possible to determine, with certainty, the responsibility for terrorist attacks. Many attacks are unclaimed, and some claims of responsibility are unreliable. What is important is that President Arafat has committed the Palestinian Authority to an effort to prevent violence by all Palestinian groups operating from the occupied territories. We urge the Palestinian Authority to fulfil this commitment, and Israel to help create the conditions for a return to negotiations. Only a just and lasting peace can assure security for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

### Great War Battlefields

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his Belgian counterpart concerning the preservation for posterity of landscape features associated with battlefields of the Great War. [25390]

**Peter Hain:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has regular contact with his Belgian counterpart at EU meetings and on other occasions. The Government and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission maintain a regular dialogue with the Belgian authorities on developments affecting war graves in Belgium.

### Afghanistan

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government are taking to ensure that prisoners taken during the fighting in Afghanistan are protected from torture or death once they have surrendered. [24938]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We have urged the new Afghan Interim Authority to treat humanely all those who are prisoners in their custody and to respect the principles of the Geneva Conventions.

The UN also appealed to the Afghan forces to treat surrendering forces in accordance with international humanitarian law. Security Council resolution 1378 (2001) calls on all Afghan forces to adhere strictly to their obligations under human rights and international humanitarian law. International Committee of the Red Cross staff returned to Afghanistan in mid-November, and have been allowed access to prisoners held by the Northern Alliance.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Child Support Agency

**Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to reform the workings of the Child Support Agency. [25135]

**Malcolm Wicks:** From April 2002 we will introduce a number of changes to the child support system. The changes are designed to provide a simple, clear and responsive service which will be easy to operate and easy to understand.

The new arrangements will be introduced for new clients from April 2002. Current clients will transfer to the new scheme, from a later date, when we are sure that the new arrangements are working well.

### Benefit Fraud

**Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many prosecutions for social security fraud there were in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000; [18509]

(2) how many claimants were found to be illegally claiming social security benefit for a year or more in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000. [18508]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Information on the duration of fraudulent claims is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. In order to prepare for the implementation of the "two strike" provisions in the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 we are currently improving the data sources used to compile information on prosecutions, cautions and penalties. The latest provisional information is in the table.

| *Investigations* | *Prosecutions* | *Cautions and penalties as an alternative to prosecution* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Benefits Agency* | | | |
| 1997–98 | 11,700 | — | 11,700 |
| 1998–99 | 10,238 | 2,835 | 13,073 |
| 1999–2000 | 9,124 | 11,029 | 20,153 |
| 2000–01 | 11,403 | 15,555 | 26,958 |
| *Local authority* | | | |
| 1997–98 | 700 | — | 700 |
| 1998–99 | 800 | — | 800 |
| 1999–2000 | 860 | 390 | 1,250 |
| 2000–01 | 1,100 | 550 | 1,650 |

*Notes:*

1. Benefits Agency investigations data are now compiled from a new data source. The figures above are provisional and may differ from those previously published.

2. The data on cautions and penalties for 1998–99 is derived from the database proceeding the current database and there maybe some overlap with 1999–2000.

3. Administrative Penalties, as an alternative to prosecution, were introduced by the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act (1997) with effect from December 1998.

4. Figures are taken from local authority management information returns. It is possible that there could be some double counting with Benefits Agency data if there were cases which involved a joint prosecution.

5. Data are not available for all 409 local authorities. The total for Great Britain includes estimates for local authorities that have not responded. These estimates are based on historical and regional data. This type of estimate is standard practice in reporting totals where there have been non-respondents. The figures have been rounded to two significant figures.

## Benefits

**Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures social security offices use to ensure claimants of means-tested benefits do not have capital at levels which would render them ineligible for benefits. [18510]

**Malcolm Wicks:** When income-related benefits are first claimed, officials can require claimants to provide evidence of capital. Periodic checks are made to ensure that entitlement remains correct, by a variety of means including home visit, office interview, post or telephone.

The information gathering powers contained in the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 will allow authorised officers in the Department and in local authorities, where there are reasonable grounds to suspect fraud, to require financial institutions to provide information about their customers, including savings and assets. These powers will commence in the first quarter of 2002.

## Allowances

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what were the average processing times for claims to *(a)* disability living allowance, and *(b)* attendance allowance, in each month since January; and what were the average processing times for these benefits in each full year since 1997. [24217]

**Maria Eagle:** The information is in the tables.

*Days*

| | *DLA actual average clearance times* | *AA actual average clearance times* |
|---|---|---|
| *2001* | | |
| January | 45.5 | 28.7 |
| February | 44.4 | 26.9 |
| March | 41.7 | 24.9 |
| April | 41.4 | 25.3 |
| May | 41.5 | 25.9 |
| June | 43.5 | 26.8 |
| July | 45.7 | 27.1 |
| August | 44.6 | 28.3 |
| September | 44.4 | 28.4 |
| October | 46.3 | 30.9 |
| November | 44.6 | 28.2 |

| | *Actual average clearance time year to date for DLA*[1] | *Actual average clearance time year to date for AA*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 37.2 | 25.2 |
| 1998–99 | 35.0 | 25.1 |
| 1999–2000 | 42.6 | 32.1 |
| 2000–01 | 46.8 | 30.5 |
| 2001–02[2] | 44.0 | 27.6 |

[1] Figures as at each year end (31 March)
[2] Figures to end of November 2001

## Child Poverty

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many children were living in poverty in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [22441]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Child poverty and social exclusion are complex multi-dimensional concepts, affecting many aspects of children's lives—including their living standards, health, housing, the quality of the environment and opportunities to learn. The third "Opportunity for all" report (Cm 5260) sets out the Government's strategy for tackling child poverty and social exclusion and presents the latest information on the indicators used to monitor progress against this strategy.

## Sarccidosis

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the number of sarccidosis sufferers in receipt of disability living allowance. [25483]

**Maria Eagle:** Information is not available in the form requested.

## Departmental Projects

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list (i) the start date, (ii) the planned completion date, (iii) the actual completion date, (iv) the planned cost and (v) the actual cost of *(a)* DSS year 2000 programme, *(b)* site backbone upgrade, *(c)* CSA operations re-organisation project, *(d)* decision making and appeals, *(e)* working families tax credit, *(f)* resource accounting and budgeting, *(g)* devolution (Scotland), *(h)* disability living allowance administrative reforms, *(i)* order book control service (OBCS)—national roll-out project, *(j)* bereavement benefits, *(k)* jobseeker's allowance—new deal for partners of the unemployed, *(l)* the strategic debt solution project, *(m)* the ACCORD IS/IT supply programme (office and networks) and *(n)* the ITSA strategic outsourcing project. [18002]

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will answer question 18002, on his Department's IT projects, tabled by the hon. Member for Northavon on 21 November 2001. [23923]

**Mr. McCartney:** As explained in my answer on 13 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 689–90W, the increase in resources provided in Spending Review 2000 allowed the Department to expand greatly the speed and scope of our modernisation programme. The headquarters of DWP were also re-organised to focus resources more on delivery. As a result the entire programme was replanned and organised on a different basis. In the course of this work a number of existing projects merged,

restructured, superseded or concluded. As a consequence the information sought can be calculated only at disproportionate cost.

### Benefits Take-up

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Daventry, (Mr. Boswell), of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 152W, how take-up of disability living allowance among eligible children is kept under review. [24246]

**Mr. McCartney:** We undertake routine monitoring of statistical information which indicates that take-up of disability living allowance continues to increase.

### Bereavement Allowance

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment he has made on the financial impact of the introduction of the bereavement on allowance on women under 55 years of age who have been widowed since 9 April and are in receipt of incapacity benefit; [22278]

(2) what assessment he has made on the financial impact of the introduction of the bereavement allowance on women under 55 years of age who have been widowed since 9 April. [22279]

**Malcolm Wicks:** Our reforms to bereavement benefits introduced in April 2001 concentrate the help available where and when it is needed most—on immediate needs and on families with children. And for the first time these benefits are available equally to both men and women. Immediate help with costs arising on bereavement is provided by a lump sum bereavement payment of £2000—double the old widow's payment of £1000. There is a weekly benefit for widowed parents who satisfy the qualifying conditions. The bereavement allowance is also available for 12 months, to give widows and widowers aged 45 or over without dependants time to adjust to their new circumstances.

Women under 55 years of age who have been widowed since 9 April 2001 can claim the new bereavement benefits in the same way as anybody else. Where they are already in receipt of incapacity benefit and claim either widowed parent's allowance or bereavement allowance they will receive the higher of the two benefits to which they are entitled.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints have been reported in his Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; and how many of them related to special advisers. [25329]

**Malcolm Wicks:** The procedures for making complaints under the civil service code are set in the Department's staff handbook. Civil servants are encouraged, in the first instance, to raise complaints made under paragraph 11 of the civil service code with their line manager. If for any reason this is not felt to be possible, perhaps because the line manager is part of the complaint, individuals may take their complaint to a nominated official (or officials). It is not possible to provide a comprehensive figure for the number of complaints made under within this Department under paragraph 11 of the code as there is no requirement for managers to report to the centre details of complaints made under the civil service code which are resolved within the management line.

## HEALTH

### Paediatric Pathologists

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paediatric pathologists practise in England; and how many practised in 1997. [24655]

**Mr. Hutton** *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Paediatric pathology is a sub-specialty of histopathology. Data are not collected for sub-specialties and the information requested is not available.

Data for histopathology are shown in the table.

*Hospital medical staff within the histopathology specialty*

| | *1997* | *2000* |
|---|---|---|
| All staff | 940 | 1,160 |
| *of which:* | | |
| Consultants | 720 | 860 |

*Note:*
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10
*Source:*
Department of Health medical and dental work force census

### Medical Facilities (Sharing)

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what initiatives have been funded by his Department to promote greater sharing of medical facilities between PCTs and health authorities using the internet. [24677]

**Mr. Hutton** *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Through the Department's Project Connect programme all health authorities primary care trusts and general practitioner practices have been given access to NHSnet (and the internet) which enables them to communicate by e-mail and also to access remote applications.

NHSnet is the national health service's own secure intranet which has guaranteed levels of service quality that are not available on the internet.

In addition my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has confirmed that all PCTs will have a centrally funded 256,000 fixed link to NHSnet and the internet to enable them to utilise facilities such as teleconferencing and telemedicine.

### Health Action Zones

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total expenditure for the Camden and Islington health action zones has been since its inception; and what spending is planned for this financial year. [25827]

**Mr. Hutton:** Since its inception in April 1999, Camden and Islington health action zone has received over £5.2 million in direct funding. In 2002–03 the HAZ will receive at least £1.5 million.

In addition, Camden and Islington health authority received £2.7 million targeted funding for health authorities in HAZs between 1999–2000 and 2000–01. In 2001–02 and for 2002–03 this was subsumed within the health inequalities adjustment, Camden and Islington HA's share of which was £3.1 million and £3.3 million respectively.

## Waiting Lists

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average waiting time was from seeing a GP on *(a)* in-patient and *(b)* out-patient lists for cardiology patients in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [24582]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is shown in the tables. The average waiting time for both people seeking in-patient treatment and those on out-patient lists for cardiology has fallen over the past 12 months.

*Estimated average (median) waiting time for first out-patient appointment, cardiology specialty, England*

*Trust based*

| *Quarter* | *Average (median) waiting time (weeks)* |
|---|---|
| September 2000 | 8.64 |
| December 2000 | 8.05 |
| March 2001 | 7.93 |
| June 2001 | 7.20 |
| September 2001 | 7.09 |

*Source:*
Department of Health form QM08

*Estimated average (median) waiting time for in-patient treatment, cardiology specialty, England*

*Trust based*

| *Quarter* | *Average (median) waiting time (months)* |
|---|---|
| September 2000 | 2.70 |
| December 2000 | 2.72 |
| March 2001 | 2.63 |
| June 2001 | 2.67 |
| September 2001 | 2.64 |

*Source:*
Department of Health form KH07

## Mental Health

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to develop national occupational standards in mental health; and if he will make a statement. [24993]

**Jacqui Smith:** Through the health care national training organisation, Healthwork UK, in conjunction with the training organisation for social services we are developing national occupational standards across all ages in mental health on a United Kingdom wide basis. A functional map of the standards was produced in the workforce action team report published in August 2001 and the work to fully develop the standards is being taken forward with a view to completing the task by March 2003.

By describing best practice, the aim of the work is to improve the competence of the workforce to provide better services to individuals with mental health needs and their carers.

## Care Homes

**Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many care home establishments have *(a)* closed and *(b)* opened in East Sussex in each of the past five years for which figures are available. [25614]

**Jacqui Smith:** The numbers of residential and nursing care establishment closures in 1999 and 2000, together with the number of new registrations, are presented in the table. Information was first collected in this form for the year ending 31 March 1999. Information for the year ending 31 March 2001 is not yet available.

*Table 1: Number of care home establishment closures and new home registrations in East Sussex—Year ending 31 March*

| | *1999* | *2000* |
|---|---|---|
| *Number of establishment closures* | | |
| Residential[1] | 48 | 69 |
| Nursing[2] | 5 | 10 |
| *Number of new registrations* | | |
| Residential[1] | 44 | 24 |
| Nursing[2] | 4 | 4 |

[1] East Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove Council
[2] East Sussex, Brighton and Hove Health Authority
*Source:*
Registration and Inspection Survey

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what grants are available to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* private nursing and residential homes to assist in the provision of additional places in such homes; when the most recent invitations to bid for such grants were issued and to whom; what resources are available for such grants; when bids close and decisions will be made on bids; and if he will make a statement. [24948]

**Jacqui Smith:** We have recently announced that the resources which the Department is making available for social care will be increasing by 6.5 per cent. next year. Local councils will decide how to use these additional resources, most of which can be used for the provision of residential or nursing care. Resources are generally allocated to local councils by formulae rather than on a bidding basis. The Department does not make any grants direct to private sector homes.

## Surplus Estate Sales

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's standard guidance for good practice in the advertising and sale of surplus estate. [25509]

**Mr. Hutton:** The Department follows guidance relating to the disposal of surplus property contained in Government Accounting, a copy of which is available in the Library.

National health service bodies are required to follow guidance on the disposal of surplus property in Estatecode. A copy of the 1995 version, produced by NHS Estates, is in the Library, and an updated version is available in the publications and guidance section under "Downloadable Guidance" at www.nhsestates.gov.uk. A hard copy will be placed in the Library when it is printed.

### Stoke Mandeville Hospital

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress and timescale of the PFI scheme for additional doctors' and nurses' accommodation at Stoke Mandeville hospital. [25511]

**Ms Blears:** There is no private finance initiative scheme for additional doctors' and nurses' accommodation at Stoke Mandeville hospital. However, development proposals provide for key-worker accommodation, 27 doctors' houses and, in a separate scheme, the provision of on-call accommodation for junior doctors on the main hospital site. Both these schemes are envisaged to be available for use towards the latter part of 2003.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the legal status is of the land at Stoke Mandeville hospital which was sold to Persimmon Homes in 1998; [25510]

(2) what the receipts were of the sale in 1998 of land at Stoke Mandeville hospital to Persimmon Homes; [25507]

(3) if he will place in the Library a copy of the report commissioned by NHS Estates into the sale in 1998 of land at Stoke Mandeville hospital to Persimmon Homes; [25506]

(4) if the sale in 1998 by his Department of land at Stoke Mandeville hospital was advertised; [25508]

(5) if he will make a statement on his plans for the land at Stoke Mandeville hospital which is now in his ownership. [25505]

**Ms Blears:** Two parcels of land at Stoke Mandeville hospital have been disposed of. One is subject of a number of conditions which have yet to be satisfied, so the amount of the receipts will not be known until all of the conditions have been fulfilled, and the payment due is calculated.

The strategy for disposal of the site was agreed by the previous Anglia and Oxford regional office of the Department. It was not advertised as it was considered that a negotiated disposal was the best way of obtaining "best value" measured in terms of cash receipts, optimum site uses, the trust's reprovision plans, planning consents, programming and risk transfer.

The Stoke Mandeville hospital site itself is owned by the Stoke Mandeville National Health Service Trust. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State retains ownership of two parcels of land there. The first is the sports ground for the disabled, to the rear of the main hospital site. This is occupied by the British Wheelchair Foundation under the terms of a long lease. It is intended that the freehold interest of this area will remain with my right hon. Friend for the immediate future.

The second parcel of land is used for hospital purposes. It will, however, become available for redevelopment, and it is intended that some of the site will be used for additional staff residential accommodation. A review of the NHS trust's long term staff accommodation needs is currently being undertaken. The site will be marketed and disposed of subject to provision by the purchaser of an agreed number of staff residential units.

NHS Estates carries out performance management reviews of selected land disposals which are in progress or have been completed. In this case the review is not yet complete, and the disposal is subject of on-going negotiations, so it would be premature to respond to the question.

### GPs

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what health authority areas in England have recently identified difficulties in recruiting general practitioners; [24006]

(2) what steps his Department intends to take to increase the supply of general practitioners in England. [24007]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested on health authorities that have recently identified difficulties in recruiting general practitioners is not available. Information on vacancies is available in the GP Recruitment, Retention and Vacancy Survey. Copies are available in the Library or at www.doh.gov.uk/stats/gprrvsurvey2001.htm.

The NHS Plan includes targets for at least 2,000 extra GPs and 450 extra GP registrars, since increased to 550, by 2004. The latest information available shows that on 30 September 2000 there had been a 9.1 per cent. increase in the number of GP registrars, to 1,659. This is the fourth consecutive annual increase and the largest annual percentage increase for 20 years.

In order to deliver the recruitment targets a number of initiatives are under way. Various recruitment and retention initiatives are being pursued that are aimed at encouraging qualified GPs into, or return to, practice. They include: the Golden Hello scheme for those GPs taking up their first substantive appointment; the highly successful GP retainer scheme on which are around 1,120 GPs; the introduction of up to 20 days a year of protected time for higher professional training to help ease the transition from training to general practice; improving working lives with new measures for maternity and paternity leave and NHS child care; and the Cabinet Office review aimed to eliminate the amount of non-clinical paperwork and bureaucracy overheads.

Last month we announced the lifting of the funding bar on recruiting non-European Economic Area doctors to GP registrar posts. To further increase supply, the Home Office's Highly Skilled Migrant Entry Programme now includes provision to facilitate the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified overseas doctors who wish to work as general practitioners for the national health service.

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment his Department has made of the standard of general practitioner surgery; and what percentage have full disabled access and facilities; [24008]

(2) what funds are available for improvement of *(a)* general practitioner surgeries and *(b)* disabled access and facilities at general practitioner surgeries. [24009]

**Mr. Hutton:** A study undertaken by the Valuation Office agency on behalf of the Department indicates that around 82 per cent. of general practitioner premises have good to average disabled access. General practitioners can apply to their primary care trust or group for grants

towards the cost of improving access to and within their premises. Alternatively, GPs can owner-occupy or lease modern replacement properties that comply with access and other building standards. Costs are met from a variety of national health service funding sources.

### NHS Dentistry

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dental practices there are in Stafford constituency; and how many are accepting new NHS patients. [11179]

**Ms Blears:** There are 16 dental practices in the Stafford constituency. Of these, one is currently accepting all categories of registrations, three will accept exempt adults and children, six will accept children and the remaining six are not currently accepting registrations.

There is also a Dental Access Centre in Stafford, which is open seven days a week, providing access to dental care for people not registered with a dentist. In addition, there is a Dental Access Centre in Cannock which, although not located within the Stafford constituency, may be appropriate for some people who live on that side of the Stafford constituency, and which is open most week days and some Saturdays.

### Ward Improvements

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what examination he has made of the use made by acute hospital trusts of the money given to ward managers for ward improvements. [9868]

**Mr. Hutton:** Ward environment budgets were introduced on 1 October 2000. They give the ward sisters and charge nurses that manage a ward a minimum of £5,000 a year to improve patient care and improve the working lives of staff. An independent MORI telephone survey in mid December 2000 showed over 70 per cent. of ward sisters and charge nurses had been able to improve the ward environment in the two months since the budget had been launched. The majority of purchases provided greater comfort for patients as well as visual improvements to the ward environment.

In keeping with the stated objective of reducing bureaucracy, no further surveys have been undertaken since that date.

### Lung Disease

**Mr. Simmonds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to establish a national service framework for lung disease; and if he will make a statement. [17447]

**Mr. Hutton:** There are currently no plans to establish a National Service Framework for lung disease. The NSF for Older People recognises the importance of respiratory diseases to the health and well being of older people. The NSF provides for a 10-year developing framework for action across health and social care, and within this arthritis and respiratory disease in older people are the next priorities for future work. The focus of this will be older people, but the service model will have implications for and apply to all who need these services, regardless of their age.

There are a range of Government initiatives already in place which take a preventive approach to lung disease and have long-term objectives to improve treatment and care. These include the investment of £53 million in smoking cessation services. Smoking is the major cause of lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). In addition the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has been asked to prepare clinical guidelines for the NHS for the diagnosis and treatment of lung cancer and the management and treatment of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS

### Departmental Allowances

**Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will estimate the total annual value of London weightings and London living allowances for her Department; and if she will make a statement. [6860]

**Estelle Morris:** As at 30 November 2001, the total value of London weightings and London allowance being paid to Department for Education and Skills staff is £19,760 per annum.

London weightings and London allowance have been consolidated into the basic pay of staff in the Department for Education and Skills, with the exception of 11 senior civil servants who have opted to receive the allowances separately.

### School Funding

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list each initiative by her Department that has attracted additional funding for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools between 1997–98 and 2001–02, indicating the overall budget for each initiative and the number of schools that have participated in each one. [16607]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The information requested is contained in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries.

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average real term base line funding per pupil was at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary level in each of year between 1997–98 and 2001–02, excluding additional funding that was made available to all pupils in all schools. [16605]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

*Real terms (2000–01 prices) SSA per pupil*

£

| | *Primary* | *Secondary* |
|---|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 2,280 | 2,980 |
| 1998–99 | 2,340 | 3,040 |
| 1999–2000 | 2,410 | 3,080 |
| 2000–01 | 2,470 | 3,180 |
| 2001–02 | 2,520 | 3,230 |
| Change | 240 | 250 |

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total amount of additional funding made available by the DFEE/DFES per pupil was at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary level between 1997–98 and 2001–02, excluding amounts made available to all pupils in all schools. [16606]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The information requested is set out in the following table:

*Estimated total additional funding[1] £ per pupil (cash terms)*

| | *Primary* | *Secondary* |
|---|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 10 | 10 |
| 1998–99 | 20 | 20 |
| 1999–2000 | 50 | 40 |
| 2000–01 | 150 | 130 |
| 2001–02 | 240 | 210 |

[1] Non-SF grants and Standards Fund

*Notes:*

1. All figures rounded to the nearest £10
2. Grant figures are drawn from the relevant parts of the answer to PQ16607.
3. Capital funding is excluded from these figures.
4. Primary and Secondary figures are estimates because a split of grants between sectors is not available; the data are not collected in that way.
5. Figures for 2001–02 include the Teachers Pay Reform Grant, the actual figures for which will not be known for a while, but Threshold costs for each academic year are expected to be in the region of £450 million.
6. Figures for 2001–02 include latest figures for Transitional Funding Grant and Transitional Insurance Grant (both former GM schools). These are subject to change.
7. The pupil numbers used in the calculations are those aged 5–10 (primary) and those aged 11–15 (secondary)—as defined in each year's SSA settlement.

### Early Years Excellence

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 345W, on Early Years Excellence, *(a)* on what date and *(b)* by what means her Department fulfilled the promise made in the letter of 20 June to Somerford Infant School concerning their expression of interest. [18662]

**Margaret Hodge** *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* The further guidance setting out criteria and detailed requirements for joining the Early Excellence Centre (EEC) programme was issued on 5 October. This explained that those whose expressions of interest were assessed as category 2 should submit a fresh expression of interest, taking into account the outline feedback provided. Somerford Infant School was assessed as category 2. The Department has not received a further expression of interest from Somerford Infant School. Nevertheless, the Department plans to follow up Somerford's interest along with others in a similar position.

### Departmental Underspend

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 81W, on departmental underspend, if she will break down the main projects for which the unspent £1.44 billion available in end-year flexibility from the former Department for Education and Employment had been intended in financial year 2000–01. [22774]

**Estelle Morris:** The Department is voted funds for its programmes rather than individual projects. The End Year Flexibility (EYF) is therefore calculated on the total Departmental Expenditure Limit aggregates.

£715 million of the available EYF can, however, be analysed into a number of separate elements as follows: £220 million for the European Structural Funds, £106 million for the Employment Opportunities Fund, £87 million for the Capital Modernisation Fund, Non-Discretionary Other (primarily Student Loans) of £172 million, Ofsted £1 million and Sure Start £129 million.

The remaining £739 million of Discretionary Capital and Other (current) underspends can be analysed against the Departmental objectives as follows: against Objective 1: Early years and schools, were £441 million; Objective 2: Lifelong Learning, £233 million; Objective 3: Helping people without a job into work, £22 million; and on activities supporting all objectives, including administration costs, £43 million.

During 2001–02 this EYF has been and will be drawn on to fund additional expenditure on Departmental programmes. Following the machinery of government changes the EYF on European Structural Funds and the Employment Opportunities Fund transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions. Discussions are taking place with other Government Departments concerning the amount of Discretionary Other EYF required to support the services transferred.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 81W, on departmental underspend, on what specific purposes the remaining £530 million left from underspend in 2000–01 will be spent in the current financial year. [22776]

**Estelle Morris:** Of the £530 million, £129 million relates to Sure Start, £1 million to Ofsted, £172 million relates to non-discretionary other (primarily student loans) and £228 million to discretionary capital and other, including administration costs. The funds will be drawn down to support departmental programmes as required to meet priorities and pressures.

### Graduate Earnings

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she has collated about changes to average graduate earnings since 1997. [23404]

**Margaret Hodge:** Information on estimated average graduate earnings is available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The table shows estimated average gross weekly earnings of graduates with a first degree or above, in full-time employment, taken from the spring quarters of the LFS. The figures show that, in cash terms, estimated average weekly earnings have increased every year between 1997 and 2001.

*Average gross weekly earnings for graduates with a first degree or above, in full-time employment*

| Year | £ |
|---|---|
| 1997 | 510 |
| 1998 | 520 |
| 1999 | 540 |
| 2000 | 570 |
| 2001 | 580 |

*Note:*
Figures are in cash terms.
*Source:*
Labour Force Survey, spring quarters, for Great Britain

### Student Loans

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of recipients of student loans are in arrears with their repayments. [23496]

**Margaret Hodge:** The only borrowers who were in arrears at the end of 2000–01 were those who had taken out mortgage-style loans which were in place before the introduction of income contingent loans in 1998. At the end of financial year 2000–01 some 13 per cent. of borrowers with student loan accounts in repayment status were in arrears with their repayments. Repayment from borrowers with income contingent loans are collected through the tax system. As these repayments are mostly collected by employers who are legally obliged so to do, the borrower cannot go into arrears.

### Pupil Vacancies

**Mr. Mark Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupil vacancies there are in secondary schools in London; and if she will make a statement. [23648]

**Mr. Timms:** My Department does not collect this information. The Government believe that decisions concerning the supply of school places are best taken locally by the main partners in the provision of education, who have knowledge of local needs. It is for local education authorities to plan and keep under review the supply of school places and to ensure there is sufficient provision to meet demand. They must publish annually a School Organisation Plan setting out how they plan to deal with any surplus or deficit of places over a five-year rolling period.

### Specialist Schools

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of applications for specialist school status have been successful where the school in question is *(a)* a grammar school, *(b)* a comprehensive school and *(c)* a secondary modern or high school. [24087]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Information covering designations from September 1997 on the percentage of successful applicants for specialist school status of grammar, comprehensive and modern schools is set out in the following table.

| | Grammar | Comprehensive | Modern |
|---|---|---|---|
| *1996–97* | | | |
| Applications | 13 | 313 | 12 |
| Designations | 2 | 71 | 2 |
| Success Rate (Percentage) | 15.4 | 22.7 | 16.7 |
| *1997–98* | | | |
| Applications | 7 | 205 | 7 |
| Designations | 0 | 80 | 3 |
| Success Rate (Percentage) | 0.0 | 39.0 | 42.9 |
| *1998–99* | | | |
| Applications | 4 | 111 | 4 |
| Designations | 1 | 75 | 1 |
| Success Rate (Percentage) | 25.0 | 67.6 | 25.0 |
| *1999–2000* | | | |
| Applications | 13 | 250 | 12 |
| Designations | 8 | 120 | 4 |
| Success Rate (Percentage) | 61.5 | 48.0 | 33.3 |
| *2000–01* | | | |
| Applications | 12 | 314 | 22 |
| Designations | 6 | 130 | 14 |
| Success Rate (Percentage) | 50.0 | 41.4 | 63.6 |

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list applications for specialist school status which have been made by grammar schools; and what the subject specialism and the outcome of the application was in each case. [24088]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* A list of applications to become specialist schools from September 1997 which have been made by grammar schools, together with information about the specialism for which they applied and the outcome of these applications is given in the table.

| School | LEA | Specialism | Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|
| *1996–97* | | | |
| Burnham Grammar School | Buckinghamshire | Sports | Unsuccessful |
| Chatham Grammar School for boys | Kent | Sports | Unsuccessful |
| Bournemouth School | Bournemouth | Language | Unsuccessful |
| Newport Girls' High School | Shropshire | Language | Unsuccessful |
| Sir Thomas Rich's School | Gloucestershire | Language | Unsuccessful |
| Slough Grammar School | Berkshire | Language | Unsuccessful |
| Aylesbury Grammar School | Buckinghamshire | Technology | Successful |
| Beaconsfield High School | Buckinghamshire | Technology | Successful |
| Queen Elizabeth Grammar School | Cumbria | Technology | Unsuccessful |
| Queen Mary's Grammar School | Walsall | Technology | Unsuccessful |
| *1997–98* | | | |
| Chatham Grammar School for boys | Kent | Sports | Unsuccessful |
| Dr. Challoner's High School | Buckinghamshire | Language | Unsuccessful |
| Newstead Wood School for Girls | Bromley | Language | Unsuccessful |
| Sir Thomas Rich's School | Gloucestershire | Language | Unsuccessful |

| School | LEA | Specialism | Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|
| Slough Grammar School | Berkshire | Language | Unsuccessful |
| Queen Elizabeth Grammar School | Cumbria | Technology | Unsuccessful |
| St. Anselm's College | Wirral | Technology | Unsuccessful |
| *1998–99* | | | |
| Sir Thomas Rich's School | Gloucestershire | Language | Unsuccessful |
| Slough Grammar School | Berkshire | Language | Unsuccessful |
| Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls | Kent | Language | Successful |
| *1999–2000* | | | |
| King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Girls | Birmingham | Arts | Unsuccessful |
| Cotham School | Bristol | Arts | Successful |
| King Edward VI Aston School | Birmingham | Sports | Successful |
| Bournemouth School | Bournemouth | Language | Successful |
| Chatham Grammar School for Boys | Medway | Language | Successful |
| Sir Thomas Rich's School | Gloucestershire | Language | Successful |
| St. Anselm's College and Upton Hall School (joint) | Wirral | Language | Unsuccessful |
| Wirral Grammar School for Girls | Wirral | Language | Successful |
| Chelmsford County High School for Girls | Essex | Technology | Successful |
| The King Edward VI Camp Hill School | Birmingham | Technology | Successful |
| Wallington High School for Girls | Sutton, London Borough of | Technology | Unsuccessful |
| *2000–01* | | | |
| Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School | Buckinghamshire | Arts | Unsuccessful |
| Dr. Challoner's High School | Buckinghamshire | Sports | Successful |
| Skegness Grammar School | Lincolnshire | Sports | Successful |
| Aylesbury High School | Buckinghamshire | Language | Successful |
| Pate's Grammar School | Gloucestershire | Language | Successful |
| Slough Grammar School | Slough | Language | Unsuccessful |
| Southend High School for Boys | Southend | Language | Successful |
| Boston Grammar School | Lincolnshire | Technology | Unsuccessful |
| John Hampden Grammar School | Buckinghamshire | Technology | Successful |
| St. Anselm's College | Wirral | Technology | Unsuccessful |
| Upton Hall School | Wirral | Technology | Unsuccessful |

Some schools appear twice in the table. This is where the school has submitted a subsequent application following an unsuccessful bid in a previous year.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria she uses in determining the briefing information she provides to external organisations about hon. Members when seeking responses to written questions. [24103]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** There are no set criteria or guidelines used to determine the information provided to external organisations about hon. Members when seeking responses to written questions.

Common practice is to give the name of the Member together with basic information about other similar questions that they have asked in the past, and any known interest they may have in the subject.

### Higher Education

**Stephen Hesford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to increase participation in higher education. [25532]

**Margaret Hodge:** Our programmes to raise standards in schools and colleges will have a major impact on increasing participation. The Excellence Challenge programme, including the Aim Higher advertising campaign and roadshow, will encourage more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter HE. Foundation degrees will also encourage more people, especially those already in work, to take HE qualifications.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils from the Buckingham constituency went on to higher education in each year since 1999. [24863]

**Margaret Hodge:** Figures for the number of school pupils who go on to higher education are not collated centrally on a constituency basis. The latest available figures for England, showing the number of UK domiciled entrants to undergraduate courses over the past five years, are given in the table. The increase in entrants in 1997–98 related partly to changes in the funding arrangements for higher education, with students choosing to enter HE rather than wait until 1998–99. There was a corresponding reduction in 1998–99 before entrant numbers started to increase again in 1999–2000.

*UK domiciled entrants to undergraduate courses, England*

| Year | Entrants[1] |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 510,000 |
| 1997–98 | 514,500 |
| 1998–99 | 501,500 |
| 1999–2000 | 516,600 |
| 2000–01 | 538,600 |

[1] As at 1 December

### Learning Mentors

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Learning Mentors are working in secondary schools in the constituency of Buckingham. [24865]

**Mr. Timms:** There are currently no Learning Mentors working in schools in the constituency of Buckingham. Our support for Learning Mentors is focused on schools in disadvantaged city authorities as part of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme, and upon schools in Excellence Clusters which cover smaller pockets of disadvantage.

### Secondary Schools (Hertfordshire)

**Mr. Lilley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the average *(a)* class size and *(b)* pupil:teacher ratio in secondary schools in Hertfordshire in each year since 1983. [25243]

**Mr. Timms:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*Average class size and pupil:teacher ratio in maintained secondary schools[1] for Hertfordshire local education authority at January each year 1983 to 2001*

| | Average class size for | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *1 teacher classes* | *All classes* | *Pupil:teacher ratio* |
| 2001 | 21.0 | 21.1 | 16.7 |
| 2000 | 20.8 | 21.1 | 16.6 |
| 1999 | 20.6 | 21.2 | 16.3 |
| 1998 | 20.2 | 20.5 | 16.1 |
| 1997 | 20.3 | 20.9 | 15.9 |
| 1996 | 20.2 | 20.8 | 15.7 |
| 1995 | 20.0 | 20.6 | 15.5 |
| 1994 | 20.1 | 20.6 | 15.7 |
| 1993 | 19.9 | 20.4 | 15.7 |
| 1992 | 19.8 | 20.4 | 15.8 |
| 1991 | 19.5 | 20.4 | 15.4 |
| 1990 | 19.2 | 20.1 | 15.1 |
| 1989 | 19.0 | 20.3 | 15.1 |
| 1988 | 19.1 | 19.8 | 15.4 |
| 1987 | 19.3 | 19.7 | 15.5 |
| 1986 | 19.6 | 20.4 | 15.9 |
| 1985 | 19.5 | 20.1 | 16.0 |
| 1984 | 19.4 | 20.1 | 16.1 |
| 1983 | 19.3 | 19.9 | 16.2 |

[1] Includes middle schools deemed secondary.

*Source:*

Annual Schools' Census

### Individual Learning Accounts

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will fully reimburse colleges which have honoured courses applied for before the deadline for students with individual learning awards. [25282]

**John Healey:** I am now able to confirm that initial payments to the majority of providers who submitted claims up to 21 November was made on 20 December. This will help a significant number of providers meet immediate cash flow needs and, I hope, settle some of the concerns they may have had. We are continuing to work on validating the claims made after 21 November and on the mechanism for dealing with learning booked on the ILA system up to 23 November. Once we are satisfied that eligible learning has taken place in accordance with the rules of the programme, we will then be able to make arrangements for future payment to providers.

Learning that was not booked onto the ILA system before the programme was closed on 23 November will not be eligible for a discount.

### Pupils (Herefordshire)

**Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy to bring spending per pupil in Herefordshire closer to the average for the shire counties; and if she will make a statement. [25314]

**Mr. Timms:** The Government are currently working up proposals, in partnership with local government and other education interests, for the introduction of a new funding system in 2003–04. We are taking a fresh and objective look at what provision is needed, and at the additional costs some authorities undoubtedly face. We want a system that is both fair and clear.

The new system will consist of a basic entitlement per primary or secondary school pupil, with enhancements only for authorities where significant deprivation adds to costs, or schools need to pay more to recruit and retain staff.

### Special Education Grant

**Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to pay a special education grant to Herefordshire for the 2002–03 financial year; and if she will make a statement. [25315]

**Mr. Timms:** In 2002–03 there is over £1.3 billion extra in Education Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs); a further increase in Standards Fund grant of almost £160 million; and an increase in the direct grant for schools of 2.75 per cent. The scale of these increases means there is less need for special grant support from Government and we have no plans to pay such a grant to Herefordshire for 2002–03.

### Urban Regeneration

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what schemes targeting urban regeneration needs are managed by her Department; how much each scheme has available to invest; what issues each scheme aims to tackle; and how much has been spent annually since 1997 *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in Teesside, *(c)* in Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough councils and *(d)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [25482]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The Department for Education and Skills' programmes contribute to the regeneration of all deprived neighbourhoods by raising the educational attainment, skills and aspirations of children, young people and adults.

The Department works with other Government Departments to tackle the causes and effects of social exclusion and ensure that all mainstream policies and programmes contribute to urban regeneration.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 253–54W. In this reply I provided levels of funding for the initiatives listed by the Cabinet Office Regional Co-ordination Unit as being the responsibility of the Department for Education and Skills.

### Education Maintenance Allowance

**Ms Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what plans she has to extend the education maintenance allowance to the whole of England; [25525]

(2) what assessment she has made of the working of the education maintenance allowance in *(a)* Stoke-on-Trent, North and *(b)* the UK. [25528]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** Decisions on the future of the education maintenance allowance (EMA) will be taken in the light of findings from the current evaluation of the pilot scheme. Stoke-on-Trent is one of the areas where EMA is being evaluated, although our researchers are publishing their reports for the pilot scheme as a whole, rather than for individual areas.

As to the UK position, the Scottish Executive are piloting a variant of the EMA scheme in four local authority areas. The Scottish scheme is currently in its third year and will be evaluated in 2002. There is no EMA scheme running in Wales or Northern Ireland.

### Sure Start

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she proposes to give commencement approval to the plan submitted to her in July for a Sure Start scheme for Blakelaw and Cowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne. [25612]

**Yvette Cooper:** I have been asked to reply.

The Sure Start plan for Newcastle Cowgate and Blakelaw was approved on 17 December 2001.

### Pupil Exclusion

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils were excluded permanently from school in each local authority in Greater London in each year since 1997. [25814]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*Number of permanent exclusions from schools[1] in each local education authority area within Greater London*

| | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| England | 12,668 | 12,298 | 10,438 | 8,323 |
| London | 2,193 | 2,027 | 1,782 | 1,289 |
| Inner London | 771 | 756 | 639 | 516 |
| Camden | 71 | 50 | 32 | 22 |
| City of London | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Hackney | 41 | 46 | 36 | 31 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 72 | 52 | 48 | 21 |
| Haringey | 49 | 46 | 43 | 25 |
| Islington | 46 | 47 | 36 | 20 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 24 | 38 | 29 | 24 |
| Lambeth | 63 | 62 | 40 | 31 |
| Lewisham | 60 | 77 | 65 | 75 |
| Newham | 40 | 54 | 54 | 33 |
| Southwark | 93 | 96 | 108 | 69 |
| Tower Hamlets | 64 | 49 | 32 | 31 |
| Wandsworth | 91 | 76 | 76 | 94 |
| Westminster | 57 | 63 | 40 | 39 |
| Outer London | 1,422 | 1,271 | 1,143 | 773 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 89 | 47 | 39 | 31 |
| Barnet | 91 | 77 | 42 | 57 |
| Bexley | 63 | 72 | 61 | 33 |
| Brent | 99 | 97 | 77 | 57 |
| Bromley | 99 | 93 | 87 | 28 |
| Croydon | 138 | 108 | 131 | 87 |
| Ealing | 91 | 82 | 74 | 27 |
| Enfield | 102 | 87 | 76 | 73 |
| Greenwich | 79 | 61 | 79 | 43 |
| Harrow | 59 | 60 | 42 | 39 |
| Havering | 56 | 70 | 41 | 34 |
| Hillingdon | 68 | 58 | 66 | 47 |
| Hounslow | 97 | 71 | 67 | 52 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 35 | 29 | 25 | 16 |
| Merton | 22 | 36 | 24 | 23 |
| Redbridge | 34 | 35 | 42 | 29 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 59 | 54 | 45 | 25 |
| Sutton | 36 | 45 | 39 | 19 |
| Waltham Forest | 105 | 89 | 86 | 53 |

[1] Includes maintained primary and secondary schools and special schools

### Students

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the drop-out rate for first year students at English universities in each of the last three years was; and if she will make a statement. [25826]

**Margaret Hodge:** The latest "Performance Indicators in Higher Education" published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) last month show that the proportion of entrants to full-time first degree courses in 1998–99 who did not continue beyond the first year was 10 per cent., the same proportion as in the two previous academic years. HEFCE's figures indicate that around one fifth of these students will re-enter HE after a year out. Although the UK has the second highest completion rate among OECD countries, the Government are not complacent. HEFCE have been asked to report on the measures being taken to bear down on the drop-out rate. HEFCE have produced an interim report and are expected to produce their complete report shortly.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Thursday 10 January 2002*

## SOLICITOR-GENERAL

### Access to Information

35. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Solicitor-General what measures she has taken to improve access to information in her Department by those outside her Department. [23871]

**The Solicitor-General:** In the interest of accountability, the Attorney-General is determined that the Departments for which he is responsible should take steps to extend access to official information, the assumption being that such information should be released except where disclosure would not be in the public interest.

The Law Officers' Departments—the Crown Prosecution Service, the Serious Fraud Office and the Treasury Solicitor's Department—all continue to increase access to information through various avenues.

CPS publicity materials now include more extensive information about CPS policies and the prosecution process. A key recent example is the publication of a booklet providing the background to prosecution policy on domestic violence cases.

The potential for releasing information via the internet will be explored to the full. The website maintained on behalf of the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers is currently being reviewed and 2002 will see a new, improved, CPS website. The SFO website has recently been substantially expanded and the Treasury Solicitor has also improved access to information through two dedicated websites.

### Antisocial Behaviour

37. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Solicitor-General what efforts are being made to ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service works effectively with the police and local authorities to secure successful prosecutions in antisocial behaviour cases. [23873]

**The Solicitor-General:** The CPS work with the police and local authorities through the local partnerships set up under the Crime and Disorder Act.

In February 2000 all key agencies launched the antisocial behaviour protocol and there have been joint training seminars and joint guidance.

Between April 1999 and September 2000:

466 Antisocial Behaviour Orders were made by Magistrates Courts.

53 defendants were prosecuted for breach of such Orders.

47 were convicted.

An application by the police or local authority for an ASBO is a civil matter and not for the CPS. The CPS are involved when an ASBO is breached as this is a criminal offence.

### Serious Fraud

38. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Solicitor-General what criteria are applied in deciding whether to prosecute serious fraud. [23874]

**The Solicitor-General:** Criteria for consideration of prosecuting serious fraud are the same as for all criminal cases: (i) is there enough evidence and (ii) is it in the public interest.

Offences involving serious or complex fraud are prosecuted by the Serious Fraud Office (SFO). In deciding whether the SFO rather than CPS should accept a case for investigation, the factors taken into account include:

1. The sum at risk is estimated to be at least £1 million (this is simply an objective and recognisable signpost of seriousness and likely public concern rather than the main indicator of suitability).
2. The case is likely to give rise to national publicity and widespread public concern. These include those involving Government Departments, public bodies, the Governments of other countries and commercial cases of public interest.
3. The case has a significant international dimension.
4. There is a need for legal, accountancy and investigative skills to be brought together as a combined operation.
5. The suspected fraud appears to be complex and one in which the use of section 2 powers might be appropriate.

### Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill

39. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Solicitor-General with which organisations she has had discussions on the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill relating to the prevention of terrorism. [23875]

**The Solicitor-General:** Policy responsibility for the Act, including for consultation, lies with the Home Secretary. Any discussions that I, or the Attorney-General, have had about aspects of the Bill were therefore conducted in the context of our role as Law Officers, such as in discussion with the Crown Prosecution Service regarding some of the prosecution/criminal law aspects. Quite separately from this, the Attorney-General provided assistance to the Home Secretary in taking parts of the Bill through the House of Lords.

### Crown Prosecution Service

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement about the performance of the Crown Prosecution Service. [23870]

**The Solicitor-General:** During the period April–September 2001 the Crown Prosecution Service secured convictions in respect of 98 per cent. of defendants whose case proceeded to a hearing in magistrates courts and almost 89 per cent. of defendants whose case proceeded to a hearing in the Crown court. During the same six-month period, the service had already met its 2001–02 targets for the timeliness of committal papers and of briefs to counsel, and for reduction in non-injury acquittals attributable to failings in the prosecution. In addition, the service made a vital contribution towards halving the time

taken to deal with persistent young offenders, from an average of 142 days in 1996 to 70 days in the quarter ending September 2001.

While these figures show that the Crown Prosecution Service is continuing to work to a high standard, its priorities for 2002–03 are more demanding still, including: delivering more effective prosecutions; developing a greater public service ethos; developing its own professional role; building partnerships to drive up the performance of the criminal justice system as a whole; and developing a modern, diverse organisation which staff take pride in.

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS

### Teaching Vacancies

5. **Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent meetings she has had with the National Union of Teachers to discuss the number of vacancies in secondary schools. [23835]

**Mr. Timms:** My right hon. Friend meets representatives of the NUT along with other unions from time to time to discuss a wide range of issues.

21. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent meetings she has had with the Association of Colleges to discuss the number of *(a)* teachers and *(b)* lecturers in further education. [23853]

23. **Mr. Simmonds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent meetings she has had with the Association of Colleges to discuss the numbers of *(a)* teachers and *(b)* lecturers in further education. [23857]

**Margaret Hodge:** The Secretary of State met David Gibson from the Association of Colleges (AoC) on 14 November 2001 and also addressed the AoC Conference on 20 November. Additionally, my colleague John Healey and I have each met twice with representatives from the AoC on 12 July and 10 October and 15 June and 31 July, respectively.

Discussions with AoC representatives are wide reaching, including recruitment and retention difficulties for lecturers in some subject areas and initiatives such as the Teaching Pay Initiative, Golden Hellos, Student Loan Write Off and Training Bursaries, which the Government have introduced to attract new staff to the profession and reward and retain excellent teachers and lecturers.

### Teaching Vacancies (Hertfordshire)

6. **Mr. Lilley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many vacancies there are for teacher posts in maintained schools in Hertfordshire. [23836]

**Mr. Timms:** Information on the number of teacher vacancies in local education authorities is collected once a year in January as part of the annual census of teachers and vacancies. In January 2001, the vacancy rate for Hertfordshire LEA was 0.6 per cent. compared with 1.4 per cent. nationally.

### Further Education Funding

11. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she intends to achieve equal funding for students at sixth form colleges and in school sixth forms. [23841]

**Margaret Hodge:** The Government are firmly committed to bringing up the level of funding for colleges towards that of school sixth forms. As we have repeatedly made clear, this will take time and must be done as resources allow.

28. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to increase funding to further education colleges; and if she will make a statement. [23862]

**John Healey:** £527 million extra funding is available for further education colleges this year compared with 2000–01. This is a 12 per cent. real terms increase and there will be a further 3 per cent. real terms increase in 2002–03. The increase in funding is designed to support widening participation in learning, higher standards of teaching and learning leading to improved success rates, the introduction of centres of vocational excellence, a step change in capital investment in the sector and the modernisation of pay arrangements in further education.

### Education Funding (Swindon)

12. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to increase education funding in Swindon. [23842]

**Mr. Timms:** Swindon's Education Standard Spending Assessment will be increased by 4.65 per cent. next year, and the sums available through the Standards Fund and in direct grant to schools will also increase.

### University Research Funding

13. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has for the distribution of university research funding. [23843]

**Margaret Hodge:** The Government's policy is selectively to support high quality research in universities and colleges. The detailed distribution of public funds for research is a matter for the research councils, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the other UK funding councils.

### Nursery Provision

14. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement about nursery provision. [23845]

**Margaret Hodge:** Since September 1998, all four-year-olds have been able to access a free early education place.

We have increased the percentage of three-year-olds able to access free places from 34 per cent. in 1997 to 62 per cent. in 2001. From September 2004 all three-year-olds will have access to a free early education place.

The funding available for early education will be increased from £1 billion in 1996–97 to £2 billion in 2003–04.

27. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children aged between three and five years are in full-time nursery education. [23861]

**Margaret Hodge:** My Department estimates that eight per cent. of three and four-year-old children were in full-time nursery education[1] in England in January 2001.

However, the vast majority of children engage in nursery education on a part-time basis. If these children are included, my Department estimates that two in three children aged three and four are in either full or part-time nursery education. Of these, 32 per cent. of the population attended private and voluntary providers, four per cent. attended independent schools, 30 per cent. attended maintained nursery schools or nursery classes within maintained primary schools and less than 0.5 per cent, special schools.

We are committed to guaranteeing free part-time places for all four-year-olds whose parents want one and by September 2004 free part-time places for all three-year-olds.

Children in nursery education comprise those educated in schools and private and voluntary early years settings, but does not include children educated in infant classes in maintained primary schools.

### Pupils Without Qualifications

15. **Mr. Fabian Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the proportion of pupils reaching the end of compulsory schooling without qualifications. [23846]

26. **Ms Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the proportion of pupils reaching the end of compulsory schooling without qualifications. [23860]

**Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the proportion of pupils reaching the end of compulsory schooling without any qualifications. [23850]

**Mr. Timms:** In 2001 the proportion of pupils reaching the end of compulsory schooling without any qualifications fell for the sixth year in a row to 5.5 per cent. This reflects a continuing rise to 94.5 per cent. in 2000–01 in the percentage of pupils achieving one or more GCSEs at grades A*-G (or equivalent).

### Teachers (Administrative Burden)

17. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to reduce the administrative burden on teachers. [23848]

**Mr. Timms:** My Department is committed to making teaching a more manageable profession and keeps administrative requirements on all schools under continuous review. Following the recent PricewaterhouseCoopers study on teacher workload and its recommendations on reducing administrative burdens, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has invited teacher representatives, local authorities and other key education figures to join her on a working party to take forward work on remodelling the teaching profession.

### Education Funding (Wiltshire)

18. **Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on funding for education in Wiltshire. [23849]

**Mr. Timms:** In 2002–03 Wiltshire's Education SSA will be £189.72 million, an increase of £11.58 million or 6.50 per cent.—above the national average. Wiltshire will also benefit from the increase in Standards Fund grant of almost £160 million; and in the direct grant for schools of at least 2.75 per cent..

### University Status

19. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the process for awarding university status to higher education colleges. [23851]

**Margaret Hodge:** The criteria and processes for the award of university title to higher education colleges were revised in 1999 following full consultation with the academic community and others. I am satisfied that they are working effectively balancing, as they must, the legitimate wishes of some colleges to become universities with the need to protect the reputation of the United Kingdom university title.

### Further Education

20. **Valerie Davey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she is taking to increase participation in further education among 16 to 18-year-olds. [23852]

**John Healey:** We are investing substantially in a wide range of policies designed to raise participation among 16 to 18-year-olds, including in further education. We have established the Learning and Skills Council to drive these forward and have put in place a number of measures which provide the support and incentives young people need to take up and succeed in learning. These include the Connexions Service, education maintenance allowances, new generation modern apprenticeships, and the new Connexions Card to be launched nationally in autumn 2002. Further education colleges will also play a central role in our plans to develop a coherent 14–19 phase of learning for young people. We will be publishing a Green Paper shortly setting out our plans in this area. Finally, with the Learning and Skills Council, we are continuing with our drive to improve standards in further education, underpinned by a rigorous, independent inspection regime.

### Higher Education (Wales)

22. **Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent discussions she has had with regard to the future of higher education in Wales. [23854]

**Margaret Hodge:** My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning at the National Assembly for Wales covering a range of issues, including higher education.

### Adult Learning

24. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what strategy her Government have to increase participation in adult learning. [23858]

**Margaret Hodge:** The Government's strategy is to ensure that learning is available in a form and at a time and place that best suits the needs of adult learners; to provide targeted financial support to adult learners; and to extend the information, advice and guidance available on learning. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has a statutory duty to encourage adults to learn. It will publish its strategy for workforce development by the end of March 2002. The National Target for Participation in Learning has been achieved one year early, with 500,000 additional learners since 1997.

### University Attendance

25. **Ross Cranston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to encourage more children from lower socio-economic backgrounds to attend university. [23859]

**Margaret Hodge:** We are spending over £190 million on the Excellence challenge programme, which will provide extra help and information for young people in areas with traditionally low participation to reach higher education. In addition, education maintenance allowances and our reforms to qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds will assist young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds to stay in education and training and to reach the level to access higher education.

### Individual Learning Accounts

29. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she intends to lift the suspension of individual learning accounts. [23863]

**John Healey:** Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) will not be reinstated in their present form. However, I can give a cast-iron guarantee that this is not the end of Government funding for adult learning, or of Government support for all those who find a lack of money a barrier to returning to education, learning or training. We are developing future plans which build on the successful elements of the ILA programme.

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the premises of training organisations dealing with ILA holders were inspected with regard to *(a)* the training stations available and *(b)* the training qualifications of staff. [23436]

**John Healey** *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The premises of training organisations dealing with ILA holders and the training qualifications of their staff were not inspected. However, as part of the registration process learning providers were asked to provide a copy of a valid health and safety certificate and their public liability insurance. In addition we required all learning providers to sign a learning provider agreement. A key part of the agreement asked providers to offer a clear explanation to account holders of any accreditation held (in respect of the course, the qualification or the provider), the qualification a course undertaken may lead to, and the awarding body.

ILAs aimed to encourage more people into learning by helping tackle the financial barriers to learning. To help meet the policy objective the ILA system was designed to be simple and easy to use and non-bureaucratic.

**Dr. Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what compensation her Department is providing to colleges in respect of losses incurred by the withdrawal of individual learning accounts. [23831]

**John Healey:** The Department has no plans to compensate learning providers in relation to the closure of individual learning accounts.

### School Science Statistics

30. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the numbers of *(a)* girls and *(b)* boys taking science subjects at A and AS-level in each of the last five years. [23864]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The number of girls and boys that took science subjects at A and AS level in each of the last five years was as follows:

| | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *A Level (legacy)* | | | | | |
| Girls | 53,975 | 55,768 | 55,102 | 54,568 | 51,826 |
| Boys | 65,588 | 65,845 | 62,951 | 60,053 | 57,054 |
| *Advanced Supplementary (legacy)* | | | | | |
| Girls | 3,508 | 3,360 | 3,465 | 3,598 | 1,973 |
| Boys | 3,799 | 3,939 | 4,011 | 3,748 | 1,989 |
| *Advanced Subsidiary (new)—2000–01* | | | | | |
| Girls | 57,780 | — | — | — | — |
| Boys | 61,917 | — | — | — | — |

### ICT

31. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress is being made to equip schools with resources in information and communications technology. [23865]

**John Healey:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) on 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 657.

### Parenting Orders

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many parenting orders have been sought by schools based in the Buckingham constituency. [23731]

**Mr. Denham:** I have been asked to reply.

We understand from the Youth Justice Board that between October 2000 and June 2001, 10 parenting orders were sought and granted in Buckinghamshire following convictions of adults for failing to send children to school.

### Student Domicile Statistics

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the trends in the numbers of students domiciled in *(a)* Scotland who attend English universities and *(b)* England who attend Scottish universities, in the last five years. [23844]

**Margaret Hodge:** In the five years to 2000–01 the number of full-time Scottish undergraduate students in England rose from 5,277 to 5,834 while numbers of full-time English undergraduates in Scotland fell from 16,336 to 14,723. However, UCAS entry figures for 2001–02 suggest these trends have changed with decline of full-time Scottish students in England of about three per cent. and an increase in full-time English students in Scotland of about five per cent.

### Teacher Recruitment and Retention

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement about teacher *(a)* recruitment and *(b)* retention in London. [23855]

**Mr. Timms:** Information on the number of teacher vacancies in local education authorities is collected once a year in January as part of the annual census of teachers and vacancies. In January 2001, the vacancy rate for London was 3.5 per cent. compared with 1.4 per cent. nationally. We are aware of the particular problems in London and are making considerable efforts to address them. In 2001 the Government made nearly £20 million available to London LEAs through its recruitment and retention fund. This amounted to more than half the total national funding. In 2002 we will increase that funding in London to £22 million. In addition we have increased pay for all teachers above the rate of inflation for the third successive year. London allowances have been raised by 30 per cent. so that teachers in inner London now receive a starting salary of £20,000.

### Threshold Allowance Awards

**Mrs. Calton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many teachers received backdated threshold pay before 1 April 2001, broken down by local authority; A [25844]

(2) how many teachers received backdated threshold pay after 1 April 2001; A [25845]

(3) what assessment she has made of the number of teachers who paid higher rates of tax as a result of their backdated pay being paid after 1 April 2001. A [25846]

**Mr. Timms:** The information requested has not been collected centrally and could be gathered only at disproportionate cost.

**Mrs. Calton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 259W, on what evidence she based her answer on the numbers of teachers having to pay higher rates of tax; and how this is reconciled with her answer of 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1213W, on threshold allowance awards. [25861]

**Mr. Timms:** To pay higher rate tax as a result of receiving threshold back pay from 2000–01 in the current financial year a teacher would have to earn at least £32,768 this year before any threshold back pay was added. Estimates derived from the teachers' pensions scheme indicate that a substantial majority of teachers who have crossed the threshold are not paid as much as this. So even though we do not have detailed information about when they were paid, we can nevertheless say that most post-threshold teachers would not pay higher rate tax even if they received threshold back pay this year.

### Faith Schools

**Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils attended faith schools in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1997, *(d)* 1998, *(e)* 1999 and *(f)* 2000. [19199]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The available information is shown in the following table.

*Number of pupils[1] in maintained primary and secondary schools in England*

| | *2000* | *2001* |
|---|---|---|
| *Primary* | | |
| Number of pupils in non-religious schools | 3,199,355 | 3,173,926 |
| Number of pupils in faith schools | 1,235,991 | 1,232,289 |
| *Secondary* | | |
| Number of pupils in non-religious schools | 2,694,103 | 2,736,891 |
| Number of pupils in faith schools | 487,710 | 494,936 |

[1] Headcount of pupils

*Source:*
Annual Schools' Census and Register of Educational Establishments

No directly comparable data are available for 1995 to 1999.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Pakistan

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with President Musharraf on the situation in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [23714]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** During his visit to Pakistan on 22–23 November, the Secretary of State discussed the situation in Afghanistan with President Musharraf. The Secretary of State expressed our continuing appreciation for President Musharraf's courageous decision to support the fight against terrorism and the practical assistance that Pakistan has provided. The Secretary of State also discussed the situation in Pakistan and sought President Musharraf's advice on how best to achieve our shared objective of a broad-based multi-ethnic government in Afghanistan.

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what encouragement he has given to President Musharraf to return Pakistan to democracy during 2002. [25431]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Both my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary encouraged President Musharraf to return Pakistan to democracy during their recent visits to Pakistan. We welcome President Musharraf's public reiteration of his commitment to stick to his roadmap to democracy and hold national and provincial elections by October 2002.

### Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, "Winning the Generation Game", *(a)* what progress his Department has made and *(b)* what future plans his Department has for acting on them; and if he will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24200]

**Mr. Bradshaw** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 335W.

### Indonesia

**Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Indonesian Government on the protection of Christians; and if he will make a statement. [24418]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We take every opportunity, including with our EU partners, to urge states to foster tolerance and mutual respect and to protect religious minorities. In the case of Indonesia, we raised our concerns about violence in Maluku and Sulawesi most recently on 29 November when the British Chargé d'Affaires in Jakarta called on Manuel Kaisiepo, the Minister for Eastern Indonesia. I myself raised the issue with Vice-President Haz when I met him in August.

The Department for International Development (DFID) has pledged more than £4 million to help establish the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Conflict Prevention and Recovery Unit in Jakarta. The unit will build up capacity in conflict reduction and recovery in the provinces torn apart by ethnic conflict, particularly north Maluku. The British Government have also recently funded a series of Conflict Reporting training workshops for journalists in various provinces in Indonesia, including north Maluku and Sulawesi. We will continue to work with the Indonesian authorities and UNDP to promote reconciliation, begin wider reconstruction work and to offer practical assistance where we can.

**Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the treatment of Christians in Indonesia. [25730]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** There are a number of regional conflicts in Indonesia with a religious dimension. Their origins are complex. The UK's message to the Indonesian Government has been consistently clear: a long-term solution can be achieved only through political dialogue and consultation with the people.

The Department for International Development has pledged more than £4 million to help establish the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Conflict Prevention and Recovery Unit in Jakarta. The Unit will build up capacity in conflict reduction and recovery in the provinces torn apart by ethnic conflict. The British Government have also recently funded a series of Conflict Reporting training workshops in various provinces in Indonesia. We will continue to work with the Indonesian authorities and UNDP to promote reconciliation and offer practical assistance where we can.

We will continue to monitor cases of inter-communal violence closely and raise our concerns with the Indonesian Government at every appropriate opportunity. I myself raised the issue with Vice President Haz when I met him in Jakarta in August.

### Middle East

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role the EU is playing in seeking to make progress towards peace in the middle east. [25415]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The EU plays an active role in efforts to secure peace in the region, in parallel with US, UN and Russian efforts. EU Foreign Ministers and High Representative Solana visit the region frequently to deliver strong messages to both parties about their responsibilities to put an end to the violence and resume negotiations. Solana began a further visit on 6 January. The EU's position is clear: the Palestinian Authority should dismantle terrorist networks; the Israeli Government should withdraw their military forces, end operations against Palestinian institutions and lift restrictions.

### Vietnam

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations

he has made to the Vietnamese Government concerning the treatment of Christians in Vietnam. [25295]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Secretary of State raised general human rights issues in Vietnam when he met the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Mr. Nien, in London in September 2001. The EU Human Rights Working Group in Hanoi, in which our embassy plays a leading role, raises the treatment of religious groups and individuals, during its regular dialogue with the Vietnamese authorities.

### Overseas Assistance

**Mr. Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on UK assistance to militaries and police forces overseas. [26900]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** UK training and assistance to militaries and police forces overseas has been provided through the ASSIST (Assistance to Support Stability with In-Service Training) scheme, the ASSIST Challenge Fund and English language training programme. In total £6.8 million in FY 2000–01 supported some 220 training and assistance projects for the military, law enforcement agencies and civilian bodies in over 65 countries, with a strong emphasis on human rights and good governance. Examples include the attachment of a UK chief constable to the Indonesian police service to help it establish a new structure and code of ethics; English language training for central and eastern Europe militaries to support their international peacekeeping capabilities and NATO candidature; and a project to help UK and South Asian police forces work together on the issue of forced marriages.

Following a review last year of the Government's conflict prevention and resolution activities, the ASSIST budgets have been subsumed into the interdepartmental Conflict Prevention Pools, which continue to fund ASSIST-type activities.

The review of the ASSIST activities for 2000–01 gives more detail. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

### Nepal

**Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to offer military support against terrorism in Nepal by supplying *(a)* equipment and *(b)* personnel. [24747]

**Mr. Ingram:** I have been asked to reply.

The Government are very concerned at the situation in Nepal and have fully supported the Nepalese Government's efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Maoist insurgency. The United Kingdom has been equally supportive of the Nepalese Government, which has a duty to protect its citizens from Maoist violence, over the crisis caused by the Maoists' return to violence in November 2001. Our armed forces have close links with the Royal Nepalese Army and already provide them with training and are currently providing logistic equipment. We remain in close contact with the Nepalese Government.

## DEFENCE

### Type 45 Destroyer

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Sea Dart anti-aircraft missiles on Type 45 destroyers can be used against surface targets; if Sea Dart missiles will be fitted to Type 45 destroyers; if the Aster anti-aircraft missiles on the Type 45 destroyers can be deployed against surface targets; what effect the move to littoral operations has on the need for anti-surface weapons capabilities; and if he will make a statement. [24022]

**Mr. Ingram:** The Sea Dart missile is fitted only to Type 42 destroyers. It has a limited anti-surface unit capability. It will not be fitted to Type 45 destroyers. The Aster missile system, with which the Type 45s will be equipped, will not have an anti-surface unit capability. The Type 45 Destroyer's anti-ship capability will be provided by the Sea Skua missile fitted to its Lynx helicopter, together with the 4.5" Mk8 Mod 1 Gun and twin 30mm guns. The Type 45 Destroyer is being designed to facilitate the incremental incorporation of additional capabilities, including a surface-to-surface guided missile should the requirement for one be demonstrated.

Our ships have always needed to operate in the littoral, but the emphasis on ensuring that we can operate in this environment has increased, not least to take better advantage of the contribution of maritime forces in the force projection role. The Type 45, in its primary role of maritime air defence, will significantly enhance our ability to operate in this environment. For anti-surface capability, however, the main effect is to increase the emphasis on robust measures to protect ships operating in this area against the threat from fast inshore attack craft.

### Regimental Strengths

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will state the *(a)* strength and *(b)* establishment of the Coldstream Guards; [24569]

(2) if he will state the strength and the establishment of the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment; [24916]

(3) what the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* strength is of the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment. [25467]

**Mr. Ingram:** The establishments and actual strengths for the Coldstream Guards, the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and the Worcestershire and Sherwood Forester's Regiment as at 1 November are shown in the table.

| | *Establishment strength* | *Actual strength* |
|---|---|---|
| Coldstream Guards | 609 | 604 |
| 1st Battalion of the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment | 669 | 602 |
| 2nd Battalion of the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment | 667 | 613 |
| Worcestershire and Sherwood Forester's Regiment | 610 | 597 |

The establishments and actual strengths for the regiments above include the cap-badge strength as well as attached personnel from other Corps who are supporting the regiments in their current location.

### Early Retirement

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many enlisted personnel have sought early retirement after serving less than the maximum period for a full pension in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [25831]

**Mr. Ingram:** Full pension for enlisted personnel is payable after completion of 37 years' service. However, those who complete 22 or more years' service are eligible for an Immediate Pension which, broadly, is calculated on a pro rata basis. The latest figures in each category are set out in the table.

For the last three years, the total numbers of enlisted personnel who have retired before completing the necessary 37 years' service for full pension entitlement, but after having served the required 22 years for immediate pension are as shown in the table.

| | *Personnel having served 22 years* |
|---|---|
| 1 November 2000 to 31 October 2001 | 897 |
| 1 November 1999 to 31 October 2000 | 752 |
| 1 November 1998 to 31 October 1999 | 709 |

The total numbers who retired before completing the necessary 22 years for payment of immediate pension and were therefore entitled to a preserved award only are given in the table:

| | *Personnel having served less than 22 years* |
|---|---|
| 1 April 2000 to 1 March 2001 | 78,823 |
| 1 April 1999 to 1 March 2000 | 79,412 |
| 1 April 1998 to 1 March 1999 | 78,638 |

### NBC Equipment

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Fuchs NBC defence vehicles and CAM-level 3s are *(a)* in service and *(b)* operational. [25701]

**Mr. Ingram:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 434W, regarding the Fuchs NBC Defence Vehicle.

A number of hand-held Chemical Agent Monitors (CAM) have recently been refurbished and sufficient stock is held to meet current defence planning assumptions. I am withholding the information with regard to specific quantities in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

### Defence Analytical Statistical Agency

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies the Defence Analytical Statistical Agency has carried out in the last four years which have involved data on servicemen and women who had already retired. [23957]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Defence Analytical Services Agency routinely analyses data on men and women who have left the service to obtain historical information on the strengths and characteristics of the services and to help in predicting the future numbers and types of leavers. The source data are obtained from departmental pay and personnel systems.

Retired service personnel may also be included in more general surveys conducted by the agency, for example if a retired officer is employed by the department in a civilian post or if a survey includes reservists.

In the last four years the agency has also carried out some special studies involving retired service men and women. In 1999–2000 a study of people who die in service or are invalided out was undertaken to support the Joint Compensation Review, and information on leavers in general was used to support the Armed Forces Pension Scheme Review. The agency is currently carrying out a study of ex-service men with pensions and preserved pension rights to provide information on pension troughs in the Armed Forces Pension Scheme.

### National Air Traffic Services

**Sandra Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has completed negotiations with NATS on the contract for the new Scottish centre. [23560]

**Mr. Ingram:** The Ministry of Defence is currently engaged in discussions with National Air Traffic Services about the future provision of military area radar support services. No decision has yet been made about whether it will conduct military area radar operations from the new Scottish centre.

### National Security Adviser

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to establish an office of a national security adviser. [25857]

**Mr. Hoon:** None.

### Pensions

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to his Department to service current pension commitments in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [25833]

**Mr. Ingram:** Contributions towards retired pay and pensions from the Ministry of Defence in each of the last three years, for civilian and Service personnel, were as follows:

| | £ |
|---|---|
| 1998–99 | 1,155,334,581 |
| 1999–2000 | 1,203,738,081 |
| 2000–01 | 1,257,556,631 |

### Warship Support Modernisation Project

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the bidding companies for the Warship Support Modernisation Project have been allowed to amend their bids since the closing date following subsequent discussions with Warship Support Agency officials. [25864]

**Mr. Ingram:** Proposals were received in September 2001 from the Dockyard companies for potential partnering arrangements at each of the Naval Bases as part of the Warship Support Modernisation Initiative. Since then, the normal process of post-tender clarification, negotiation and assessment has been taking place. This has involved discussions by officials with representatives from each of the companies. As a result of these discussions, the proposals have been amended in places to clarify matters that had not been fully explained and to reflect the latest state of play in these negotiations.

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the trade unions' alternative proposals for the Warship Support Modernisation Project demonstrate value for money; if value for money will be the sole criterion for the final decision; and if he will make a statement. [25868]

**Mr. Ingram:** Officials in the Ministry of Defence are currently assessing the alternative proposals from the MOD trade unions for warship support modernisation, alongside the in-house efficiency proposals from the Naval Base Management and the proposals from the Dockyard companies. All options are currently being compared for value for money, together with their technical, commercial and Human Resource implications.

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which naval personnel can be used by a private company to provide a profit-making service to the Royal Navy; [25865]

(2) what arrangements have been put in place to secure the continuing service rights of naval personnel who will be working for a profit-making private company on the Warship Modernisation Project; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [25866]

**Mr. Ingram:** If partnering is the agreed way forward, a number of naval personnel will be seconded to work with the companies, chiefly in the area of engineering support. They will remain available for standard military duties, training and for other ad hoc military or emergency tasks. The use of these personnel will be charged to the companies on an annualised hours basis, whereby the companies will pay for the available working time of those personnel at local commercial rates. All naval personnel employed within the partnering arrangements will continue to be subject to the essential terms and conditions of service which apply to all Royal Naval personnel irrespective of where they serve.

## Military Vehicles

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* All Terrain Mobility Platforms, *(b)* Hagglund BV 206, *(c)* Truck Utility Light/Medium, *(d)* Battlefield ambulances, *(e)* Truck Utility Medium, *(f)* Drops, *(g)* Truck Cargo 8 Tonne 4 x 4, *(h)* Truck Cargo 16 Tonne 8 x 4, *(i)* Foden GS 6 x 6 Recovery Vehicles, *(j)* Tank Transporter Unipower Commander and *(k)* Centurion Beach Armoured recovery vehicles are operational. [25700]

**Mr. Ingram:** The information requested is held quarterly. The information for the quarter ending 31 December 2001 will be available at the end of this month. I will write to the hon. Member at that stage and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

## Military Aircraft

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* offensive fighters, *(b)* defensive fighters, *(c)* heavy bombers and *(d)* transporters were operational in (i) October and (ii) November 2001. [25698]

**Mr. Ingram:** The number of aircraft of the types specified, in the RAF's Operating Fleet, as at 1 October and 1 November 2001, is detailed in the table. The Actual Operating Fleet comprises all aircraft which are fully operational or in 1st and 2nd line maintenance. Dedicated training aircraft of the aircraft models comprising the answer, have been excluded.

| | *Number of aircraft* | |
|---|---|---|
| *Aircraft type* | *1 October 2001* | *1 November 2001* |
| Offensive fighter | 208 | 204 |
| Defensive fighter | 115 | 113 |
| Transporters | 75 | 76 |
| Heavy Bombers | 0 | 0 |

## RAF Navigators

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many fully-trained navigators would be required by the RAF if it was fully recruited; how many are available; what steps he is taking to improve training facilities for navigators; and if he will make a statement. [25154]

**Mr. Ingram:** The requirement for trained navigators in the Royal Air Force on 1 December 2001 was 973. The trained strength was 1,176. However, the figures mask a deficit of 83 at junior officer level.

The Military Flying Training System project is planned to provide the updated facilities required to train the navigators of the future. Other measures introduced over recent years to improve the training output include the introduction of new and redesigned training modules to ensure the syllabus continues to reflect the training needs, and the provision of extra flying training for students where necessary.

## Government Actuary

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what use his Department has made of services provided by the Government Actuary's Department in each of the last four years. [23956]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ministry of Defence regularly uses the services provided by the Government Actuary's Department. These services include receiving actuarial advice in respect of the armed forces pension scheme, advice regarding continuing pension provision for civilian staff transferred to a new employer under the TUPE regulations and also specific advice on casework involving both Service and Civilian staff pensions.

The Government Actuary has provided these services for many years.

## TREASURY

### Inland Revenue (RSI Claims)

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason the firm of solicitors acting for the Inland Revenue in respect of the RSI Compensation Scheme are also acting for the PCS Union representing employees claiming compensation. [25767]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The solicitors who act for the PCS Union, representing staff who use the Inland Revenue's RSI Compensation Scheme, do not also act for the Inland Revenue. As with all litigation involving the Inland Revenue, the Solicitor to the Commissioners of the Inland Revenue acts on the Department's behalf in respect of the scheme.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the correspondence between the Inland Revenue and Solicitors Russell, Jones and Walker, in respect of the RSI Compensation Scheme. [25768]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** It would be inappropriate to publish the correspondence between the Inland Revenue and the solicitors acting for the PCS Union in respect of the RSI Compensation Scheme, in accordance with Exemptions 4 (law enforcement and legal proceedings) and 12 (Privacy of an individual) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of RSI have been settled since the announcement of the Compensation Scheme for employees of the Inland Revenue in 1996; and how many are outstanding. [25766]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Inland Revenue's RSI Compensation Scheme was set up on 20 December 1995. Since then, 638 claims have been submitted under the scheme. Of these, the remaining 243 claims are still being processed.

### Working Families Tax Credit

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people living in the London borough of Wandsworth are in receipt of the working families tax credit. [25900]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The number of recipients of the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit in each region, local authority and parliamentary constituency are shown in "Working Families' and Disabled Person's Tax Credit Statistics: Geographical analyses." This can be found on the Inland Revenue website, www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk, under "Statistics", and in the Library.

### Fraud

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) of 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 585W, what assessments have been undertaken which show that the level of fraud on inactive national insurance accounts is no higher than for live accounts. [24247]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** In 1999, as part of the NI Integrity Programme, a review of inactive accounts (where no national insurance contributions or credits have been recorded for three or more consecutive tax years) on NIRS2 was carried out. Most of these accounts relate to women who do not have paid employment. Others relate to people who have gone to live abroad.

Part of the review resulted in an analysis of 100 accounts of contributors found guilty of fraud and 22 were inactive (22 per cent.) and 78 were live accounts. The number of fraudsters using inactive accounts appears to be in proportion to the number of inactive accounts held on NIRS2 (14 million of the 66 million accounts held on NIRS2 are inactive, which equals 21 per cent.).

We have initiated further work under the banner of the 'National Insurance Number (NINO) Work Programme' sponsored by the NINO board (a joint Department for Work and Pensions and Inland Revenue project). This will look at all areas of vulnerable accounts held on the NIRS2 and Departmental Central Index systems.

### Taxation

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross earnings was accounted for by *(a)* income tax, *(b)* national insurance contributions, *(c)* VAT, *(d)* other indirect taxes and *(e)* local taxes for (i) a single person, (ii) a married couple who are both working and (iii) a married couple with two children on (A) 50 per cent., (B) 75 per cent., (C) 100 per cent., (D) 150 per cent., (E) 200 per cent., (F) 500 per cent. and (G) 1,000 per cent. of average earnings in each year since 1997. [25296]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The available information, which shows income tax (including child benefit and working families tax credit from its first full year of implementation) and national insurance contributions for multiples of median earnings up to 200 per cent. was published in answer to a question from the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) on 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 843–44W. The same information for 500 per cent. and 1,000 per cent. of median earnings is given in the table. The estimates of median earnings used here are the same as those in the earlier answer, £19,600 per annum in 2001–02).

Estimating the impact of indirect taxes on these very specific family types is meaningless because spending patterns vary considerably between households of the same type and income. The level of council tax payments also varies depending on where families live.

| | *Multiples of median earnings* | |
|---|---|---|
| | *500 per cent.* | *1,000 per cent.* |
| *Single* | | |
| *1997–98* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,603.65 | 3,207.30 |
| Income Tax | 522.65 | 1,164.11 |
| NICs | 41.54 | 41.54 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 32.6 | 36.3 |
| NICs | 2.6 | 1.3 |
| Tax and NICs | 35.2 | 37.6 |

| | Multiples of median earnings | |
|---|---|---|
| | 500 per cent. | 1,000 per cent. |
| *1998–99* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,663.50 | 3,327.00 |
| Income Tax | 542.05 | 1,207.45 |
| NICs | 43.38 | 43.38 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 32.6 | 36.3 |
| NICs | 2.6 | 1.3 |
| Tax and NICs | 35.2 | 37.6 |
| *1999–2000* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,722.25 | 3,444.50 |
| Income Tax | 560.27 | 1,249.17 |
| NICs | 43.40 | 43.40 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 32.5 | 36.3 |
| NICs | 2.5 | 1.3 |
| Tax and NICs | 35.1 | 37.5 |
| *2000–01* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,799.75 | 3,599.50 |
| Income Tax | 584.35 | 1,304.25 |
| NICs | 45.90 | 45.90 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 32.5 | 36.2 |
| NICs | 2.6 | 1.3 |
| Tax and NICs | 35.0 | 37.5 |
| *2001–02* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,880.74 | 3,761.48 |
| Income Tax | 611.30 | 1,363.60 |
| NICs | 48.80 | 48.80 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 32.5 | 36.3 |
| NICs | 2.6 | 1.3 |
| Tax and NICs | 35.1 | 37.5 |
| *Two-earner married couple, no children* | | |
| *1997–98* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,603.65 | 3,207.30 |
| Income Tax | 398.57 | 1,040.03 |
| NICs | 83.08 | 83.08 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 24.9 | 32.4 |
| NICs | 5.2 | 2.6 |
| Tax and NICs | 30.0 | 35.0 |
| *1998–99* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,663.50 | 3,327.00 |
| Income Tax | 413.23 | 1,078.63 |
| NICs | 86.76 | 86.76 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 24.8 | 32.4 |
| NICs | 5.2 | 2.6 |
| Tax and NICs | 30.1 | 35.0 |
| *1999–2000* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,722.25 | 3,444.50 |
| Income Tax | 427.84 | 1,116.74 |
| NICs | 86.80 | 86.80 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 24.8 | 32.4 |
| NICs | 5.0 | 2.5 |
| Tax and NICs | 29.9 | 34.9 |
| *2000–01* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,799.75 | 3,599.50 |
| Income Tax | 448.81 | 1,168.71 |
| NICs | 91.80 | 91.80 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 24.9 | 32.5 |
| NICs | 5.1 | 2.6 |
| Tax and NICs | 30.0 | 35.0 |
| *2001–02* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,880.74 | 3,761.48 |
| Income Tax | 470.31 | 1,222.61 |
| NICs | 97.60 | 97.60 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 25.0 | 32.5 |
| NICs | 5.2 | 2.6 |
| Tax and NICs | 30.2 | 35.1 |
| *Single-earner married couple, two children* | | |
| *1997–98* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,603.65 | 3,207.30 |
| Income Tax | 517.37 | 1,158.83 |
| NICs | 41.54 | 41.54 |
| Child Benefit (CB) | 20.05 | 20.05 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 32.3 | 36.1 |
| NICs | 2.6 | 1.3 |
| Income Tax+NICs-CB | 33.6 | 36.8 |
| *1998–99* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,663.50 | 3,327.00 |
| Income Tax | 536.57 | 1,201.97 |
| NICs | 43.38 | 43.38 |
| Child Benefit (CB) | 20.75 | 20.75 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 32.3 | 36.1 |
| NICs | 2.6 | 1.3 |
| Income Tax+NICs-CB | 33.6 | 36.8 |
| *1999–2000* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,722.25 | 3,444.50 |
| Income Tax | 556.48 | 1,245.38 |
| NICs | 43.40 | 43.40 |
| Child Benefit (CB) | 24.00 | 24.00 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 32.3 | 36.2 |
| NICs | 2.5 | 1.3 |
| Income Tax+NICs-CB | 33.4 | 36.7 |
| *2000–01* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,799.75 | 3,599.50 |
| Income Tax | 584.35 | 1,304.25 |
| NICs | 45.90 | 45.90 |
| Child Benefit (CB) | 25.00 | 25.00 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 32.5 | 36.2 |
| NICs | 2.6 | 1.3 |
| Income Tax+NICs-CB | 33.6 | 36.8 |
| *2001–02* | | |
| *£ per week* | | |
| Gross income | 1,880.74 | 3,761.48 |
| Income Tax | 611.30 | 1,363.60 |
| NICs | 48.80 | 48.80 |
| Child Benefit (CB) | 25.85 | 25.85 |
| *Percentage of gross earnings* | | |
| Income Tax | 32.5 | 36.3 |
| NICs | 2.6 | 1.3 |
| Income Tax+NICs-CB | 33.7 | 36.9 |

*Notes:*

1. Income tax payments are calculated on the basis that the households receive no tax reliefs other than the standard allowances and only have income from employment. All earners are assumed to pay Class 1 national insurance contributions at the contracted-in rate.
2. Earnings are taken to be the median gross weekly earnings of all full-time employees on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence. (Median earnings are more representative of the population as whole than mean male full-time earnings).
3. In line with the convention in the Tax Benefit Reference Manual, Child Benefit is treated as negative income tax.
4. For the two earner family it is assumed that earnings are split 60 per cent.:40 per cent.

### Child Poverty

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent developments have taken place in the United Kingdom to reduce child poverty. [25904]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Government are committed to abolishing child poverty within a generation and halving it by 2010. In support of this, it recently published a strategy document on child poverty, "Tackling Child Poverty—giving every child the best possible start in life", which will inform the Budget and Spending Review 2002.

The Government's strategy involves:

helping to ensure a decent family income, with work for those who can and support for those who can't;

delivering excellent public services for all neighbourhoods and targeted interventions for those with additional needs;

supporting parents so that they can provide better support for their children; and

harnessing the power and expertise of the voluntary and community sectors, providing support for innovation and good practice and building strategic partnerships with these sectors to fight child poverty.

As a result of personal tax and benefit measures announced in the last Parliament, it is estimated that there are 1.2 million fewer children in poverty than would otherwise have been the case. The Government have also made substantial new investments in services for children. Over the four years to 2004, average real-terms annual growth in spending on education and training in England will be over 5.5 per cent. In addition, extra funds have been made available for SureStart, Neighbourhood Renewal and the Children's Fund.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Part-time Workers

**Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations will apply in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the application of this directive to England, Scotland and Wales. [25919]

**Alan Johnson:** In Northern Ireland, implementation of employment legislation is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly. Responsibility for regulations on part-time workers rests with the Minister for Employment and Learning. I understand that the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 came into operation on 1 July 2000.

The Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 came into force in England, Scotland and Wales on 1 July 2000 and ensure that part-timers are treated no less favourably than comparable full-timers in their terms and conditions unless this is objectively justified.

The measure ensures that Britain's six million part-timers can no longer be treated as second class citizens.

### Parental Leave

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what mechanism was used for measuring the uptake of parental leave in the last three years; and what was the *(a)* uptake of parental leave and *(b)* proportion of those eligible who took parental leave in the same period. [25879]

**Alan Johnson:** The Department commissioned a survey of working parents to inform the Government's review of maternity and parental leave. Initial results were published in the Green Paper "Work and Parents competitiveness and choice", published in December 2000, and in the accompanying document "Work and Parents competitiveness and choice—Research and Analysis". The survey found that, by autumn 2000, at least 3 per cent. of working parents had taken parental leave since December 1999.

Questions on take-up of parental leave have recently been introduced in the Labour Force Survey. Results are expected later this year.

### Sustainable Development

**Roger Casale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's definition is of the term sustainable development. [25311]

**Nigel Griffiths** *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The DTI's definitions of sustainable developments and the Department's strategy was published in October 2000 and is also available on the DTI's website www.dti.gov.uk/sustainbly.

### Graduates

**Geraint Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on productivity of the increased proportion of graduates in the work force. [25472]

**Mr. Alexander** *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Levels of educational attainment, including attainment at a tertiary level, are one of a range of factors which impact on productivity and competitiveness that are identified in the DTI's UK Competitiveness Indicators (Second Edition, February 2001). A copy is available in the Libraries of the House. The economic benefits of increased participation in higher education are widely recognised. For example a recent report from the OECD states that:

High tertiary entry and participation rates help to ensure the development and maintenance of a highly educated population and labour force. Tertiary education is associated with better

access to employment and higher earnings. Rates of entry to both types of tertiary education are an indication, in part, of the degree to which the population is acquiring high-level skills and knowledge valued by the labour market in knowledge societies (Education at Glance—OECD Indicators, 2001).

### Nuisance Faxes

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to investigate nuisance faxes; and what charges can be made against those who continue to send unprompted material. [25005]

**Mr. Alexander:** Unsolicited direct marketing by fax is regulated under the Telecoms Data Protection and Privacy Directive, implemented in the UK by the Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) Regulations 1999. Under these regulations, unsolicited direct marketing faxes to individual subscribers are banned unless they have given their prior consent. Corporate subscribers, including limited companies, are entitled to register with the Fax Preference Service or instruct particular senders not to send them any further faxes. (Individuals may also reinforce their protection by registering). Any faxes which advertise premium rate services are in addition subject to self-regulatory control by the industry regulator, ICSTIS, and must comply with the ICSTIS code of conduct.

The Information Commissioner enforces the Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) Regulations. The Commissioner may send an enforcement notice to anyone who sends faxes to individuals who have not given their consent, or to subscribers who have registered on the Fax Preference Service; ultimately, failure to comply with enforcement notices is a criminal offence punishable by a fine.

### Consignia

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the latest annual bonuses paid to managers of Consignia in each business unit of Consignia, broken down by *(a)* gender and *(b)* ethnic origin. [24460]

**Mr. Alexander:** Since the company was given the commercial freedom it had long sought, operational issues like bonus payments are a matter for the company.

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the size of the Consignia work force is. [24451]

**Mr. Alexander:** I am advised by Consignia that the average number of staff, calculated on a full-time equivalent basis, including part-time employees, employed by the company in the year ended 31 March 2001 was 217,964.

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average rate of pay is for *(a)* the work force, *(b)* managers and *(c)* non-managers of Consignia, broken down by business unit, and in each business unit by (i) gender and (ii) ethnic origin. [24453]

**Mr. Alexander:** Rates of pay are an operational issue for Consignia.

I am advised by the company that this information is not available in the format requested.

### Exporters

**Mr. Simon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria need to be met by British manufacturers if they wish to obtain preferential status. [22812]

**Nigel Griffiths:** The Government do not give preferential status to particular exporters.

### Postal Archive

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement about the *(a)* status of and *(b)* future of the postal archive and the property of what was formerly the Postal Museum. [24570]

**Mr. Alexander:** This is an issue for Consignia plc. I am advised by the company that the archives of the Post Office from 17th to 20th century, including historical documents, maps and posters, are open to the public at Freeling House at Mount Pleasant in London on weekdays with no need of an appointment.

The artefacts of the national Postal Museum are stored at Freeling House and most of the philatelic material may be viewed by appointment. Various options are currently being considered for enhanced philatelic study facilities and improved public access to the museum collections.

### Computer Hardware

**Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of computer hardware suppliers tying their customers to a particular software operating system, with particular reference to small businesses. [24514]

**Mr. Alexander:** All UK consumers of computer hardware are free to make purchases from a range of suppliers and to choose one providing a package that will meet their individual software requirements. I am not aware of any limitation of consumers' choice in this area. If, however, there is any evidence of anti-competitive behaviour this should be forwarded to the Director General of the Office of Fair Trading.

### Select Committee Reports

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in meeting the Government's commitments *(a)* in response to recommendation (d) of the Eighth report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, UK Online Reviewed: The First Annual report of the E-Minister and E-Envoy, dated March 2001 and *(b)* in response to recommendation (e) of the Fourteenth report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry on the Electronic Communications Bill, dated October 1999. [27107]

**Mr. Alexander:** *(a)* Progress in response to this commitment was reported on pages 18–19 of the UK Online Annual Report 2001, and in a memorandum to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry dated 20 December. Copies of both documents have been placed in the Library of the House.

*(b)* Departments have until recently proceeded with the task of identifying statutory requirements of writing for updating on the basis that an order under section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act, or other amending

legislation, was necessary to authorise or facilitate electronic communication in fulfilment of the requirement. The Law Commission published an Advice to Government on 19 December which gives a different view on what constitutes 'writing' in the context of electronic communications. The Government are still considering the implications of this advice. The Government have, however, in the light of the advice and other developments, modified their approach to updating the law to authorise or facilitate electronic communication. Their revised policy is set out in the memorandum to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry dated 20 December, which also includes lists of legislation so far identified by Departments for updating.

### ECGD

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she intends to publish the ECGD's Annual Report and Resource Accounts for 2000–01. [27108]

**Ms Hewitt:** The Export Credits Guarantee Department's (ECGD's) Annual Report and Resource Accounts for 2000–01 were laid before the House this morning. I am pleased to say that they demonstrate once more that British capital goods exporters and investors have been successful in winning valuable overseas orders with Government insurance and guarantee support worth £5.6 billion. Furthermore, they show that ECGD is in a good financial position from which to continue supporting further business while protecting the interests of the taxpayer, in what is a difficult period for the global economy.

### Trade Credits

**Andy Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what was the value of trade credits to heavily indebted poor countries guaranteed by the UK Government which were cancelled in each year since 1983. [25238]

**Nigel Griffiths:** No such debts in relation to trade credits were cancelled between 1983 and 1990 inclusive. Amounts cancelled in each year since were as follows:

| *Year* | *£Million* |
|---|---|
| 1991 | 6.62 |
| 1992 | 17.80 |
| 1993 | 26.89 |
| 1994 | 8.76 |
| 1995 | 23.74 |
| 1996 | 180.69 |
| 1997 | 22.49 |
| 1998 | 33.04 |
| 1999 | 56.91 |
| 2000 | 48.13 |
| 2001 | 135.04 |
| Total | 560.11 |

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Performing Arts

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the *(a)* new companies, *(b)* new work and *(c)* new venues that have been funded by her Department in order to increase access to the performing arts in the last 12 months. [22541]

**Dr. Howells:** We have contacted the Arts Council of England to request the information required, and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available, placing copies of her letter in the Libraries of the House.

### Public Libraries

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the libraries based in the Buckingham constituency which have received funding from the *(a)* Public Library Volunteer scheme and *(b)* People's Network programme indicating (i) the nature of the project, (ii) the date of the award and (iii) the amount provided in each case. [23743]

**Dr. Howells:** My Department, in conjunction with the Home Office Active Community Unit, is match funding the "Lending Time" scheme led by CSV (Community Service Volunteers) to promote the use of volunteers in libraries. Expressions of interest were invited from libraries through the Library Association and six libraries have been selected to pilot the scheme. Buckinghamshire did not express an interest in this scheme.

All eight public libraries in Buckingham constituency have been awarded funds from the New Opportunities Access to Lifelong Learning Programme to support the People's Network programme. The funding will have provided, by summer 2002, 24 new terminals within Buckingham. The award was announced on 11 April 2001. Awards for individual libraries are not available. In total, Buckinghamshire library service will receive £827,138 to connect all its libraries to a high speed broadband network, and provide new PCs and appropriate training for librarians.

### Sports Drug Tests

**Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussion she has had with UK Sport about the number of drug tests on British triathletes. [25529]

**Mr. Caborn:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no direct discussions on the number of drug tests on British triathletes, although she receives UK Sport's annual reports of the testing programmes for all sports covered by their anti-doping programme.

**Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions UK Sport has had with the International Triathlon Union about drug testing; and if she will make a statement. [25530]

**Mr. Caborn:** UK Sport works in partnership with the national federations in the UK to deliver testing programmes both in and out of competition. There are a small number of events in the UK which fall under the international federation's responsibility and on these occasions UK Sport liaises with the international federation direct. The last such event was the London Triathlon in September 1998.

In 2000–01 triathlon was introduced to the Olympic Games in Sydney. The focus of the testing programme was on the pre-Olympic testing of UK triathletes both in

the UK and in Australia. This programme was arranged in partnership with the British Triathlon Association. In 2001–02, so far two triathlon events in the UK have been tested and one World Class Squad Training Day making a total of 37 tests to date.

Discussions are on-going about triathlon introducing an out of competition testing programme for individual triathletes, and the British Triathlon Association have been actively working towards increasing their anti-doping efforts.

### Royal Parks Agency

**Mr. Luke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what performance targets were set for the Royal Parks Agency for 2001–02. [26901]

**Dr. Howells:** The following performance targets were set for the Royal Parks Agency for 2000–01:

*Financial and Efficiency*

To increase income by 10 per cent. from the 2000–01 level, from all sources except recharges and VAT refunds.

Stay within the revised running costs allocation.

Seek to bring the hourly cost of a Royal Parks Police Constable on duty in line with the recommendation in the Speed Report.

*Visitor satisfaction*

Achieve an overall quality rating of 89 per cent. from visitors to the parks. The minimum rating for any one park should be no lower than 85 per cent., compared with 83 per cent. in 2000–01.

*Fabric*

Achieve an average rating from visitors of at least 89 per cent. on cleanliness in the parks. The minimum rating for a park should be no lower than 85 per cent.

Maintain an average score of 89 per cent. for soft landscape presentation, compared with a score of 88 per cent. in 2000–01. The minimum score for a park should be no lower than 85 per cent. compared to 82 per cent. in 2000–01.

Re-appraise maintenance priorities, and set annual targets and meaningful indicators for reducing the backlog of works and maintenance.

## SCOTLAND

### Euro

**Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the results of a future referendum on British membership of the euro will allow identification of votes cast for and against according to *(a)* parliamentary constituency, *(b)* local authority area and *(c)* Scotland. [25870]

**Mrs. Liddell:** The conduct of referendums has, since 16 February 2001, been the responsibility of the Electoral Commission, following the coming into force of provisions in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

### Computer Crime

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft her Department recorded in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and on how many occasions in those years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (A) within and (B) outside her Department. [13132]

**Mrs. Liddell:** The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. During the specified period, there were no cases of computer fraud, no incidents of computer hacking, and no systems were illegally accessed; neither were there any cases of computer theft reported by the Scotland Office.

## TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

### Waste Policy

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much additional money will be available for local authority recycling and composting in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03, *(c)* 2003–04 and *(d)* 2004–05, as a result of the increases in SSA for environmental, cultural and protective services after allowing for (i) cost increases in landfill and incineration and (ii) inflation. [22323]

**Dr. Whitehead** *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* SR2000 provided real terms increases for the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS) block of the Standard Spending Assessment which includes these services. By the third year the EPCS will have risen by £1.1 billion. Landfill and incineration costs will be affected by factors such as the volume of waste, pressure on landfill gate fees and the landfill tax, which is currently £12 per tonne for active waste and will be increased by £1 per year through to 2004–05. Their effect on local authority costs will also depend on how much waste is recycled or composted. It is for each local authority to decide how much of the revenue support grant it receives, and its other resources including the amount raised through council tax, should be directed towards any particular service.

### Vehicle Lights

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact that the introduction of mandatory day-time running lights on all vehicles will have on the number of road-related *(a)* accidents and *(b)* fatalities. [24294]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory to carry out a review of the methodology used by the SWOV Institute in the Netherlands for their report on the safety effects of daytime running lights. This report, carried out on behalf of the European Commission, which combined the results of 24 published studies, suggested that the universal use of daytime running lights in the United Kingdom in 1995 would have saved 648 lives. This would represent a 17 per cent. reduction in fatal accidents. The hypothetical overall casualty reduction would be 29 per cent.

The Transport Research Laboratory's review concluded that the claims for potential accident savings appeared exaggerated because daytime running lights can only be effective in preventing a limited type of accident.

The Department is proposing to carry out further research into the effectiveness of daytime running lamps.

**John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made towards the fitting of daytime running lights on all new vehicles. [24293]

**Mr. Jamieson:** A commitment to fit daytime running lamps was included in the European Commission's proposals to introduce pedestrian protection features in new cars by a negotiated agreement with car manufacturers.

This element of the proposals has been deferred for further consideration.

### Transport Projects

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which transport infrastructure projects given formal approval since 1997 will affect the Buckingham constituency; and if he will indicate the cost of each project. [24843]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There are a number of significant infrastructure schemes, either within the Buckingham constituency or nearby, which will affect the constituency. Further information is given in the table.

*£000*

| *Scheme* | *Cost* |
|---|---|
| *1998–99* | |
| A43 Towcester—M40 dualling[1,3] | 56,600 |
| *2000–01* | |
| Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western Bypass[2] | 32,400 |
| M40 Handy Cross improvement measures | 3,000 |
| A41 Aston Clinton Bypass[3] | 21,000 |
| *2001–02* | |
| Berryfields—new right turn lane[3] | 250 |
| A5 Old Stratford Roundabout signalisation[3] | 250 |
| *2002–03* | |
| Complementary works for M40 Handy Cross junction | 400 |
| M1 J14 minor improvements[3] | 100 |
| Total | 114,000 |

[1] Scheme confirmed in "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England" published in July 1998
[2] Provisionally accepted local authority major scheme
[3] Highways Agency Scheme

### Railtrack

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the relationship is between the Strategic Rail Authority and Partnerships UK with respect to the proposed bid to take over Railtrack plc by a not for profit company. [24871]

**Mr. Byers:** The Strategic Rail Authority is now the sponsor of the bid by the proposed company limited by guarantee (CLG) which will put forward a proposal to the administrator to take over the assets and liabilities of Railtrack plc and its role as network operator. It is for the CLG bid team and the SRA to decide what further assistance they may require.

### Affordable Housing

**Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many affordable housing units there were; and what was the proportion occupied in rural areas by *(a)* constituency, and *(b)* local authority for each year since 1990. [24895]

**Ms Keeble:** Information is not available in the form requested.

New affordable homes in rural settlements in England with a population of 3,000 or less are funded by the Housing Corporation and by local authorities, or through the planning system without public subsidy.

From 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992 and each of the following years up to and including 1 April to 30 November 2001 the following affordable homes in rural settlements in England with a population of 3,000 or less were completed and funded, by the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme and Local Authority Social Housing Grant.

| *Year* | *Total* |
|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 803 |
| 1992–93 | 2,268 |
| 1993–94 | 1,567 |
| 1994–95 | 1,341 |
| 1995–96 | 1,811 |
| 1996–97 | 1,678 |
| 1997–98 | 2,020 |
| 1998–99 | 1,792 |
| 1999–2000 | 1,533 |
| 2000–01 | 1,278 |
| 2001–02 | 463 |

The number of affordable housing units completed through the planning system is not collected centrally. I will write to the hon. Member with a breakdown by local authority of the affordable housing completions shown above.

### London Underground

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answers of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 560W, on London Underground, what were the comparable figures for 2000. [25163]

**Mr. Jamieson:** These are operational matters for London Underground who inform me that there were:

(a) 85 signal failures causing delays to services on the District line between Earl's Court and Wimbledon during 2000; and

(b) 38 train delays of over 15 minutes and 155 peak time cancellations of District line trains because of train defects during 2000.

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 15W, on London Underground, if the terms of reference referred to were the final terms of reference agreed with Ernst & Young; and if he will make a statement. [25862]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The precise timing of the Ernst & Young report is under review as it depends on London Underground's progress with its evaluation of bids. Otherwise, the terms of reference referred to are final. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made clear that he will publish Ernst & Young's report before any decisions are taken on whether to sign contracts.

## Millennium Dome

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much is to be paid for the Dome structure by English Partnerships' exclusive partner; [25112]

(2) how much is to be paid for the building land adjacent to the Dome by English Partnerships' exclusive partner; and when the payment will be made. [25111]

**Ms Keeble:** Through the proposed deal between English Partnerships and Meridian Delta Ltd., English Partnerships expects to receive hundreds of millions of pounds, over the lifetime of the project, including a guaranteed minimum price for the land that English Partnerships is putting into the joint venture. The amount to be received by English Partnerships will be determined further during negotiations with Meridian Delta Ltd., and will also be dependent on timing and quantum of future development.

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guarantees he is seeking from English Partnerships' exclusive partner about the circumstances in which they would be permitted to demolish the Dome structure. [25113]

**Ms Keeble:** The proposed deal with Meridian Delta Ltd. envisages a review of the Dome's physical structure in 2019, in the light of the then commercial conditions and the projected maintenance costs of the Dome.

Anschutz Entertainment Group, part of the Meridian Delta Ltd. consortium, and who would be responsible for building and operating the arena inside the Dome, have stated, publicly, their intention to retain the Dome for many years more than this.

## Drink Driving

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many motorists were detected driving with a blood alcohol level beyond the permitted maximum broken down by bands of 20 mg in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [25159]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The number of positive or refused breath tests recorded in England and Wales in each of the last three years are shown in the table. This information is obtained from the Home Office. Information is not collected centrally on blood alcohol levels.

*Positive or refused breath tests recorded in England and Wales*

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1998 | 102,300 |
| 1999 | 94,100 |
| 2000 | 94,600 |

## Housing (Tower Hamlets)

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what factors account for the reduction in the major repairs allowance available for housing repairs in the London borough of Tower Hamlets. [25878]

**Ms Keeble:** The major repairs allowance is calculated on a per dwelling basis. Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001 the number of local authority dwellings in Tower Hamlets fell by almost 6 per cent. However, a 2.4 per cent. increase in the allowance per dwelling for next year restricted the overall reduction in Tower Hamlets' 2002–03 allocation to 3.6 per cent.

## Homelessness

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the estimated number of homeless living in *(a)* London and *(b)* cities outside London in each of the last 10 years. [25030]

**Ms Keeble:** I have arranged for a table to be placed in the Libraries of the House. This present information on households accepted as homeless and in priority need in each financial year, and households resident in temporary accommodation at the 31 March of each year, as reported by English local authorities on their annual Housing Investment Programme returns.

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many homeless people aged between 16 and 18 years were registered on local authority housing lists in each of the last 15 years. [24970]

**Ms Keeble:** The Department collects information on the number of households accepted by local authorities in England under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need. Available estimates of those cases where the authority considered the presence of a "vulnerable young person" to be the most crucial category in determining priority need are given in the table. This category was not separately identified in statistics collected prior to June 1991.

Information collected by the Department on local authorities' housing registers does not include an analysis by age of head of household.

*Homeless households accepted by local authorities in England 1991–92 to 2000–01*

| | *Households with vulnerable young people* | *As a percentage of total* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 3,400 | 2.4 |
| 1992–93 | 4,650 | 3.4 |
| 1993–94 | 4,360 | 3.5 |
| 1994–95 | 3,850 | 3.3 |
| 1995–96 | 3,780 | 3.2 |
| 1996–97 | 3,520 | 3.2 |
| 1997–98 | 3,200 | 3.1 |
| 1998–99 | 3,560 | 3.4 |
| 1999–2000 | 3,590 | 3.4 |
| 2000–01 | 5,170 | 4.5 |
| 2001–02[1] | 2,870 | 4.8 |

[1] April-September

*Notes:*

Vulnerable young persons are typically, but not exclusively, aged 18 or under. Households headed by 16 to 18-year-olds but accepted under another priority-need category (such as with dependent children or with a pregnant woman) cannot be separately identified and are not included in these figures.

*Source:*

DTLR P1(E) housing returns (quarterly)

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many homeless households are in *(a)* temporary and *(b)* bed-and-breakfast accommodation in each region of the country; what steps are being taken to reduce these numbers; and if he will make a statement. [25737]

**Ms Keeble:** At 30 September 2001, the numbers of households in each region in temporary accommodation (which includes bed-and-breakfast) and in bed-and-breakfast (rounded to the nearest 10) were:

| | *Total* | *Of which bed-and-breakfast* |
|---|---|---|
| North East | 1,540 | 60 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 2,080 | 270 |
| East Midlands | 2,050 | 70 |
| Eastern | 5,520 | 200 |
| London | 44,340 | 8,540 |
| South East | 12,860 | 1,410 |
| South West | 5,590 | 1,160 |
| West Midlands | 1,820 | 120 |
| North West | 2,150 | 150 |
| England | 77,940 | 12,290 |

The Homelessness Bill, when enacted, will require local authorities to conduct a review of the levels, and likely future levels, of all forms of homelessness in their area and to develop a strategy for preventing homelessness and ensuring that sufficient accommodation and support is available for those who are or may become homeless.

The Minister for Housing and Planning also announced on 3 December that a new Homelessness Directorate will be set up to bring together and invigorate existing work to help homeless people, as well as develop new work to help prevent homelessness, and investigate its underlying causes.

Additionally, we are determined to reduce local authority use of unsatisfactory accommodation to accommodate the homeless. Over the next two years the new bed-and-breakfast unit will work with partners to introduce measures to reduce the need to place families, especially those with children, in bed-and-breakfast. The unit will shortly be publishing targets.

## Rent Arrears

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the level of rent arrears was in each local authority in each of the last 10 years. [24966]

**Ms Keeble:** I have placed in the Libraries of the House a table showing the level of rent arrears as reported by each local authority in England at the end of the financial year, for each of the last 10 years.

## Council House Sales

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of capital receipts raised from the sale of council houses has been spent on building and renovating council stock in each of the last 20 years. [25012]

**Ms Keeble:** The information requested is not available. The receipts from council house sales available for new capital expenditure are used, along with other un-hypothecated capital resources (eg other capital receipts, borrowing supported by basic credit approvals), to finance authorities' overall capital programmes.

## Housing

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people have been housed in *(a)* local authority housing, *(b)* social housing and *(c)* the rented private sector in each of the last 15 years. [25010]

**Ms Keeble:** The information requested for England is shown in the following table. Annual figures are available only from 1993 onwards when the Survey of English Housing started. Figures for earlier years come from a periodic supplementary questionnaire on housing topics that was included in the Labour Force Survey. For years before 1993 figures in terms of persons are not readily available so the information requested has been provided in terms of households. If information about housing in Wales is required inquiries should be made to the Office for the Secretary of State for Wales.

*Housing tenure in England 1984 to 2000*

*Thousand*

| | *Local authority* | *Registered social landlord* | *Private rented sector* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Households* | | | |
| 1984 | 4,660 | 374 | 1,920 |
| 1988 | 4,246 | 460 | 1,702 |
| 1991 | 3,872 | 564 | 1,824 |
| 1993 | 3,672 | 726 | 1,876 |
| 1994 | 3,677 | 767 | 1,936 |
| 1995 | 3,494 | 910 | 2,011 |
| 1996 | 3,482 | 1,010 | 2,047 |
| 1997 | 3,338 | 987 | 1,991 |
| 1998 | 3,324 | 1,028 | 2,044 |
| 1999 | 3,137 | 1,161 | 2,099 |
| 2000 | 2,941 | 1,279 | 2,003 |
| *Persons* | | | |
| 1984 | .. | .. | .. |
| 1988 | .. | .. | .. |
| 1991 | .. | .. | .. |
| 1993 | 8,505 | 1,466 | 4,225 |
| 1994 | 8,411 | 1,645 | 4,143 |
| 1995 | 7,938 | 1,928 | 4,383 |
| 1996 | 7,887 | 2,245 | 4,424 |
| 1997 | 7,485 | 2,165 | 4,387 |
| 1998 | 7,513 | 2,240 | 4,415 |
| 1999 | 7,085 | 2,479 | 4,514 |
| 2000 | 6,520 | 2,792 | 4,369 |

**David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many local authorities will be in a position to implement an arm's length management organisation for their housing stock in the next two years. [25109]

**Ms Keeble:** It is open to any local authority with housing stock to manage that stock through arm's length arrangements, subject to the agreement of the Secretary of State to the delegation of their housing management functions. We do not hold information on the number of authorities that may be considering this option. On

Thursday 29 November 2001, we announced conditional funding allocations to eight local authorities which intend to pursue this option *Official Report*, column 1064W. These allocations will be confirmed during 2002 if the authorities meet the necessary criteria. Applications for the next round of conditional allocations are due by the end of February 2002.

**David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many housing units were cleared in the public and private sector in the last five years, broken down by region. [25248]

**Ms Keeble:** According to information supplied by local authorities, the number of dwellings demolished in the private and public sector in England by region in the last five financial years is given in the table.

| | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| England | 10,852 | 14,030 | 13,579 | 15,218 | 17,969 |
| North East | 1,517 | 1,432 | 1,786 | 2,446 | 2,222 |
| North West | 3,206 | 3,549 | 2,678 | 3,459 | 5,713 |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 1,100 | 1,825 | 2,637 | 2,282 | 3,615 |
| East Midlands | 265 | 373 | 191 | 139 | 674 |
| West Midlands | 1,601 | 2,135 | 1,679 | 2,646 | 1,332 |
| East | 355 | 700 | 345 | 220 | 325 |
| London | 1,679 | 2,797 | 2,819 | 2,870 | 2,400 |
| South East | 791 | 910 | 943 | 832 | 960 |
| South West | 338 | 309 | 501 | 324 | 728 |

## Disabled Facilities Grants

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of the review of disabled facilities grants. [24952]

**Ms Keeble** *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* There has been no review of disabled facilities grants as such. However, the Government have been considering the maximum limit for grant, and preparing new guidance.

The Government have decided that the maximum limit for mandatory disabled facilities grant in England should be increased from £20,000 to £25,000. This change will take effect from 21 January 2002. Government resources to local authorities for the disabled facilities grant budget for 1992–93 will be increased to £88 million and we will shortly be announcing individual DFG allocations to local authorities for that year.

In conjunction with the Department of Health, my Department is also preparing new statutory and good practice guidance for local authorities covering all aspects of housing adaptations for disabled people. We hope to publish this new guidance in the spring of 2002.

## Multiple Occupation

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will publish a summary of the responses he received to the consultation paper on Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation in England, issued by his Department in 1999; and if he will place copies of the responses in the Library; [25541]

(2) when he intends to undertake formal consultation on reforms to the Housing (Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation) Regulations 1990; and if he will make a statement. [25543]

**Ms Keeble:** I hope to publish both of these papers in the near future. However, what we say on these matters will need to have regard to the position reached on the Home Energy Conservation Bill, currently before Parliament, which among other things would provide for a revised definition of a house in multiple occupation and introduce mandatory registration and licensing of such properties.

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* households and *(b)* people in private rented HMO dwellings there are in England, broken down by (i) traditional and bedsit HMOs, (ii) shared houses and flats, (iii) households with lodgers and (iv) HMO buildings converted into flats. [25542]

**Ms Keeble:** The table provides the most recent estimates (1996) for number of households and people in private rented HMO dwellings in England.

*Estimates[1] of the number of households and people in private rented HMOs in 1996*

| | *Households* | *People* |
|---|---|---|
| Traditional or bedsit HMOs | 165,000 | 267,000 |
| Shared houses and flats | 188,000 | 547,000 |
| Households with lodgers | 202,000 | [2]253,000 |
| HMO buildings converted into flats[3] | 302,000 | 472,000 |
| Total[4] | 857,000 | 1,539,000 |

[1] There is a margin of error involved in the estimates arising from the sample nature of the English House Condition Survey and from the complexities of classifying some types of HMO.

[2] The number of people refers to the number of lodgers and excludes the landlord and members of the landlord's household.

[3] Shared converted flats, households with lodgers in converted flats and bedsits in converted flats are included in the respective columns and not in the converted flat total.

[4] Please note that the total excludes households and people within private rented, purpose built HMOs for which the EHCS sample size is too small to produce reliable estimates.

*Source:*

English House Condition Survey 1996: Houses in Multiple Occupation in the private rented sector (DTLR:1999)

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many private rented houses in multiple occupation accommodation units and dwellings there are in England, broken down by *(a)* traditional and bedsit HMOs, *(b)* shared houses and flats, *(c)* households with lodgers and *(d)* HMO buildings converted into flats. [25590]

**Ms Keeble:** The table provides the most recent estimates (1996) for the number of private rented house in multiple occupation accommodation units and dwellings in England.

*Estimates[1] of the number of private rented HMO accommodation units and dwellings in 1996*

| | *Accommodation units* | *Dwellings* |
|---|---|---|
| Traditional or bedsit HMOs | 219,000 | 56,000 |
| Shared houses and flats | 189,000 | 189,000 |

*Estimates[1] of the number of private rented HMO accommodation units and dwellings in 1996*

| | *Accommodation units* | *Dwellings* |
|---|---|---|
| Households with lodgers | 202,000 | 202,000 |
| HMO buildings converted into flats[2] | 337,000 | 337,000 |
| Total [3] | 947,000 | 784,000 |

[1] There is a margin of error involved in the estimates arising from the sample nature of the English House Condition Survey and from the complexities of classifying some types of HMO.
[2] Shared converted flats, households with lodgers in converted flats and bedsits in converted flats are included in the respective columns and not in the converted flat total.
[3] Please note that the total excludes accommodation units and dwellings within private rented, purpose built HMOs for which the EHCS sample size is too small to produce reliable estimates.
*Source:*
English House Condition Survey 1996: Houses in Multiple Occupation in the private rented sector (DTLR:1999)

### Housing Fitness Standard

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to replace the housing fitness standard by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System; and if he will make a statement. [25610]

**Ms Keeble:** The Housing Health and Safety Rating System will set out a new approach to the assessment of housing conditions. The Government intend to legislate, as soon as parliamentary time allows, so that local authorities can take action against properties posing health and safety risks on the basis of the new system.

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish a summary of the responses he received to the consultation paper on the replacement of the housing fitness standard by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. [25611]

**Ms Keeble:** We consulted last year on a framework of legislation and guidance within which local authorities would use the Housing Health and Safety Rating System as the basis for action against unacceptable housing conditions. I am placing a summary of the responses in the Library of the House. It will also be available shortly on the Department's housing website at www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/information/index08.htm.

### Alternative Fuels

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many *(a)* LPG and *(b)* natural gas refuelling depots there are in (i) the UK and (ii) Wales; and if he will provide a list of where these points in Wales are; [25632]

(2) what measures he is taking to ensure that the availability of grants to convert vehicles to run on liquidified petroleum gas which are available from PowerShift is widely publicised; [25624]

(3) how many applications there have been for PowerShift grants for converting vehicles to run on LPG; and how many grants have been approved. [25623]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Energy Saving Trust run the PowerShift programme, covering Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as England, on behalf of the Government. There is a comprehensive marketing strategy to raise awareness of LPG and other alternative fuels, and publicise the conversion grants available. There is an interactive website, and regular articles in national and regional newspapers and magazines.

Since the PowerShift programme began in 1996, the trust has received a UK total of 3,809 applications, of which 2,642 were approved as eligible, covering the conversion of 12,404 vehicles to run on LPG. Of these, the figures for Wales are 157 applications received, and 124 applications approved as eligible, covering 559 vehicles.

Powershift grants have been limited to conversion of vehicles up to one-year-old, but have recently been extended to be available for vehicles up to five-years-old for which quality LPG conversions are available.

The number of LPG refuelling points have been growing rapidly and now stands at around 1,000, of which 91 are in Wales. Natural gas is used in heavy vehicles. There are around 30 refuelling points in the UK, mainly at vehicle operators' depots. None is in Wales. Information on LPG refuelling points is available on the PowerShift website at: www.transportaction.org.uk, and I have placed a copy of the present list in the Library. There is no published list of CNG refuelling depots.

### New Dwellings

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the number of new dwellings to be completed by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* registered social landlords using the funds provided for this purpose in each of the years of the current Comprehensive Spending Review. [25742]

**Ms Keeble:** My Department estimates that under the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme, Registered Social Landlords will produce a total of around 65,000 new or rehabilitated homes for low cost renting or home ownership over the period of the current spending review, 2001 to 2004. The precise number depends critically on the costs of land and construction. This does not include Starter Home Initiative funded new dwellings.

In addition, my Department estimates that local authorities, through local authority social housing grant, will fund around 20,000 affordable homes. This does not include the release of local authority dwellings through the cash incentive scheme. These are estimates based on current investment patterns. How local authorities decide to allocate resources in the future is a matter for local discretion.

Estimates of the number of homes to be provided in each of the three years are not available.

### Parish Polls

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to amend the rules on parish polls to require any voter adding his or her name to the request for a poll on a particular issue to declare any interest that they may have in the subject of the poll; and if he will make a statement. [25400]

**Dr. Whitehead:** As part of our initiatives, following the Rural White Paper (Cm 4909), to strengthen local democracy at parish level we will be reviewing the operation of parish polls including the proposal that any voter adding his or her name to the request for a poll on a particular issue should declare any interest that they may have in the subject of the poll. Any change to the current requirements will require primary legislation.

### Local Authority Housing

**Mr. Hopkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the local authorities in *(a)* England, by region, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales that own housing stock indicating in each case (i) how many properties they manage, (ii) how much debt they have in their housing revenue account and (iii) what plans they have to deal with their investment and repair backlogs. [25886]

**Ms Keeble:** The information requested on the numbers of dwellings owned by each local authority in England and the associated Housing Revenue Account debt, has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Details of the information provided on plans to tackle renovation and improvement backlog is in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plans that authorities were required to produce for the first time last summer and is available in the Library of the House (see Section E of the Statistical Appendix to the Business Plan).

The quality of these initial plans varies considerably and not all authorities have been able to provide backlog figures in line with the definitions set. Government Offices however, are working closely with authorities to improve the robustness of the assessment of investment needs and expenditure plans.

Responsibility for housing matters in Scotland and Wales rests with the Scottish and Welsh Offices.

### Asbestos

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what countries ban white asbestos. [25757]

**Dr. Whitehead:** This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Under the European Commission Directive 1999/77/EC white asbestos is due to be banned throughout the European Union by 1 January 2005. Many member states, including the UK, have introduced the ban in advance of that date.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the relative risks of *(a)* white and *(b)* blue asbestos. [25753]

**Dr. Whitehead:** In line with most scientific opinion, the Government have always taken the view that white asbestos presented a lower risk per unit of exposure than blue asbestos. However white asbestos still represents a risk and is classified as a Category 1 carcinogen by the European Union.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the cost of implementing the register of asbestos conditions from 2002 to *(a)* British businesses and *(b)* public buildings. [25755]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The total compliance costs for the proposed new duty to manage the risk from asbestos are estimated to be £350 million for public buildings and £2.9 billion for British businesses from 2000 over the next 50 years.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many prosecutions there have been in the UK in each of the last 10 years by the Health and Safety Executive, involving use of white asbestos. [25759]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Health and Safety Executive (HSE)'s prosecution statistics are based on the information laid by health and safety inspectors before the courts in England and Wales and on the charges preferred in Scottish courts. Each information laid or charge preferred relates to a breach of an individual legal requirement and a duty holder may be prosecuted for more than one of these breaches.

The table sets out proceedings taken over the last five years by HSE under the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987, the main regulations applying to asbestos activities. Access to older data is not readily available and would require restoration of archived databases. HSE's system for recording prosecutions does not differentiate between the different types of asbestos. In this table, figures for informations laid include charges preferred in Scotland.

| | *Informations laid* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 37 |
| 1997–98 | 45 |
| 1998–99 | 40 |
| 1999–2000 | 120 |
| 2000–01[1] | 82 |

[1] provisional

*Note:*

Data is from HSE's Field Operations Directorate (FOD), Hazardous Installations Directorate (HID) Land Divisions (excluding Mines, Pipelines and Explosives) and Nuclear Safety Division (NSD) (conventional safety only)

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what records his Department has of asbestos-related illness linked to encapsulated asbestos cement in the last 50 years. [25756]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The available records of asbestos-related disease are not sufficiently detailed to identify the separate effect of asbestos released from different kinds of asbestos products such as encapsulated asbestos cement.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has for increasing restrictions on white asbestos use. [25758]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Government have no plans to increase the current restrictions on the use of white asbestos and of products containing it, apart from the derogations contained in the Asbestos (Prohibitions) (Amendment) Regulations 1999 that will cease to have effect after 1 January 2005.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the scientific advice to the Health and Safety Executive on which it has based its risk assessment of white asbestos. [25754]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Health and Safety Executive has over the years taken account of a range of scientific evidence in reaching its view on the proper control of health risks from white asbestos exposure. Important recent elements of this evidence have been the 1985 Doll and Peto paper on the effects on health of exposure to asbestos, the Institute of Environmental Health's 1997 report on fibrous materials in the environment, and the 2000 Hodgson and Darnton paper on the quantitative risks of mesothelioma and lung cancer in relation to asbestos exposure. All have been published and copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what meetings his Department has had with representatives of building product companies or trade bodies to discuss the hazards of white asbestos. [25760]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) held a number of meetings with representatives of the Asbestos Information Centre, prior to formal consultation on the proposals to ban the marketing, supply and use of white asbestos in 1998. The HSE held further meetings with them following consultation. At none of the meetings were the hazards of white asbestos specifically discussed. HSE has also met a representative of the Asbestos Cement Product Producers Association in 2000 to discuss their concerns about the white asbestos ban.

### Aircraft (Air Quality)

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidelines are in place to monitor the air quality of commercial aircrafts arriving or departing within the United Kingdom; who regulates the effectiveness of high-efficiency particulate air filters; and if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of HEPA filters on the transmission of turberculosis. [25216]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There are at present no guidelines relating to the monitoring of air quality in aircraft. There is no statutory requirement for the use of filters in aircraft ventilation systems but where such filters are used, the CAA requires that they do not adversely affect the prime functions of the aircraft systems to which they are fitted and that airlines conduct maintenance in line with the aeroplane manufacturers' instructions. According to tests carried out by a manufacturer of High Efficiency Particulate Air filters, they have been found to remove microbiological organisms with an efficiency greater than 99.999 per cent.

The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology in its report on air travel and health concluded that the modern aircraft cabin environment generally poses no greater risk of transmission of infection between its occupants than crowded situations elsewhere—and may, indeed, be healthier than most of them.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Hunting

**Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if *(a)* private and *(b)* non-Governmental organisations have been given access to the Veterinary Risk Assessment report on hunting prior to its official publication; and if she will make a statement. [12023]

**Alun Michael:** No one from private or non-government organisations was given access to the Veterinary Risk Assessment prior to publication although some draft recommendations emanating from the Risk Assessment were discussed with both pro and anti-hunting groups.

**Mr. Anthony D. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what types of unusual incidents hunts are expected to report when returning their certificates of compliance to her Department. [25486]

**Alun Michael:** Hunts would be expected to report episodes such as the disturbance of deer or other animals unrelated to the hunt or anything else unexpected which would pose a risk to the disease control requirements.

### Rural Payments Agency

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on *(a)* farm cash flow and *(b)* farmers' livelihoods in the Macclesfield constituency of delays in the (i) despatch and (ii) processing of (A) livestock and (B) South West Peak ESA scheme (1) claim forms and (2) payments from the Rural Payments Agency in Worcester; and if she will make a statement. [15808]

**Mr. Morley:** For some ESA cases there has been a delay in despatching claim forms because of queries that need resolution. However the majority of claim forms were sent out in September. This is about one month later than normal and was due to the restructuring of ex MAFF regions. Payments are however expected to be made within the two month Citizen Charter target.

There has been no delay in despatching livestock claims but a number of factors, including the loss of experienced staff to foot and mouth disease (FMD), industrial action, the need to cross check claims against the FMD database to establish entitlement and the need to update computer software to reflect some changes have affected the speed of processing. Advance payments on SAPS and BSPS are on target, and advances on SPS are currently ahead of last year's performance. No advances on SCPS have yet been made but are expected to start shortly with the intention of them all being paid by the deadline.

Farmers' cash flows and livelihoods should not therefore be significantly affected.

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 17 December 2001, Ref 20948, what savings have been made since the establishment of the Rural Payments Agency. [24974]

**Mr. Morley:** The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) was established on 16 October 2001. By 2004 it will have implemented a major change programme that will deliver cost efficiencies in key aspects of CAP administration. During this period there will be two phases of office closures coupled with progressive delivery of changed business processes supported by modernised IT.

The first phase of office closures will be completed by the end of February 2002. However, the remaining site rationalisation and development of new IT system are not due for completion until 2004. As a result, the full scale of savings will only be realised at the end of the change programme.

### Sheep Premium

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on *(a)* farm cash flow and *(b)* farmers' livelihoods of delays in the despatch of sheep annual premium to farmers who have had a partial contiguous cull of sheep as a result of foot and mouth. [20023]

**Mr. Morley:** Payment of Sheep Annual Premium is payable only when entitlement has been established. All claims, where entitlement was established, were paid on time.

### Pesticides Tax

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the impact of a pesticides tax on the profitability of UK agriculture. [23065]

**Mr. Morley:** Proposals for a pesticides tax are not currently under discussion, pending evaluation of the success of a voluntary initiative by industry. In the 2001 budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer welcomed the package of voluntary measures for minimising the adverse environmental impacts of pesticides submitted by the Crop Protection Association, farming unions and other stakeholders and said that the Government wished to see it implemented nationwide as soon as possible. The 2001 pre-Budget report published on 27 November sets out the Government's latest position and the relevant paragraphs are as follows:

*Extract from 27 November 2001 pre-Budget report*

Pesticides

7.86 Pesticide use is associated with damage to biodiversity and water contamination. The Government is committed to minimising these impacts, consistent with adequate crop protection. The statutory product approval system and the Pesticides Forum make important contributions to achieving this objective. The Government also believes that a tax on pesticides could, in conjunction with other measures, be a useful tool in addressing the environmental impact of pesticides.

7.87 In Budget 2001 the Government welcomed the voluntary proposals from the agrochemical industry and the commitments made by various stakeholders to address these issues, and encouraged their early implementation. The voluntary package was implemented from 1 April 2001 and will run initially for five years, nationwide. It is overseen by a steering group comprising the signatories to the package and representatives of an equivalent number of environmental organisations, under an independent chairman. The Government will review progress on the package in the run up to Budget 2002, to assess whether it is delivering significant environmental benefits over and above those that would result from introducing a pesticides tax.

### Sheepmeat Regime

**Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations the Government have made in Europe since the last meeting of the European Union's Agriculture Council for reform of the sheepmeat regime. [23967]

**Mr. Morley:** The Commission's proposals for reform of the sheepmeat regime have been the subject of discussion at ministerial and official levels with a number of other member states and the European Commission. The proposals were agreed by the Council of Ministers (Agriculture) on 19 December.

### Foot and Mouth

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what calculations she has made of the change in the public moneys expended in the foot and mouth disease areas during the outbreak; and what that sum would have been had no outbreak occurred. [24385]

**Mr. Morley:** The Chancellor's pre-Budget report shows that the Government are spending an additional £2.7 billion to tackle foot and mouth disease (FMD) and its implications for the rural economy. This includes the cost in compensation paid to farmers affected by FMD and additional support to the rural economy.

It is not possible to estimate the total public moneys that would have been spent in FMD areas in the absence of the outbreak.

### Farmers' Markets

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department is taking to promote consumer awareness of farmers' markets in town and city centres. [25188]

**Mr. Morley:** The promotion of individual farmers' markets is primarily a matter for market organisers. However, the Department has provided funding to the National Association of Farmers' Markets to help re-launch farmers' markets following the foot and mouth crisis. The Countryside Agency, which we grant aid, is also providing support to the National Association.

### Biofuel Production

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to encourage biofuel production; what total oilseed production output was in each of the last 20 years for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [25195]

**Mr. Morley:** Figures for UK harvested production of oilseeds are as follows:

| | *Thousand tonnes* |
|---|---|
| 1984 | 924 |
| 1985 | 897 |
| 1986 | 966 |
| 1987 | 1,323 |
| 1988 | 1,033 |
| 1989 | 946 |
| 1990 | 1,207 |
| 1991 | 1,283 |
| 1992 | 1,213 |
| 1993 | 1,084 |
| 1994 | 1,243 |
| 1995 | 1,234 |
| 1996 | 1,415 |
| 1997 | 1,527 |
| 1998 | 1,566 |
| 1999 | 1,737 |
| 2000 | 1,157 |
| 2001 | [1]1,138 |

[1] Provisional

Following the Green Fuels Challenge my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that a new duty rate for biodiesel, set at 20p per litre below the rate for Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel, is to be introduced in Budget 2002. This Department also supports solid biomass crops through the Energy Crops Scheme, part of the England Rural Development programme. This Department has recently commissioned a six-month study, on behalf of the Government-Industry Forum on non-food uses of crops, to provide an independent, comprehensive and rigorous evaluation of the comparative energy, environmental and socio-economic costs and benefits of biodiesel production in the UK. The study will compare results with those for other relevant green fuels and relevant energy saving measures.

## Crop Protection Products

**Mr. Curry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she will take to monitor the enforcement of regulations relating to the application of agricultural crop protection products for non-approved amenity uses. [25033]

**Mr. Morley:** All pesticides are subject to strict regulatory control and must be approved by Ministers before they can be marketed or used in the UK.

Pesticides must be used in accordance with the approved conditions of use specified on the pesticide label, which include directions for the situations in which the pesticide may be used. Failure to comply with a condition of use is an offence and may be subject to enforcement action. The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for enforcement in respect of the professional use of pesticides in amenity situations, and will decide on any necessary action on the basis of evidence that arises.

**Mr. Curry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to regulate the use of marker chemicals when pre-mixed with crop protection chemicals for use in amenity situations; how many prosecutions there have been from such use in each of the past five years; and if she will make a statement. [25008]

**Mr. Morley:** All pesticides are subject to strict regulatory control and must be approved by Ministers before they can be marketed or used in the UK.

No pesticide may be mixed with a marker or other additive prior to sale or supply unless approval has been granted for the sale or supply of that mixed product. However following sale users may mix approved products with other chemicals, or arrange for mixing to take place on their behalf, provided they comply with all conditions governing use described on the pesticide label. An appropriate risk assessment must also be carried out prior to use. No prosecutions have been taken against users for the illegal use of mixed products.

Guidelines regarding the mixing of pesticides—"Guidelines on the Provision of Pesticide Mixing Services and Sale of Pesticide Twin Packs and Kits" were issued by the Pesticides Safety Directorate on 17 August 2000. These are being reviewed and it is intended that revised guidelines will be distributed to approval holders, distributors, retailers and user groups in 2002.

**Mr. Curry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to strengthen the role of the HSE in the enforcement of laws relating to illegal import of crop protection products for use in agriculture and horticulture. [25032]

**Mr. Morley:** All pesticides are subject to strict regulatory control and must be approved by Ministers before they can be marketed or used in the UK.

The Health and Safety Executive already have extensive powers to enforce against the illegal storage or use of pesticides, including those illegally imported into the UK. Local authorities have similar powers to take enforcement action against illegal advertisement, sale or supply. Where evidence establishes that illegal activity has occurred enforcement action is taken.

## Flooding

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what action is being taken to assist the Environment Agency to complete the detailed report on the flooding across the UK in October and November 2000; when these reports are expected to be completed; and if she will make a statement; [25746]

(2) when the Environment Agency is expected to complete an assessment of the flooding in Edmonton in October 2000; and if she will make a statement. [25745]

**Mr. Morley:** On 20 March 2001 I announced publication of the Environment Agency's Lessons Learned report on the 2000 floods. The agency subsequently produced a series of regional reports on the flooding including one for the Thames Region which covered the flooding in Edmonton.

Recommendation 1.4 in the Lessons Learned report was that

> "The Agency will use all available information, to catalogue the flooding that took place in Autumn 2000, the local causes of flooding and how solutions or responsibility for action can be successfully attributed".

The agency has been progressing this work in all the areas affected by the flooding.

As regards flooding at Edmonton, the agency commissioned consultants in July 2001 to investigate the flooding problems associated with Salmons Brook. Their study is now expected to be completed later this month (January 2002). Options to reduce the risks that are identified will be investigated in a detailed feasibility study which is expected to be completed by the end of 2003.

### Agri-environment Schemes

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent on agri-environment schemes in each year since 1997. [25621]

**Mr. Morley:** Total payments to agreement holders in the English agri-environment schemes in each financial year from 1996–97 are as follows:

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 44.5 |
| 1997–98 | 55.4 |
| 1998–99 | 64.2 |
| 1999–2000 | 85.8 |
| 2000–01 | 90.8 |

Data for payments made under agri-environment schemes in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can be provided by the relevant Departments.

### Flood Defence

**Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what allowance has been made in the revenue support grant for 2002–03 for flood defence for councils in the River Severn catchment area. [25316]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Provisional Standard Spending Assessments for flood defence in 2002–03 were announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, on 4 December 2001 and are available in the House Library.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Review Body on Senior Civil Service Pay

**Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Special report and recommendations of the Review Body on Senior Civil Service Pay. [27055]

**The Prime Minister:** As part of the long-term programme of reform for the Civil Service, the Senior Salaries Review Body was asked in April 2001 to provide an independent assessment of the appropriate pay rates as a basis for the new Senior Civil Service pay system coming into effect in April 2002. The aims of the new pay system are to enable the Civil Service to compete more effectively to recruit and retain top managers; and to reward sustained performance and the delivery of results.

The Government accept the Review Body's recommendations for the minima and maxima of the new ranges. The target rates recommended will also be incorporated in the new system for the best performers.

Copies of the SSRB Special Report, along with a summary of the new SCS pay system are in the Vote Office and the Library of the House. I am grateful to the Chairman and the members of the Review Body for their work.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Trade Credits

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the value of debt and interest paid to the UK Government on trade credits to heavily indebted poor countries guaranteed by the UK Government in the last five years. [25239]

**Nigel Griffiths:** I have been asked to reply.

During the period from 1 January 1997 to December 2001 £57 million of principal and £68 million of interest was paid by heavily indebted poor countries under bilateral debt agreements resulting from defaulted trade credits.

All but £10 million was received from only eight countries—Ghana, Kenya, Yemen, Tanzania, Cameroon, Zambia, Guyana and Bolivia. Under the HIPC Initiative and the Government's 100 per cent. forgiveness policy no further payments are expected from the last five of these countries. Kenya and Yemen are deemed to have sustainable debt levels and Ghana is currently applying for HIPC debt relief.

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the value of trade credits to heavily indebted poor countries guaranteed by the UK Government which were cancelled in each year since 1983. [25238]

**Nigel Griffiths:** I have been asked to reply.

No such debts in relation to trade credits were cancelled between 1983 and 1990 inclusive. Amounts cancelled in each year since were as follows:

| *Year* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1991 | 6.62 |
| 1992 | 17.80 |
| 1993 | 26.89 |
| 1994 | 8.76 |
| 1995 | 23.74 |
| 1996 | 180.69 |
| 1997 | 22.49 |
| 1998 | 33.04 |
| 1999 | 56.91 |
| 2000 | 48.13 |
| 2001 | 135.04 |
| Total | 560.11 |

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Pension Schemes

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Scotland receive a pension from contributions to final salary occupational pension schemes. [24932]

**Mr. McCartney:** The available information is in the table.

*Number of pensioners in Scotland receiving pension from occupational pensions*

| | *Number*[1] |
|---|---|
| Males | 434 |
| Females | 251 |
| Total | 685 |

[1] Figures to the nearest thousand

*Note:*
The FRS does not distinguish between pensions from final salary and money purchase schemes. It also does not distinguish between those receiving occupational pensions due to their own contributions and those who are receiving survivors benefits.

*Source:*
Family Resources Survey 2000–01 (FRS).

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what calculations he has made of the number of persons of retirement age who have *(a)* one and *(b)* more than one (i) personal, (ii) private and (iii) occupational pension schemes; and in the case of (b) how many such schemes they have. [15496]

**Mr. McCartney:** The information is shown in the tables. Information is drawn from the Family Resources Survey (FRS), and may be subject to a margin of error due to the size of the FRS sample and the fact that the Survey relies on self-reporting of pension income.

Separate figures are not given for 'private pensions', because this is a generic term for any non-state pension.

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| *(a) Individuals receiving income from one occupational or personal pension* | |
| Occupational pension | 3,900,000 |
| Personal pension | 400,000 |
| *(b) Individuals receiving income from more than one occupational or personal pension* | |
| Occupational pension | 600,000 |
| Personal pension | 50,000 |

| | *Individuals with two of each type* | *Individuals with three or more of each type* |
|---|---|---|
| Occupational pensions | 550,000 | 50,000 |
| Personal pensions | 50,000 | [1]— |

[1] Indicates less than 25,000

*Note:*
These figures are for individuals above State Retirement Age only. Figures for occupational pensions include individuals in receipt of a widow's pension from an occupational pension scheme. Due to sampling methods, the survey does not generate data for individuals in receipt of a widow's personal pension.
Some individuals will be in receipt of both personal and occupational pensions.
All figures rounded to nearest 50,000
Because of sampling sizes and the relatively small numbers of individuals, separate figures for those with four or more pensions have not been included.
Receipt of pension income is self-reported in FRS; figures may therefore differ slightly from those found in the Industry.

*Source:*
FRS 1999/2000

### Pensioners

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will calculate the date at which a single woman of 65 years retiring today relying solely on pensions savings of £100,000 buying an indexed linked single annuity at market rates can be expected to become eligible for income support if the minimum income guarantee for pensioners continues to be linked to earnings. [15495]

**Mr. McCartney:** The length of time that will pass before the individual in the question becomes entitled to minimum income guarantee (MIG) will depend on a number of assumptions. These assumptions are the annuity rate, the rate of price inflation and the rate of real earnings growth.

It should be noted that the introduction of pension credit will ensure that this individual receives a direct reward for her saving. Pension credit will provide additional weekly income on top of any income derived from the annuity.

It should also be noted that over 95 per cent. of women have some entitlement to state pension and that if this individual had entitlement to full basic state pension, entitlement to MIG would not arise for 48 years.

Based on the assumptions of an annuity rate of 6.0 per cent. (the most favourable available on 15 November 2001), price growth of 2.5 per cent. per annum and real earnings growth of 1.5 per cent. per annum, it is estimated that a single woman of 65 years retiring solely on pension savings of £100,000 would become eligible for MIG after 16 years.

### Benefits Agency Staff

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what were the staffing levels for each of the last five years in the Benefits Agency offices at *(a)* Elthorne road, London N19, and *(b)* Seven Sisters road, London N7, the number of callers per day for the equivalent period and the average waiting time. [23637]

**Malcolm Wicks:** This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Jeremy Corbyn, dated 9 January 2002:*

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question asking, if he will state the staffing levels for each of the last five years in the Benefits Agency offices at (a) Elthorne Road London N19 and (b) Seven Sisters Road London N7, the number of callers per day for the equivalent period and the average waiting time.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information that is available is in the attached table.

| | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Seven Sisters road, Finsbury Park office* | | | | | |
| Average staff days per month (number) | 443 | 377 | 348 | 379 | 369 |
| Average number of callers per month (number) | 5,912 | 5,631 | 5,217 | 5,695 | 5,039 |
| Initial waiting time 10 minutes or less based on the average number of callers (shown as a percentage) | 57 | 57 | 43 | 34 | 41 |
| Initial waiting time 30 minutes or less based on the average number of callers (shown as a percentage) | 82 | 94 | 91 | 87 | 85 |
| *Elthorne road, Highgate office* | | | | | |
| Average staff days per month (number) | 315 | 329 | 304 | 402 | 427 |
| Average number of callers per month (number) | 5,340 | 4,936 | 4,602 | 5,050 | 4,553 |
| Initial waiting time 10 minutes or less based on the average number of callers (shown as a percentage) | 72 | 43 | 68 | 70 | 63 |
| Initial waiting time 30 minutes or less based on the average number of callers (shown as a percentage) | 98 | 85 | 100 | 100 | 97 |

## HEALTH

### NHS Staff

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of national health service personnel was represented by *(a)* nurses, *(b)* doctors, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* other professions allied to medicine and *(e)* other employees, in the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000 and (iv) 2000–01. [23662]

**Mr. Hutton:** Data showing the number and proportion of nurses, doctors, midwives, qualified allied health professions and other staff as at 30 September, 1997 to 2000, are shown in the table.

*All NHS staff, including all doctors and nurses, as at 30 September each year*

*Headcount*

| | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total NHS Staff[1] | 1,058,690 | 1,071,560 | 1,098,350 | 1,118,960 |
| Percentage | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| *of which:* | | | | |
| Total NHS doctors | 89,620 | 91,840 | 93,980 | 96,320 |
| Percentage | 8.5 | 8.6 | 8.6 | 8.6 |
| GMPs (excluding GP Retainers)[2, 3] | 29,390 | 29,700 | 29,990 | 30,250 |
| Percentage | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.7 | 2.7 |
| All HCHS medical and dental staff[4] | 60,230 | 62,140 | 63,990 | 66,070 |
| Percentage | 5.7 | 5.8 | 5.8 | 5.9 |
| *of which:* | | | | |
| Total NHS Nurses[5] | 550,900 | 556,480 | 565,620 | 574,850 |
| Percentage | 52.0 | 51.9 | 51.5 | 51.4 |
| *of which:* | | | | |
| Qualified Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting Staff (including Practice Nurses) | 318,860 | 323,460 | 329,640 | 335,950 |
| Percentage | 30.1 | 30.2 | 30.0 | 30.0 |
| *of which* | | | | |
| Midwives | 22,380 | 22,840 | 22,800 | 22,570 |
| Percentage | 2.1 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 2.0 |
| Unqualified Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting staff[6] | 231,380 | 232,420 | 234,700 | 238,960 |
| Percentage | 21.9 | 21.7 | 21.4 | 21.3 |
| Qualified Allied Health Professionals | 45,020 | 46,450 | 47,920 | 49,360 |
| Percentage | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.4 |
| Others[7] | 373,140 | 376,790 | 390,820 | 398,430 |
| Percentage | 35.2 | 35.2 | 35.6 | 35.6 |

[1] This figure includes GP Retainers.
[2] GP Retainers were collected for the first time in the 1999 census, for comparability these have been excluded from GMPs.
[3] The 1999 figure excludes 972 GP Retainers and the 2000 figure excludes 1,117 GP Retainers.
[4] Excludes Medical Hospital Practitioners and medical Clinical Assistants, most of whom are also GPs working part-time in hospitals.
[5] Total includes unclassified staff.
[6] Unqualified nursing staff includes Health Care Assistants and Support staff.
[7] Others includes administration and estates staff, ambulance staff, Health Care Assistants, Support staff, nursing, midwifery and health visiting learners, other scientific, therapeutic and technical staff, others, other practice staff and GP Retainers from 1999.

*Notes:*
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
Due to rounding totals may not equal sum of component parts.
Figures exclude agency staff.

*Sources:*
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics
Department of Health Non-medical workforce census

## Voluntary Work

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the financial value to the NHS of the voluntary work performed by *(a)* the Women's Royal Voluntary Service and *(b)* the National League of Hospital Friends in the last three years for which figures are available. [24575]

**Mr. Hutton:** Information is not collected by the Department in the form requested.

It was recently reported in "Voluntary Sector" magazine that the Women's Royal Voluntary Service estimates that the organisation's 100,000 plus volunteers gave around 12 million hours to helping others which they value at about £70 million during the 12 month period from 2000 to 2001. During that time volunteers delivered 9 million hot and frozen meals, opened five new and refurbished hospital trading outlets and assisted at 70 emergencies and disasters.

The National Association of Hospital and Community Friends have advised that in their latest survey, conducted in 1999, Leagues of Hospital and Community Friends had 36,000 members who actively volunteered and contributed 8 million hours a year to the national health service. The survey also found that the leagues gift back £36 million per year to NHS hospitals. In addition to running traditional volunteer services such as shops, visiting and transport the leagues have increased their work in the community, both therapeutic and social support, and this now accounts for 40 per cent. of volunteers' activities.

The very significant contribution made to the health service and social services by volunteers from the Women's Royal Voluntary Service and the National Association of Hospital and Community Friends complement the efforts of staff and enhance the patient and service user experience.

## Cross-border Treatment

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many English NHS patients were treated in Scotland in each of the last five years. [24572]

**Mr. Hutton:** Information on English residents treated in Scotland is collected by the information and statistics division of National Health Service Scotland. Information on the number of English residents receiving treatment in NHS hospitals in Scotland as either outpatients or as inpatients and day cases is shown in the table.

Information on English residents treated in a primary care setting in Scotland is limited. Over the past five years, on average, there have been around 2,200 patients who reside in England on the lists of Scottish general practitioners. These patients may or may not have attended their GP for a consultation in that time. The average number of face to face consultations per head of population per annum in Scotland is 3.2.

*English residents[1] treated in NHS hospitals in Scotland*

| *Year ending 31 March* | *First outpatient appointments[2,4]* | *Inpatients and day cases[3,4]* |
|---|---|---|
| 1998 | 2,049 | 7,048 |
| 1999 | 2,428 | 7,432 |
| 2000 | 2,185 | 6,991 |
| 2001 | 2,141 | 6,578 |
| 2002 (to date)[5] | 1,319 | 3,750 |

[1] Includes a small number of residents in Wales and Northern Ireland.

[2] First outpatient appointments in consultant-led clinics (SMR00). Excludes A&E and genito-urinary medicine. Information on return outpatient appointments is not collected centrally by area of residence.

[3] Discharges from acute specialties (SMR01), maternity specialties (SMR02), mental health specialties (SMR04), neonatal care for sick babies (SMR11) and long stay facilities in the specialty of geriatric medicine (SMR50). The majority (92 per cent.) of discharges are from acute specialties.

[4] All information shown is based on "episodes" of care rather than individual patients. A patient with more than one episode of care in any year or across years will be counted every time they receive an episode of care.

[5] Records held centrally at 20 December 2001. It is estimated that available figures for year ending March 2002 represent approximately 60 per cent. of total activity for the year.

*Source:*
ISD Scotland, Scottish Morbidity Records (SMRs) 00, 01, 02, 04, 11 and 50.

*Reference:*
Acute Care Information Group, 20011414.

## Congestion Charges

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has made about the exemption of health visitors from congestion charges in London. [24584]

**Mr. Hutton:** While supportive of the need to reduce congestion in central London and the resultant benefits to Londoners' health, a number of concerns have been raised with the mayor and Transport for London regarding the impact the congestion charging scheme will have on the ability of the NHS to provide high quality patient care.

The London Regional Office of the Department has been working closely with Transport for London on developing a reimbursement scheme for a number of categories of staff, including health visitors and staff providing community based services, so that they are not disadvantaged in any way. The scheme is currently out for consultation until the 18 January 2002.

## Nurses

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the number of whole time equivalent nurses who will be performing non-clinical duties with *(a)* the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, *(b)* the Commission for Health Improvement and *(c)* the NHS Modernisation Agency. [24598]

**Mr. Hutton:** The National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) and the National Health Service Modernisation Agency are responsible for improvements in quality across the NHS. Nurses are employed within these agencies to provide the frontline perspective and to influence development.

Numbers are subject to change but there are currently two nurses employed in the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, 149 nurses employed in CHI and 51 in the Modernisation Agency.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many specialist TB nurses were employed *(a)* in the NHS and *(b)* in each health authority in London by the NHS in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2001. [24448]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is not collected centrally.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure school nurses are paid at F grade. [24592]

**Mr. Hutton:** Nurses employed in the national health service under national terms and conditions are graded according to the clinical grading definitions agreed between the management and staff sides of the Nursing and Midwifery Negotiating Council in 1988.

Decisions concerning grading of individual posts including those of school nurses are the responsibility of local managers who, with advice from professional colleagues are in the best position to consider the work to be done and the skills needed to do it. The clinical grading definitions reflect the different levels of responsibility and clinical expertise required in different posts. It is for local employers using the agreed definitions and in the light of particular job content to grade posts according to responsibilities.

In the advance letter promulgating the pay award for 2001–02 employers were reminded of their obligations to ensure all jobs are graded in accordance with the existing grading guidance.

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if school nurses are defined by his Department as autonomous practitioners. [24593]

**Mr. Hutton:** Professional standards are a matter for the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

### General Practitioners

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial assistance he has planned to encourage flexible training in general practice. [24596]

**Mr. Hutton:** In line with Government guidance, "The General Practitioner Registrar Scheme: Vocational Training for General Medical Practice: the United Kingdom Guide", a copy of which is in the Library. Directors of Postgraduate GP Education will facilitate flexible (i.e. part-time) training for general practice wherever possible. In order to be accepted for general practice certification purposes, flexible training must be undertaken, week by week, at 60 per cent. or more of the weekly full-time training commitment and include a period (minimum one week) of full-time training in both the general practice and hospital components.

### Pathology Modernisation Programme

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis the authorities invited to bid for the phase III pathology modernisation programme were selected. [24447]

**Mr. Hutton:** Through our pathology modernisation programme, the Department is considering the appropriate model for pathology services in the light of "Shifting the Balance of Power" and the proposed changes to national health service structures under the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill. Therefore, the aim of pathology modernisation funding in 2001–02 is to support up to four larger reconfiguration projects exploring the development of managed clinical networks in NHS pathology services, covering a population of 1.5 million. This year it was essential to support areas that were already advanced in planning for modernised pathology services. It was clear from existing work on the programme that 12 areas met this criterion, and they were invited to bid through a limited tender exercise.

### Access Targets

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what penalties will be imposed on primary care trusts who fail to implement 48-hour access targets by March 2003. [24591]

**Mr. Hutton:** Primary care trusts will be subject to performance ratings during 2002. Access and primary care will form a key target within this rating system. Rewards, through earned autonomy, targeted support or intervention will be based on performance ratings.

### NHS Professionals

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what domestic publications the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency will use to advertise those contracts relating to NHS professionals. [24423]

**Mr. Hutton:** The National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency will advertise the contracts for NHS professionals in domestic publications relevant to the particular staff sector. For instance contracts for nursing staff will be advertised in the *Nursing Times* and contracts for doctors in the *British Medical Journal*.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS trusts will be required to use NHS professionals to meet their temporary staffing needs. [24422]

**Mr. Hutton:** There is an expectation that national health service professionals will be used as the provider of choice within the NHS, supported by tight contracts with our providers in the private sector.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken to inform private nursing agencies about the tendering processes attached to NHS professionals. [24424]

**Mr. Hutton:** The tenders for the contracts for national health service professionals being carried out by the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency will be advertised in relevant domestic journals and in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*.

The NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency is in consultation with the following trade associations that represent private nursing agencies: the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, the Federation of Independent Nursing Agencies, and the Nursing Agency Association.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding NHS professionals will receive in financial years *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [24421]

**Mr. Hutton:** National health service professionals received £4 million to support start up, £3 million in the financial year in 2001–02, and £3 million has been identified in 2002–03 to support NHS trusts through the implementation process. The service will be self-sustaining in the long-term and recoup costs directly from the NHS organisations using NHS professionals on a non-profit making basis.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency will use the *Official Journal of the European Community* to advertise the regional contracts it is negotiating on behalf of NHS professionals. [24420]

**Mr. Hutton:** Yes.

**Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the tendering process inviting private nursing agencies to agree their terms and conditions of supply to NHS professionals will be launched in the *(a)* Trent, *(b)* south east, *(c)* south west, *(d)* eastern, *(e)* north west and *(f)* northern and Yorkshire regions; and what nursing services will be covered. [24426]

**Mr. Hutton:** The timetable for tendering for agency staff has not yet been finalised. It is expected that the projects for nursing staff in the south west, the south east, and the north west of England will be launched in early January and the end of February this year. Projects for the remaining regions will begin at a later date that is yet to be decided.

The contracts will cover all grades of nurses, midwives and operating department practitioners.

## Orthopaedic Surgeons

**Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average mean waiting times were *(a)* to see an orthopaedic surgeon and *(b)* between seeing an orthopaedic surgeon and having an operation where that was necessary in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [24740]

**Mr. Hutton:** The mean average waiting times for orthopaedic patients waiting for in-patient and out-patient treatment are given in the table. Data collected on waiting times by specialty are collected quarterly. The data given are for the latest available quarter, September 2001.

*Mean average waiting time for first out-patient appointment/in-patient treatment, trauma and orthopaedics speciality, England*

| *Health authority based* | *Average (mean) waiting time* |
|---|---|
| *Quarter: September 2001* | |
| Out-patient appointment[1] (weeks) | 14.35 |
| In-patient treatment[2] (months) | 5.15 |

*Sources:*
[1] Department of Health form QM08R
[2] Department of Health form QF01

## Racist Attacks

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many racist attacks have taken place in English *(a)* NHS hospitals and *(b)* other medical facilities, broken down by health authority in each of the last three years. [25231]

**Mr. Hutton:** Information about racist attacks on staff working in the national health service is not collected centrally, but may be held at a local level by national health service employers.

The Department conducted a survey of national health service trusts in England in 1998–99. The survey found that, on average, seven violent incidents were recorded each month per 1,000 staff. This is equivalent to approximately 65,000 violent incidents against NHS trust staff each year. Details of the survey can be found in Health Service Circular 1999/229: "Managing Violence, Accidents and Sickness Absence in the NHS", a copy of which is in the Library.

Figures for recorded violent incidents in 2000–01 are currently being analysed by the Department.

## Whittington Hospital

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation he has made of the costs of the proposed PFI for the Whittington hospital compared to direct Government funding; and if he will publish the information on which this analysis is made. [25235]

**Mr. Hutton:** The evaluation of the proposed private finance initiative funding of the redevelopment of the Whittington hospital national health service trust compared to direct Government funding is currently being prepared by the trust and its advisers as part of the preparation of the full business case for the scheme and is not yet complete.

All information relevant to this analysis, and the final decision to fund the project under PFI or direct Government funding, will be included within the trust's full business case. This will be made publicly available within one month of the final approval of the case, which is currently planned to be in April 2002. Only information which may breach personal privacy or is judged to be genuinely commercially sensitive will be omitted.

Copies of the case will be provided at the trust's premises, with the chair of the Trades Unions representing staff at the trust, the local Community Health Council, the local authority, the local main public library and the Library. The trust will also place an advertisement in the local paper at the time of publication explaining that the documents are available and where they have been placed.

This is in line with the code of practice on openness in the NHS introduced by this Government.

## Head Injury Specialists

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many head injury specialists have been recruited to the NHS in each year since 1997. [24352]

**Mr. Hutton** *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Neurosurgeons and neurologists deal with head injuries as part of their wider responsibilities. The table shows the number of hospital medical neuro-surgery and neurology staff, including consultants, employed by the national health service within the specified years.

*Hospital medical neurosurgery and neurology staff, England as at 30 September*

| | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All neurosurgery staff | 360 | 370 | 370 | 410 |
| *of which:* | | | | |
| Consultants | 130 | 130 | 140 | 140 |
| All neurology staff | 640 | 640 | 660 | 690 |
| *of which:* | | | | |
| Consultants | 280 | 300 | 300 | 330 |

*Source:*
Department of Health medical and dental Workforce Census

### Doctors (Disciplinary Action)

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors have been *(a)* disciplined and *(b)* sacked for (i) drug-taking offences and (ii) stealing medical drugs in each year since 1997. [24305]

**Mr. Hutton** *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The Department does not routinely collect information regarding the disciplinary proceedings carried out in national health service organisations. Disciplinary action is a matter for local employers. NHS employers have a responsibility to investigate alleged breaches of acceptable standards by staff, and to consider whether any disciplinary action is required as a result of such allegations.

### NHS Staff Files

**Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what circumstances an NHS trust can withhold the employment history of staff seeking employment in another part of the NHS. [25490]

**Mr. Hutton:** All national health service employers are expected to carry out thorough pre-employment checks on all staff they employ. The checks include taking up references which must be accurate and truthful.

## DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

### Radio Advertising

**Ms Abbott:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much the COI spent on radio advertising in the last year; what percentage of this was spent on black minority ethnic media advertising; and what the five main campaigns that the COI financed that involved radio advertising were. [26756]

**Mr. Leslie:** The Central Office of Information undertook no radio advertising on its own behalf in the last year.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many complaints have been reported in his Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; and how many of them related to special advisers. [25330]

**Mr. Leslie:** The procedures for making complaints under the civil service code are set in the Department's staff handbook. Civil servants are encouraged, in the first instance, to raise complaints made under paragraph 11 of the civil service code with their line manager. If for any reason this is not felt to be possible, perhaps because the line manager is part of the complaint, individuals may take their complaint to a nominated official (or officials). It is not possible to provide a comprehensive figure for the number of complaints made within this Department under paragraph 11 of the code as there is no requirement for managers to report to the centre details of complaints which are resolved within the management line.

### Civil Service

**Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what delegations and authorisations have been made in 2001 under the Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992; to whom they were made; and what were the main conditions attached to them. [26854]

**Mr. Leslie:** Since the last report to Parliament, 6 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 489W, new delegations/authorisations have been made to the Food Standards Agency and the Postal Services Commission from 1 April and 1 May 2001 respectively. These were subsequently subsumed within a later delegation/ authorisation which was necessary to reflect the machinery of government changes following the general election. Ministers, certain bodies and office holders in charge of Departments' were given delegated authority from 1 September 2001 under the Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992 by that delegation/ authorisation to:

(a) prescribe the qualifications (so far as they relate to age, knowledge, ability, professional attainment, aptitude, potential, health and coping with the demands of the job) for the appointment of home civil servants (with the exception of the Fast Stream Development Programme) in their respective Departments or bodies; and

(b) determine in respect of home civil servants in their respective Departments or bodies the number and grading of posts outside the senior civil service, and the terms and conditions of employment in so far as they relate to the following:

(i) classification of staff, with the exception of the senior civil service;

(ii) remuneration, with the exception of the senior civil service;

(iii) allowances;

(iv) expenses;

(v) holidays, hours of work and attendance;

(vi) part-time and other working arrangements;

(vii) performance and promotion

(viii) retirement age and redundancy;

(ix) re-deployment of staff within the home civil service.

In some cases, where the Minister for the civil service is statutorily required to give consent to terms and conditions of service for staff appointed by statutory bodies or office holders, it was effected by waiving that requirement, subject to the condition attached to delegation/authorisation.

The delegation/authorisation was subject to the condition that recipients comply with the provisions of the Civil Service Management Code as amended from time to time. Copies of the Civil Service Management Code are available in the Library of the House. All previous delegations and authorisations made under the Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992 (other than those relating to the Arbitration, Conciliation Advisory Service, the Health and Safety Executive, the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Administration) were revoked with effect from 1 September 2001.

[1] The statutory bodies and office holders are:

Commissioners of Inland Revenue

Chief Charity Commissioner

Commissioners of Customs and Excise

Crown Estate Commissioners

Director General of Fair Trading

Director of National Savings

Director of Passenger Rail Franchising

Director General of Telecommunications

Director General of Water Services

Director of Public Prosecutions

Director of the Serious Fraud Office

Food Standards Agency

Gas and Electricity Marketing Authority

Government Actuary

Head of the Registry of Friendly Societies, being the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies and the First Commissioner of the Building Societies Commission

International Rail Regulator

Postal Services Commission

Public Works Loan Commissioners

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioners

Rail Regulator.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Departmental Staff

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many employees of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* agencies sponsored by his Department work in (i) London, (ii) areas benefiting from EU Objective 1 status, (iii) areas with Objective 2 status and (iv) other areas. [16108]

**Mr. Keith Bradley** *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* I apologise for the delay in answering this question. Information on permanent serving staff working in London, areas benefiting from European Union (EU) Objectives 1 and 2 status and other areas is provided in the table.

| *Area* | *London* | *EU Objective 1 areas* | *EU Objective 2 areas* | *Other areas* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Home Office | 8,532 | 1,172 | 3,350 | 109 | 13,163 |
| Agencies: | | | | | |
| FSS[1] | 753 | | 1,624 | | 2,377 |
| UKPA[2] | 540 | 597 | 1,398 | 121 | 2,656 |
| Prison Service | 5,947 | 770 | 34,569 | 796 | 42,082 |
| Total | 15,772 | 2,539 | 40,941 | 1,026 | 60,278 |

[1] Forensic Science Service
[2] United Kingdom Passport Agency

### Regulation

**Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many regulations his Department has proposed to Parliament since June; what regulatory impact assessments have been made for those regulations his Department has implemented in 2001; and what plans his Department has to reduce the number of regulations affecting small businesses. [21971]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** We have proposed to Parliament since June some 31 statutory instruments and three Bills. Regulatory Impact Assessments have been made for the Proceeds of Crime Bill and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill and these have been lodged in the Library.

In our forthcoming regulatory reform action plan we have no specific plans for reducing the number of regulations affecting small business. Where Home Office legislation or regulations affect business, we aim to proceed through dialogue and consultation in order to ensure that any effects on business are proportionate.

### Terrorism

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the projects planned under the Ghent Statement on Terrorism, Point 5, *(a)* to store evaluations of (i) risks, (ii) alert and (iii) intervention, *(b)* for the prevention of chemical and biological attack and *(c)* on the appointment of a European Co-ordinator for Civil Protection Measures. [22887]

**Mr. Blunkett:** I wrote to hon. Members on 9 November 2001 setting out the comprehensive review of arrangements for protecting the public that I am leading. I explained that a ministerially led sub-group was reviewing contingency and other arrangements to protect the United Kingdom against the effects of a terrorist attack using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) means but that it is not sensible for me to elaborate on all of the arrangements we are putting in place.

More generally, a short-term action plan was agreed by the Directors General of Civil protection and this called for, among other things:

The identification of rapid response teams and setting up a group of experts available 24 hours a day, to offer advice;

Enhancement of the existing network of 24-hour contact points to handle any request for or offer of assistance; and

Gathering information on serum, vaccines, antibiotics and availability of hospital beds for those seriously affected.

Additionally, a workshop was set up under the Belgian Presidency for 17 and 18 December 2001. That brought together experts in this field who will draw up proposals for action plans for the medium and longer term.

The Civil Protection Co-ordinator has yet to be appointed. Members states await details of the duties and responsibilities proposed for this post and whether these are to be purely administrative or whether an operational role is envisaged. The question of where the Co-ordinator should be located and what the reporting arrangements should be have also yet to be finalised.

### Media Briefings (Race Riots)

**Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department *(a)* briefed and

*(b)* made copies of the reports available to the media on inner city riots and urban race relations before they were published on 11 December. [23216]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The information is as follows:

*(a)* I gave a broad interview to *The Independent on Sunday* newspaper on Friday 7 December 2001 on the subject of citizenship. Nothing in the article had not already been said or written by me, including in the publication of my book 'Politics and Progress' on 26 September 2001. The resulting article provoked considerable interest from the media particularly those looking to associate issues arising from this interview with the publication of reports into the summer disturbances, due a few days later. To ensure people clearly understood my position on this and in response to media inquiries, the press office gave a general explanation of how the subject of citizenship was reflected in reports into the disturbances.

*(b)* No copies of the reports were made available to the media before they were published. The first time media had access to the reports produced by the Home Office was when they attended a press briefing on the morning of publication. I did not make my speech in Birmingham until 11.30 am to ensure that this did not pre-empt publication of the reports.

## Prison Service

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what results were achieved by the Prison Service on each of its key performance indicators in each prison between April and October. [23903]

**Beverley Hughes:** Provisional key performance indicator (KPI) results for the period April-October 2001 are shown in the table. The overcrowding KPI is formulated in terms of overall Prison Service results and is not applicable to individual prisons.

Figures for cost per place and cost per prisoner reflect establishment costs only and do not include headquarters' overheads. Data are expressed in resource terms. These figures are not comparable with the overall Prison Service cost per place and cost per prisoner KPIs (which include headquarters' overheads).

Private prisons are not required to submit sickness or minority ethnic staffing data. The proportion of minority ethnic staff data relates to September 2001.

| *Prison name* | *Escapes* | *Assault rate (Percentage)* | *Random mandatory drug testing rate (Percentage)* | *Purposeful activity*[1] | *Average days lost to staff sickness* | *Cost per place* | *Cost per prisoner* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acklington | 0 | 1.8 | 16.1 | 23.6 | 11.2 | 15,493 | 16,207 |
| Albany | 0 | 2.3 | 0.0 | 25.3 | 10.9 | 20,909 | 21,112 |
| Altcourse | 0 | 14.9 | 10.1 | 33.7 | — | 57,272 | 44,272 |
| Ashfield | 0 | 70.8 | 16.5 | 29.0 | — | 35,712 | 38,968 |
| Ashwell | 0 | 1.8 | 8.3 | 32.1 | 12.7 | 15,357 | 19,716 |
| Askham Grange | 0 | 2.8 | 3.5 | 41.8 | 8.2 | 20,202 | 21,629 |
| Aylesbury | 0 | 17.8 | 5.8 | 17.2 | 21.1 | 25,594 | 30,856 |
| Bedford | 0 | 10.7 | 16.8 | 21.3 | 20.1 | 22,238 | 19,656 |
| Belmarsh | 0 | 14.6 | 13.6 | 11.1 | 23.3 | 35,860 | 34,286 |
| Birmingham | 0 | 11.1 | 17.0 | 18.7 | 18.2 | 22,138 | 19,195 |
| Blakenhurst | 0 | 11.7 | 28.2 | 19.8 | 5.6 | 22,552 | 17,477 |
| Blantyre House | 0 | 0.0 | 3.8 | 50.3 | 9.4 | 20,777 | 21,520 |
| Blundeston | 0 | 3.3 | 10.1 | 25.6 | 7.9 | 22,947 | 23,665 |
| Brinsford | 0 | 50.9 | 10.7 | 27.6 | 9.2 | 15,897 | 16,932 |
| Bristol | 0 | 11.8 | 12.6 | 20.7 | 16.6 | 34,068 | 30,171 |
| Brixton | 1 | 13.2 | 8.6 | 16.6 | 27.4 | 29,492 | 24,850 |
| Brockhill | 0 | 28.2 | 6.5 | 16.5 | 22.4 | 30,515 | 33,295 |
| Buckley Hall | 0 | 3.2 | 20.5 | 31.9 | 14.9 | 17,795 | 16,446 |
| Bullingdon | 0 | 7.2 | 15.0 | 13.7 | 11.4 | 19,125 | 16,761 |
| Bullwood Hall | 0 | 37.9 | 8.8 | 26.8 | 16.1 | 22,667 | 24,348 |
| Camp Hill | 0 | 4.5 | 13.9 | 22.5 | 12.1 | 20,846 | 19,006 |
| Canterbury | 0 | 4.3 | 12.6 | 17.9 | 16.4 | 30,876 | 21,923 |
| Cardiff | 0 | 7.3 | 25.6 | 21.2 | 13.2 | 23,511 | 19,588 |
| Castington | 0 | 69.3 | 7.2 | 24.8 | 16.4 | 27,963 | 37,611 |
| Channings Wood | 0 | 1.8 | 6.5 | 33.8 | 13.2 | 18,581 | 18,857 |
| Chelmsford | 0 | 14.0 | 16.1 | 20.0 | 13.0 | 25,057 | 24,813 |
| Coldingley | 0 | 1.9 | 14.3 | 39.0 | 8.7 | 21,253 | 21,740 |
| Cookham Wood | 0 | 24.3 | 3.0 | 22.1 | 16.5 | 28,475 | 23,021 |
| Dartmoor | 0 | 6.0 | 2.1 | 21.4 | 12.5 | 20,831 | 24,050 |
| Deerbolt | 0 | 11.2 | 6.1 | 21.8 | 9.3 | 20,098 | 24,948 |
| Doncaster | 1 | 9.9 | 11.2 | 20.1 | — | 28,169 | 20,268 |
| Dorchester | 0 | 11.1 | 19.1 | 16.4 | 10.4 | 31,219 | 23,117 |
| Dovegate | 0 | 8.2 | 8.1 | 31.6 | — | [2]— | [2]— |
| Dover | 0 | 18.5 | 17.0 | 27.7 | 16.5 | 21,211 | 30,115 |
| Downview | 0 | 0.0 | 4.9 | 26.7 | 19.1 | 20,337 | 26,296 |
| Drake Hall | 0 | 1.5 | 12.8 | 36.4 | 10.7 | 16,147 | 22,333 |
| Durham | 0 | 11.8 | 13.6 | 20.7 | 12.0 | 33,937 | 31,449 |
| East Sutton Park | 0 | 0.0 | 3.0 | 43.3 | 14.9 | 21,396 | 21,560 |
| Eastwood Park | 0 | 20.8 | 8.4 | 20.1 | 25.7 | 21,888 | 20,601 |
| Elmley | 0 | 6.2 | 11.8 | 19.4 | 11.1 | 18,910 | 15,766 |
| Erlestoke | 0 | 0.0 | 17.7 | 27.7 | 14.7 | 18,777 | 19,224 |

| Prison name | Escapes | Assault rate (Percentage) | Random mandatory drug testing rate (Percentage) | Purposeful activity[1] | Average days lost to staff sickness | Cost per place | Cost per prisoner |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Everthorpe | 0 | 3.0 | 15.7 | 26.9 | 11.1 | 17,756 | 16,829 |
| Exeter | 0 | 10.0 | 19.1 | 23.4 | 14.4 | 30,530 | 20,442 |
| Featherstone | 0 | 2.9 | 11.9 | 24.2 | 15.5 | 20,434 | 20,847 |
| Feltham | 1 | 42.0 | 13.3 | 27.0 | 15.7 | 20,818 | 27,236 |
| Ford | 0 | 0.0 | 7.5 | 40.4 | 14.7 | 12,019 | 15,496 |
| Forest Bank | 0 | 16.2 | 20.0 | 21.0 | — | 26,981 | 27,622 |
| Foston Hall | 0 | 11.4 | 2.4 | 26.7 | 8.6 | 25,302 | 27,628 |
| Frankland | 0 | 3.5 | 9.3 | 21.5 | 10.8 | 36,144 | 37,102 |
| Full Sutton | 0 | 2.6 | 6.6 | 17.9 | 11.2 | 37,340 | 38,339 |
| Garth | 0 | 4.0 | 15.2 | 24.5 | 14.9 | 20,066 | 21,175 |
| Gartree | 0 | 2.4 | 4.8 | 30.4 | 10.2 | 23,377 | 30,157 |
| Glen Parva | 0 | 19.4 | 10.8 | 18.0 | 9.0 | 24,010 | 20,717 |
| Gloucester | 0 | 7.1 | 12.9 | 22.6 | 17.1 | 30,060 | 26,656 |
| Grendon | 3 | 0.0 | 5.9 | 36.1 | 17.5 | 18,898 | 21,519 |
| Guys Marsh | 3 | 5.8 | 14.7 | 22.7 | 14.0 | 15,685 | 15,100 |
| Haslar | 0 | 1.1 | 0.0 | 16.6 | 15.3 | 16,900 | 18,061 |
| Hatfield | 0 | 3.0 | 14.9 | 37.7 | 7.5 | 22,712 | 23,947 |
| Haverigg | 0 | 3.2 | 18.9 | 32.2 | 10.4 | 16,453 | 17,047 |
| Hewell Grange | 0 | 0.0 | 12.4 | 43.0 | 7.9 | 14,702 | 17,469 |
| High Down | 0 | 9.6 | 11.2 | 16.3 | 15.1 | 25,532 | 23,138 |
| Highpoint | 0 | 10.1 | 13.7 | 18.8 | 10.5 | 18,991 | 19,920 |
| Hindley | 0 | 14.7 | 11.8 | 19.2 | 19.9 | 23,058 | 26,570 |
| Hollesley Bay | 0 | 36.6 | 8.7 | 39.2 | 12.5 | 16,819 | 24,098 |
| Holloway | 0 | 19.9 | 11.8 | 20.7 | 24.1 | 38,406 | 40,574 |
| Holme House | 0 | 3.3 | 10.8 | 16.1 | 9.5 | 17,700 | 17,610 |
| Hull | 0 | 13.6 | 6.6 | 21.8 | 7.1 | 21,759 | 24,187 |
| Huntercombe | 0 | 63.2 | 15.5 | 25.8 | 18.1 | 25,528 | 27,994 |
| Kingston | 0 | 0.0 | 8.8 | 24.4 | 15.8 | 23,800 | 25,318 |
| Kirkham | 0 | 0.7 | 17.8 | 44.4 | 14.2 | 18,117 | 22,107 |
| Kirklevington | 0 | 0.0 | 0.8 | 53.3 | 6.3 | 15,188 | 15,830 |
| Lancaster | 0 | 4.6 | 9.2 | 25.5 | 12.3 | 22,609 | 24,101 |
| Lancaster Farms | 0 | 15.9 | 3.7 | 23.4 | 13.9 | 15,318 | 15,327 |
| Latchmere House | 0 | 0.0 | 1.6 | 63.2 | 10.2 | 14,813 | 16,874 |
| Leeds | 0 | 10.4 | 18.8 | 18.9 | 17.6 | 30,135 | 18,949 |
| Leicester | 0 | 9.6 | 23.1 | 21.9 | 11.8 | 36,192 | 23,351 |
| Lewes | 1 | 8.6 | 31.9 | 17.6 | 14.1 | 19,494 | 20,604 |
| Leyhill | 0 | 0.0 | 10.4 | 37.9 | 12.7 | 19,924 | 22,241 |
| Lincoln | 0 | 9.9 | 9.6 | 18.9 | 10.7 | 28,829 | 26,065 |
| Lindholme | 1 | 1.2 | 11.8 | 26.9 | 9.2 | 23,081 | 25,052 |
| Littlehey | 0 | 2.5 | 12.0 | 23.7 | 16.3 | 16,329 | 16,453 |
| Liverpool | 0 | 4.1 | 12.5 | 18.9 | 14.3 | 20,659 | 19,112 |
| Long Lartin | 0 | 4.3 | 9.3 | 18.2 | 11.2 | 32,141 | 44,187 |
| Low Newton | 0 | 19.2 | 14.4 | 24.5 | 11.9 | 29,389 | 27,381 |
| Lowdham Grange | 1 | 0.4 | 11.0 | 26.6 | — | 29,795 | 30,673 |
| Maidstone | 0 | 1.8 | 4.5 | 21.1 | 13.8 | 18,157 | 27,267 |
| Manchester | 0 | 5.8 | 10.7 | 19.7 | 17.5 | 28,188 | 23,746 |
| Moorland | 0 | 10.4 | 4.1 | 25.3 | 13.1 | 20,042 | 19,504 |
| Morton Hall | 0 | 3.0 | 2.0 | 31.6 | 10.0 | 25,363 | 28,477 |
| Mount | 0 | 3.8 | 8.6 | 19.9 | 10.0 | 16,077 | 15,679 |
| New Hall | 1 | 32.8 | 7.9 | 23.5 | 14.5 | 24,389 | 22,439 |
| North Sea Camp | 0 | 0.0 | 16.9 | 42.1 | 11.0 | 15,910 | 19,482 |
| Northallerton | 0 | 10.7 | 8.5 | 22.0 | 14.9 | 34,185 | 27,103 |
| Norwich | 0 | 17.4 | 18.9 | 19.2 | 11.3 | 24,306 | 19,174 |
| Nottingham | 0 | 6.9 | 18.5 | 17.0 | 9.4 | 21,896 | 20,563 |
| Onley | 0 | 47.4 | 3.7 | 17.3 | 19.3 | 13,127 | 14,695 |
| Parc | 0 | 8.9 | 11.2 | 28.0 | — | 38,587 | 35,850 |
| Parkhurst | 0 | 13.9 | 2.6 | 20.6 | 13.7 | 25,613 | 29,505 |
| Pentonville | 0 | 11.5 | 21.1 | 16.1 | 15.7 | 24,028 | 18,723 |
| Portland | 0 | 23.1 | 6.4 | 24.2 | 12.6 | 14,960 | 15,641 |
| Preston | 0 | 10.5 | 15.0 | 21.5 | 12.0 | 29,330 | 22,765 |
| Ranby | 0 | 3.5 | 7.6 | 24.5 | 13.4 | 17,383 | 17,373 |
| Reading | 0 | 18.1 | 8.8 | 25.3 | 16.7 | 32,249 | 28,598 |
| Risley | 0 | 2.8 | 18.8 | 25.0 | 15.1 | 19,305 | 19,808 |
| Rochester | 0 | 18.5 | 3.8 | 23.1 | 13.7 | 19,940 | 25,235 |
| Rye Hill | 0 | 6.5 | 6.6 | 29.0 | — | 21,952 | 22,810 |
| Send | 0 | 11.1 | 10.4 | 33.0 | 18.5 | 20,271 | 20,633 |
| Shepton Mallet | 0 | 0.0 | 9.8 | 23.6 | 7.3 | 23,383 | 28,923 |
| Shrewsbury | 0 | 4.7 | 9.5 | 25.5 | 14.1 | 34,832 | 19,612 |
| Stafford | 0 | 5.3 | 22.2 | 26.6 | 13.7 | 16,134 | 16,388 |
| Standford Hill | 0 | 0.0 | 9.4 | 40.2 | 10.5 | 18,416 | 20,895 |
| Stocken | 0 | 2.4 | 16.1 | 23.4 | 7.7 | 15,775 | 15,304 |

| Prison name | Escapes | Assault rate (Percentage) | Random mandatory drug testing rate (Percentage) | Purposeful activity | Average days lost to staff sickness | Cost per place | Cost per prisoner |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stoke Heath | 0 | 47.6 | 2.7 | 24.8 | 19.1 | 14,673 | 17,319 |
| Styal | 0 | 22.7 | 15.2 | 25.9 | 15.9 | 25,745 | 24,626 |
| Sudbury | 0 | 0.7 | 7.6 | 41.4 | 7.6 | 14,835 | 15,376 |
| Swaleside | 0 | 5.5 | 16.5 | 24.2 | 14.3 | 17,011 | 17,174 |
| Swansea | 0 | 1.6 | 18.3 | 26.7 | 11.1 | 28,393 | 33,735 |
| Swinfen Hall | 0 | 20.9 | 0.5 | 28.6 | 7.9 | 21,734 | 22,353 |
| Thorn Cross | 0 | 7.0 | 13.2 | 43.2 | 10.2 | 16,910 | 24,086 |
| Usk | 0 | 0.5 | 2.6 | 38.3 | 8.3 | 26,221 | 20,233 |
| Verne | 0 | 0.9 | 2.1 | 28.1 | 14.7 | 16,775 | 16,405 |
| Wakefield | 0 | 4.0 | 1.4 | 18.1 | 12.3 | 25,910 | 34,729 |
| Wandsworth | 0 | 6.9 | 7.9 | 17.2 | 19.7 | 21,165 | 18,349 |
| Wayland | 0 | 2.7 | 4.5 | 21.5 | 7.7 | 15,511 | 15,401 |
| Wealstun | 1 | 1.7 | 12.7 | 32.8 | 11.6 | 16,309 | 16,941 |
| Weare | 0 | 1.4 | 12.3 | 19.0 | 13.4 | 17,841 | 18,994 |
| Wellingborough | 0 | 0.3 | 12.4 | 27.7 | 13.4 | 17,009 | 17,661 |
| Werrington | 0 | 53.2 | 6.1 | 33.4 | 12.3 | 42,586 | 45,799 |
| Wetherby | 0 | 34.5 | 4.7 | 26.9 | 14.5 | 22,297 | 24,851 |
| Whatton | 0 | 0.0 | 2.1 | 29.5 | 8.9 | 15,116 | 15,470 |
| Whitemoor | 0 | 10.6 | 10.8 | 19.9 | 20.5 | 41,181 | 54,360 |
| Winchester | 0 | 7.7 | 17.2 | 18.3 | 13.7 | 26,056 | 19,635 |
| Wolds | 0 | 5.2 | 3.2 | 28.4 | — | 27,023 | 24,540 |
| Woodhill | 0 | 10.2 | 14.7 | 16.1 | 17.1 | 29,696 | 30,714 |
| Wormwood Scrubs | 0 | 7.2 | 18.2 | 19.5 | 19.1 | 18,884 | 22,500 |
| Wymott | 0 | 1.5 | 7.8 | 28.0 | 14.1 | 18,383 | 18,901 |

| Prison name | Basic skills awards: literacy | Basic skills awards: numeracy | Key word skills | Total offending behaviour programmes | Sex offender treatment programmes | Proportion of ethnic minority staff (Percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acklington | 56 | 77 | 229 | 25 | 0 | 0.5 |
| Albany | 15 | 7 | 274 | 50 | 4 | 0.0 |
| Altcourse | 42 | 37 | 0 | 0 | 0 | — |
| Ashfield | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | — |
| Ashwell | 145 | 118 | 103 | 29 | 0 | 1.3 |
| Askham Grange | 27 | 31 | 131 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Aylesbury | 2 | 6 | 78 | 15 | 0 | 4.7 |
| Bedford | 35 | 26 | 18 | 10 | 0 | 1.7 |
| Belmarsh | 27 | 26 | 139 | 7 | 0 | 7.2 |
| Birmingham | 46 | 20 | 18 | 7 | 7 | 11.9 |
| Blakenhurst | 35 | 62 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 2.3 |
| Blantyre House | 17 | 10 | 77 | 0 | 0 | 2.9 |
| Blundeston | 35 | 19 | 154 | 0 | 0 | 2.1 |
| Brinsford | 0 | 0 | 469 | 0 | 0 | 6.3 |
| Bristol | 30 | 22 | 351 | 35 | 0 | 1.9 |
| Brixton | 7 | 4 | 27 | 23 | 0 | 19.1 |
| Brockhill | 6 | 0 | 82 | 0 | 0 | 4.9 |
| Buckley Hall | 31 | 41 | 29 | 29 | 0 | 3.5 |
| Bullingdon | 61 | 100 | 115 | 34 | 0 | 2.4 |
| Bullwood Hall | 60 | 10 | 4 | 10 | 0 | 3.2 |
| Camp Hill | 51 | 45 | 362 | 0 | 0 | 0.4 |
| Canterbury | 30 | 15 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 1.0 |
| Cardiff | 121 | 118 | 50 | 19 | 0 | 1.5 |
| Castington | 21 | 9 | 1171 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Channings Wood | 115 | 93 | 429 | 60 | 16 | 0.3 |
| Chelmsford | 15 | 5 | 34 | 26 | 0 | 5.4 |
| Coldingley | 44 | 62 | 670 | 34 | 0 | 2.0 |
| Cookham Wood | 31 | 3 | 66 | 17 | 0 | 2.1 |
| Dartmoor | 82 | 56 | 405 | 40 | 0 | 1.1 |
| Deerbolt | 98 | 78 | 988 | 23 | 0 | 0.4 |
| Doncaster | 41 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | — |
| Dorchester | 15 | 16 | 191 | 18 | 0 | 0.6 |
| Dovegate | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | — |
| Dover | 4 | 5 | 107 | 6 | 0 | 1.9 |
| Downview | 60 | 38 | 287 | 19 | 0 | 3.3 |
| Drake Hall | 57 | 27 | 112 | 15 | 0 | 1.3 |
| Durham | 44 | 16 | 404 | 37 | 0 | 0.4 |
| East Sutton Park | 6 | 12 | 56 | 0 | 0 | 1.6 |
| Eastwood Park | 35 | 23 | 405 | 9 | 0 | 1.8 |

| Prison name | Basic skills awards: literacy | Basic skills awards: numeracy | Key word skills | Total offending behaviour programmes | Sex offender treatment programmes | Proportion of ethnic minority staff (Percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elmley | 95 | 33 | 0 | 66 | 0 | 1.8 |
| Erlestoke | 19 | 7 | 291 | 6 | 0 | 0.5 |
| Everthorpe | 81 | 51 | 52 | 23 | 0 | 0.4 |
| Exeter | 30 | 67 | 103 | 27 | 0 | 0.7 |
| Featherstone | 48 | 46 | 499 | 10 | 0 | 3.2 |
| Feltham | 61 | 41 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 14.0 |
| Ford | 67 | 46 | 245 | 15 | 0 | 1.8 |
| Forest Bank | 8 | 19 | 138 | 16 | 0 | — |
| Foston Hall | 13 | 12 | 111 | 16 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Frankland | 37 | 21 | 336 | 31 | 3 | 0.4 |
| Full Sutton | 11 | 6 | 153 | 12 | 4 | 0.4 |
| Garth | 35 | 13 | 52 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 |
| Gartree | 39 | 45 | 184 | 1 | 0 | 1.1 |
| Glen Parva | 89 | 34 | 680 | 17 | 0 | 4.0 |
| Gloucester | 27 | 18 | 87 | 0 | 0 | 0.9 |
| Grendon | 31 | 14 | 451 | 0 | 0 | 2.8 |
| Guys Marsh | 51 | 39 | 637 | 34 | 0 | 0.4 |
| Haslar | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.2 |
| Hatfield | 25 | 25 | 449 | 17 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Haverigg | 33 | 30 | 53 | 0 | 0 | 0.3 |
| Hewell Grange | 42 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.2 |
| High Down | 17 | 6 | 321 | 68 | 15 | 9.2 |
| Highpoint | 66 | 45 | 10 | 27 | 0 | 1.2 |
| Hindley | 34 | 42 | 818 | 15 | 0 | 1.8 |
| Hollesley Bay | 20 | 12 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 0.6 |
| Holloway | 32 | 26 | 66 | 8 | 0 | 25.6 |
| Holme House | 79 | 63 | 1,672 | 28 | 0 | 0.6 |
| Hull | 72 | 40 | 0 | 12 | 2 | 1.2 |
| Huntercombe | 4 | 0 | 131 | 0 | 0 | 3.6 |
| Kingston | 17 | 16 | 18 | 23 | 0 | 0.7 |
| Kirkham | 23 | 26 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Kirklevington | 40 | 40 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Lancaster | 19 | 1 | 252 | 9 | 0 | 0.6 |
| Lancaster Farms | 17 | 7 | 389 | 32 | 0 | 0.3 |
| Latchmere House | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6.5 |
| Leeds | 37 | 22 | 296 | 7 | 0 | 3.2 |
| Leicester | 56 | 25 | 395 | 10 | 0 | 3.3 |
| Lewes | 20 | 7 | 40 | 0 | 0 | 3.1 |
| Leyhill | 47 | 50 | 654 | 43 | 14 | 0.0 |
| Lincoln | 56 | 59 | 115 | 26 | 0 | 0.6 |
| Lindholme | 52 | 41 | 137 | 18 | 0 | 0.3 |
| Littlehey | 103 | 71 | 198 | 30 | 0 | 1.7 |
| Liverpool | 86 | 42 | 133 | 17 | 0 | 0.8 |
| Long Lartin | 56 | 22 | 69 | 22 | 0 | 1.5 |
| Low Newton | 27 | 11 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 0.4 |
| Lowdham Grange | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | — |
| Maidstone | 106 | 56 | 106 | 33 | 8 | 2.1 |
| Manchester | 52 | 33 | 13 | 35 | 8 | 2.3 |
| Moorland | 115 | 94 | 2,559 | 35 | 0 | 1.5 |
| Morton Hall | 0 | 0 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0.7 |
| Mount | 60 | 40 | 486 | 9 | 0 | 3.9 |
| New Hall | 81 | 31 | 361 | 17 | 0 | 0.7 |
| North Sea Camp | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Northallerton | 34 | 18 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Norwich | 62 | 60 | 82 | 39 | 0 | 1.2 |
| Nottingham | 25 | 17 | 242 | 0 | 0 | 3.3 |
| Onley | 56 | 57 | 482 | 31 | 0 | 3.0 |
| Parc | 12 | 36 | 0 | 9 | 0 | — |
| Parkhurst | 9 | 5 | 97 | 46 | 0 | 0.6 |
| Pentonville | 35 | 37 | 72 | 78 | 0 | 25.0 |
| Portland | 41 | 14 | 223 | 44 | 0 | 0.9 |
| Preston | 30 | 20 | 137 | 0 | 0 | 1.3 |
| Ranby | 28 | 31 | 23 | 75 | 0 | 1.8 |
| Reading | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3.1 |
| Risley | 52 | 58 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 1.0 |
| Rochester | 20 | 15 | 75 | 18 | 8 | 2.0 |
| Rye Hill | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | — |
| Send | 65 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.3 |
| Shepton Mallet | 20 | 22 | 89 | 10 | 0 | 0.7 |
| Shrewsbury | 23 | 26 | 48 | 19 | 0 | 1.5 |

| Prison name | Basic skills awards: literacy | Basic skills awards: numeracy | Key word skills | Total offending behaviour programmes | Sex offender treatment programmes | Proportion of ethnic minority staff (Percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stafford | 127 | 83 | 146 | 28 | 0 | 0.6 |
| Standford Hill | 15 | 10 | 25 | 26 | 0 | 0.5 |
| Stocken | 41 | 47 | 633 | 8 | 0 | 1.4 |
| Stoke Heath | 39 | 35 | 778 | 14 | 0 | 2.5 |
| Styal | 37 | 29 | 0 | 16 | 0 | 4.0 |
| Sudbury | 36 | 11 | 248 | 20 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Swaleside | 29 | 33 | 94 | 69 | 0 | 2.9 |
| Swansea | 35 | 40 | 242 | 42 | 0 | 0.4 |
| Swinfen Hall | 18 | 8 | 362 | 40 | 0 | 1.7 |
| Thorn Cross | 28 | 6 | 278 | 85 | 0 | 0.9 |
| Usk | 60 | 64 | 59 | 71 | 41 | 0.5 |
| Verne | 17 | 24 | 28 | 0 | 0 | 0.7 |
| Wakefield | 25 | 24 | 286 | 43 | 8 | 1.1 |
| Wandsworth | 40 | 68 | 91 | 16 | 0 | 13.4 |
| Wayland | 70 | 73 | 10 | 45 | 9 | 0.4 |
| Wealstun | 145 | 94 | 402 | 9 | 0 | 1.0 |
| Weare | 32 | 15 | 253 | 0 | 0 | 1.0 |
| Wellingborough | 49 | 38 | 178 | 35 | 0 | 2.2 |
| Werrington | 13 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.7 |
| Wetherby | 13 | 14 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 1.2 |
| Whatton | 51 | 35 | 245 | 41 | 11 | 0.7 |
| Whitemoor | 20 | 9 | 235 | 20 | 0 | 1.9 |
| Winchester | 30 | 11 | 48 | 33 | 0 | 0.6 |
| Wolds | 0 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 0 | — |
| Woodhill | 30 | 14 | 169 | 16 | 1 | 3.6 |
| Wormwood Scrubs | 143 | 72 | 248 | 19 | 0 | 17.0 |
| Wymott | 54 | 18 | 241 | 50 | 5 | 0.7 |

[1] Hours per prisoner per week
[2] Cost per place and cost per prisoner data for HMP Dovegate are unavailable

### EU Extradition Warrants

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the EU agreement on extradition warrants will take effect in each country of the EU. [24872]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** Article 27 of the Council Framework Decision on the European arrest warrant and the surrender procedures between member states requires member states to take the necessary measures to comply with it by 31 December 2003. Article 27 also provides that the Framework Decision can come into force between two member states on a bilateral basis, once they have made the necessary declaration.

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which countries do not deport their own nationals to the UK under existing extradition treaties but will be obliged to do so under the common European arrest warrant proposals. [25419]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** Of the European countries to whom the European arrest warrant proposals will apply Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg and Norway will not currently extradite their own nationals under any circumstances. Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden will do so on a discretionary basis and attach varying degrees of conditions to doing so. The Republic of Ireland and Italy will extradite their own nationals provided there is reciprocity. The United Kingdom attaches no such conditions to the extradition of British citizens.

Under the Framework Decision on the European arrest warrant, it will no longer be possible for a country to refuse to extradite an individual on the grounds that he or she is an own national. The one exception to this is Austria whose executing judicial authorities will be permitted to refuse the enforcement of a European arrest warrant if the requested person is an Austrian citizen and if the act for which the European arrest warrant has been issued is not punishable under Austrian law until such time as Austria has modified its basic law. They are required to do this under the framework agreement by 31 December 2008.

### Staff Numbers

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were employed in his Department in each of the last four years. [23784]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The available information for 1 April 2001 was published by the Cabinet Office on 8 November 2001. Figures for the previous three years are set out in Civil Service Statistics for 2000 which is available in the Library.

For ease of reference, the available data are set out in the table. The figures given are full-time equivalents.

| Home Office area | 1 April 1998 | 1 April 1999 | 1 April 2000 | 1 April 2001[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Home Office main (excluding agencies) | 8,070 | 7,710 | 9,270 | 13,020 |
| Fire Service College | 250 | 190 | 180 | [2]190 |
| Forensic Science Service | 1,240 | 1,640 | 1,780 | 2,190 |

| *Home Office area* | *1 April 1998* | *1 April 1999* | *1 April 2000* | *1 April 2001*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| UKPA[3] | 1,280 | 1,250 | 1,320 | 2,270 |
| HM Prison Service | 39,360 | 38,750 | 40,560 | 41,490 |
| Total | 50,200 | 49,540 | 53,110 | 59,160 |

[1] 1 April 2001 figures come from the Cabinet Office National Statistics briefing published on 8 November 2001.
[2] Most of the increase in the non-agency Home Office is as a result of expansion within the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.
[3] United Kingdom Passport Agency.
*Note:*
The April figures include some staff (like those of the Fire Service College) who later moved from the Home Office in the machinery of Government transfers of 8 June 2001
*Source:*
Civil Service Statistics 2000

### Departmental Expenditure Limit

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the reasons for the difference between the final voted departmental expenditure limit and provisional outturn for financial year 2000–01, as listed in the Treasury document, Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn, for Vote IV, Home Office and Charity Commission, subcategory 1 Home Office administration, police, probation, immigration and other services, England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [24112]

**Mr. Blunkett:** Full details of outturn against 2000–01 voted provision will be published in the appropriation accounts to be presented to the House of Commons by 31 January. The departmental resource account on an accruals basis will also be presented to the House of Commons before 31 January. Updated estimates of the outturn for Departmental Expenditure Limits in 2000–01 on an accruals basis were published in the 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318), Table B16.

### Anti-terrorism Legislation

**Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the costs for UK communication and internet service providers in storing data required under Part II of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [24509]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 is published on the Home Office website. Further consideration of additional costs which may be incurred will take place during consultation with communications service providers.

**Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what volume of data he expects internet service providers and communication service providers to retain under Part II of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [24504]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The type of data to be held and the retention period will be determined in consultation with service providers and the security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies. This will in turn determine the volume of data to be retained.

**Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure effective cross-border co-operation on data retention periods and disclosure under the Code of Practice on the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [24507]

**Mr. Blunkett:** We have had discussions with our European and other international counterparts on communications data retention in various fora including the G8, the European Union and informal bilaterals, and will continue to do so.

The Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 does not cover disclosure of communications data, which is provided for by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

**Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects discussion on the Code of Practice under Part II of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 to be completed. [24506]

**Mr. Blunkett:** We aim to publish a draft communications data retention code of practice after consultation so as to allow a three-month period of public consultation before laying the code before Parliament before the summer recess.

**Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if data stored outside the UK, by UK companies, will be covered by the Code of Practice on the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [24505]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The communications data retention provisions in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 apply to communications providers providing a telecommunications service in the United Kingdom wherever the data are retained. The full practical considerations will be examined during the consultation on the code of practice and agreements, in partnership with the industry.

### Internet and Communication Service Providers

**Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next intends to meet representatives of the internet and communication service providers industry; and if this meeting will include smaller companies. [24508]

**Mr. Blunkett:** Officials are now beginning consultation with industry contacts. Service providers of all sizes will have the opportunity to make individual representations, both while the code is being prepared and during consultation.

At an appropriate juncture, when discussions have proceeded to a point where this would be constructive, there will, as always, be an opportunity for the industry to meet with Ministers.

### Anti-drugs Strategy

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of whether the targets set in the 10-year anti-drugs strategy will be achieved by 2008; and if he will make a statement. [24386]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** We are currently reviewing progress against all the Drugs Strategy targets to ensure that we still have the right balance and focus. We have made good progress in establishing programmes to drive forward the Strategy and in delivering our short-term goals. Drug use in the general population remains stable with some significant reductions in the proportion of young people aged 16–19 taking drugs, although there has been a small increase in the proportion of 16 to 24-year-olds reporting cocaine use.

We know we need to be even more effective at tackling the harm caused by Class A drugs. That is why, as he indicated in his evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on 23 October 2001, the Home Secretary is seeking advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on their assessment for reclassifying cannabis from Class B to Class C. We are also implementing a series of harm minimisation measures, in partnership with the Department of Health, such as the publication of an action plan to reduce drug-related deaths.

### Older People

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, "Winning the Generation Game", *(a)* what progress his Department has made and *(b)* what future plans his Department has for acting on them; and if he will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24207]

**Mr. Blunkett** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The Home Office is committed to equality of opportunity for all staff, and our policies are designed to avoid unfair discrimination on any irrelevant grounds, including age. We are reviewing those policies in the context of the Performance and Innovation Unit recommendations, as follows:

*Conclusion 6:* Consider ways of increasing downshifting in the Civil Service.

The Home Office offers support to any member of staff who chooses to revert to a more junior grade for personal reasons, irrespective of age. Each application is given sympathetic consideration.

*Conclusion 7:* Consider creating a work pool of retired civil servants.

The Home Office uses retired civil servants for recruitment and selection boards on an ad hoc basis. We also invite retired members of staff with appropriate experience to carry out reports, enquiries and investigations from time to time.

*Conclusion 8:* Each Government Department should look at the case for allowing its civil servants to retire at 65.

The Home Office has recently completed a comprehensive review of age retirement, resulting in a change in age retirement policy throughout the Home Office, including agencies (except for the Prison Service, which will announce details of its own age retirement review in due course). The new policy, which will come into force on 1 April 2002, will allow staff the option of retiring at any point between the ages of 60 and 65.

*Conclusion 9:* Civil service departments should consider whether a short-service concession for those with less than 20 years' service should form part of its policy on normal retirement age as an interim measure.

Not applicable, as conclusion 8 recommendations have already been implemented.

*Conclusion 10:* Departments should take steps to integrate age into their equal opportunities policies.

We are currently drafting a new equal opportunities policy statement. We will consider carefully how to include age in this statement.

*Conclusion 11:* The Cabinet Office should develop a process for monitoring age-related employment practice.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 335W.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she expects to reply to the Question of 5 December, ref. 21346, from the hon. Member for Buckingham, on sickness absence. [24753]

**Mr. Blunkett:** The question to which the hon. Member is referring was answered on 17 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 91W.

### Driving Disqualifications (EU)

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the prospects for adopting mutual recognition of court-ordered disqualifications from driving across the EU. [24985]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** The Government have consulted widely on options for ratification of the European Union (EU) Driving Disqualification Convention, which was signed by all 15 member states during the United Kingdom's Presidency of the European Union in 1998. The convention requires EU member states to enforce disqualifications imposed on their residents by other member states.

The Government are now considering the responses they have received to their consultation paper and will announce their decision as soon as possible. Ratification of the convention will require primary legislation. The convention will enter into force when it has been ratified by all 15 member states, but the Government intend to explore the possibility of early implementation on a bilateral basis with those countries that have ratified it.

### Styal Womens' Prison

**Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the ratio of prison staff to inmates at Styal Womens' Prison in each of the last 10 years. [25494]

**Beverley Hughes:** The information requested is shown in the table. Information is not held on staff numbers prior to 1997. Staff in post and prisoner population are shown as at 31 March each year and at the latest available date.

| *Date* | *Prisoners* | *Staff in post* | *Staff: inmate ratio* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 31 March 1997 | 254 | 210 | 1:1.21 |
| 31 March 1998 | 285 | 235 | 1:1.21 |
| 31 March 1999 | 277 | 325 | 1:0.85 |
| 31 March 2000 | 438 | 329 | 1:1.33 |
| 31 March 2001 | 436 | 318 | 1:1.37 |
| 31 December 2001 | 379 | 335 | 1:1.13 |

### Lewes Prison

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the prison population at HMP Lewes in each month since January 2001; and what the *(a)* recommended and *(b)* absolute capacity of the prison is. [25378]

**Beverley Hughes** *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The uncrowded capacity (Certified Normal Accommodation) of Lewes prison is 485 and the operational capacity is 496. The table provides the population figures during 2001.

| *Month*[1] | *Population* |
|---|---|
| January 2001 | 411 |
| February 2001 | 414 |
| March 2001 | 445 |
| April 2001 | 446 |
| May 2001 | 435 |
| June 2001 | 443 |
| July 2001 | 471 |
| August 2001 | 478 |
| September 2001 | 471 |
| October 2001 | 468 |
| November 2001 | 467 |
| December 2001 | [2]458 |

[1] Figures relate to the last day of the month
[2] Provisional data

### Charter of Fundamental Rights

**Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the compatibility of the provisions within the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 permitting the blanket retention of data with the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights. [25817]

**Mr. Blunkett** *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The provisions of Part 11 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 comply with all European and International binding conventions. It is not our practice to assess compatibility with other, non-binding conventions.

### Sussex Police

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what funding has been made available to Sussex police specifically to combat drugs; [25762]

(2) what additional funds he is making available to the Sussex constabulary to deal with crack cocaine; [25765]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** Within the police force grant, there is not a ring-fenced allocation for tackling the misuse of drugs. Neither is there additional money allocated for dealing with crack cocaine specifically.

In the year 2001–02, central funding was made available to the Sussex constabulary for specific drug-related programmes. This comprised £258,400 from the Crime Reduction Programme to deliver and maintain drug Arrest Referral schemes, and slightly in excess of £1 million from the Communities Against Drugs (CAD) programme, which can be used for more CCTV, funding for crime stopper schemes and working with pharmacists, to tackle drug-related crime at a community level.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his assessment is of the increase in the use of crack cocaine in the Sussex constabulary area in the last five years. [25764]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** The information is not available in the form requested. The British Crime Survey (BCS) asks a representative sample of 16 to 59-year-olds (sample size of 13,300 individuals in 2000) about their drug use in the last year. The percentage who report using crack was 0.3 per cent. in 2000. Because of the small sample size and the low prevalence of reported crack use it would be unreliable to try to provide estimates for the numbers of crack users for small geographical areas, eg police force areas. Our best estimate of the number of 16 to 24-year-olds who used crack in the last year nationally is 50,000.

Again nationally, the BCS suggests that there has been a significant increase in crack use between 1996 and 2000. In 1996 0.1 per cent. of 16 to 59-year-olds reported using crack in the last year, but by 2000 this had increased to 0.3 per cent. The same figures for 16 to 29-year-olds show an increase from 0.2 per cent. to 0.8 per cent. of the age group.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of arrests have been made by Sussex police in the last year for drug offences. [25763]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** The Home Office Statistical Bulletin 19/01 "Arrests for Notifiable Offences and the Operation of Certain Police Powers under PACE, England and Wales 2000/01" shows that 6 per cent. of the total persons arrested for notifiable offences by the Sussex constabulary were for drug offences.

### Milk Tokens

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will consider awarding milk tokens to asylum seeker mothers who are HIV positive; [24556]

(2) if he will entitle all asylum seekers with children aged under five years to receive milk tokens. [24557]

**Mr. Hutton:** I have been asked to reply.

Families with children aged under five who receive certain social security benefits (income support or an income-based jobseeker's allowance) are entitled to receive milk tokens. Families of asylum seekers who do not receive social security benefits are supported by the national asylum support service. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Friday 11 January 2002*

## PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

### Remuneration

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the President of the Council if he will estimate the number of individuals in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26317]

**Mr. Robin Cook:** None.

### Members Salaries

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the President of the Council what assessment he has made of the reasons for the difference between the final voted departmental expenditure limit and provisional outturn for financial year 2000–01, as listed in the Treasury document, Public Expenditure 2000–01: Provisional Outturn, for Vote XIII, subsection 4 House of Commons: Members' Salaries; and if he will make a statement. [24117]

**Mr. Robin Cook:** The figure included in "Public Expenditure 2000–01" was a misprint. Full details of outturn against 2000–01 provision will be published in the appropriation accounts to be presented to the House by 31 January.

### People's Peers

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Council when the House of Lords Appointments Commission will invite applications for the second round of appointments of people's peers. [24381]

**Mr. Robin Cook:** The decision rests with the Prime Minister. The membership of the House of Lords, including that of non-party political peers, is kept under on-going review.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Council whether further applications from previously unsuccessful applicants for a people's peerage will be invited; and if he will make a statement. [24384]

**Mr. Robin Cook:** I understand that all unsuccessful applicants were informed that they could renominate themselves, should they choose to do so. Their existing nomination is not carried forward, but there is nothing to stop someone reapplying.

### House of Lords Appointments Commission

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Council what recent steps the House of Lords Appointments Commission has taken to encourage more applications from under-represented groups. [24382]

**Mr. Robin Cook:** I understand that the report which the House of Lords Appointments Commission published alongside its first list of names in April 2001 made clear that they wanted to encourage more high-quality nominations from women, and from other regions of the country outside of the south-east. The commission has also made clear that its wishes to continue receiving outstanding nominations from ethnic minorities.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Serious Sexual Crimes (Sentences)

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward measures to increase the severity of sentences of people convicted of serious sexual crimes. [24131]

**Mr. Keith Bradley:** Under the broad review of sentencing that began in July 2001, we are looking at tougher determinate sentences for sex offenders that will ensure they stay in prison, up to the full term if necessary, so long as they continue to present a risk of harm to our communities and that they are subject to strict and extended supervision on release. We are also looking at a requirement that where a life sentence is an option judges should not shy away from using it if the professional evidence shows that there is a clear risk that the offender will commit further sex offences. We want greater clarity and transparency, with indeterminate sentences given to serious offenders where appropriate.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been reported in his Department under paragraph 11 of the civil service code since 13 May 1999, and how many of them related to special advisers. [25336]

**Mr. Blunkett** *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* In line with section 11 of the code, there are arrangements in place which allow civil servants in the main Home Office and its agencies to raise any matter of concern in confidence with their line managers, in the first instance, or thereafter with one of several nominated officials. It is not possible to provide a figure for the number of these complaints as there is no requirement for managers to report to the centre those which are resolved within the management line, nor is a central record kept of complaints raised direct with nominated officials.

### Fraud

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will investigate possible connections between fraud and a north London mosque which has been identified to him; and if he will make a statement. [25184]

**Mr. Blunkett:** Any information provided to me or my Department on alleged criminal activity—including information passed to me by my hon. Friend—is shared with the police, who are continuing to investigate. I have corresponded with my hon. Friend on the issues raised.

### Workplace Drug Testing

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the value of workplace drug testing for *(a)* alcohol, *(b)* cannabis, *(c)* heroin, *(d)* amphetamine and *(e)* cocaine among civil servants. [24997]

**Mr. Bob Ainsworth:** The Home Office Drug Strategy Directorate is currently developing, with partners, a strategy for tackling the issue of drug misuse in the workplace. One of the proposed outcomes is the production of definitive guidance to employers, in all sectors, of best practice in managing drug issues in workplace settings. The strategy will aim to include a balanced view on the comparative worth of drug testing as a tool for employers, and cover each of the drugs specified in the question. The current intention is to publish the guidance during the financial year 2002–03 and make it widely available.

### NCIS and NCS Authorities

**Mrs. Fitzsimons:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made in appointing the chair of the service authorities for the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad. [27346]

**Mr. Blunkett:** I have appointed Mr. David Lock to be the Chair of the Service Authorities from 1 April 2002.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Zimbabwe

**Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has for addressing the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe. [25991]

**Clare Short:** There are acute shortages of food and other basic supplies in Zimbabwe as a result of misgovernment. During the last six months DFID has provided £4 million in essential drug supplies, and £4 million for non-governmental supplementary feeding programmes—targeting vulnerable children in particular. The UN has now developed a humanitarian assistance programme to help an estimated one million people. I have agreed to provide a further £6 million for this programme, supporting World Food Programme feeding activities, and helping the World Health Organisation to maintain essential medical supplies. In all of these programmes, special consideration has been given to delivery mechanisms to ensure that those in need benefit regardless of their tribal or political affiliations.

## HEALTH

### MMR Vaccine

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the annual cost of giving individual injections in place of the MMR vaccine; what the time interval required between such individual injections would be; and what estimate he has made of the vulnerability of children to particular diseases within the time gaps; [7109]

(2) how many representations he has received from *(a)* members of the medical profession and *(b)* members of the public about the policy of the NHS in providing MMR as opposed to individual injections. [7110]

**Yvette Cooper:** Separate measles, mumps and rubella vaccines in place of MMR have never been recommended by the Government's independent expert advisory committees on immunisation. As a result, no estimates have been made of the cost of giving separate vaccines. Cost is not an issue in decisions over MMR immunisation.

We are not aware of any studies that have looked at the relative merits of possible time gaps between separate measles, mumps and rubella vaccines. The researcher who first put this suggestion forward has stated that a gap of "at least a year" should be left between each vaccine. However, there is no scientific evidence to support this suggestion.

The risk to an individual child of contracting one or more of the diseases MMR protects against as a result of having separate vaccines rather than MMR will vary in different parts of the country. The risk will increase the longer a child is left unprotected. The unborn child of a pregnant women who is not immune to rubella will also be at increased risk from disease should the pregnant woman come into contact with an unimmunised individual.

There have been several hundred representations from members of the public about MMR. It is not possible to say how many are from the medical profession. The British Medical Association and the Royal Colleges who represent members of medical positions support our policy on MMR.

### Regulatory Impact Assessments

**Mrs. Browning:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the gross costs of the regulatory impact assessment for *(a)* the Restriction on Pithing Regulations 2001, *(b)* the Feeding Stuffs (Sampling and Analysis) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2001, *(c)* the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2001 and *(d)* the Gelatine (Intra-Community Trade) (England) Regulations 2001. [17700]

**Yvette Cooper:** These costs are shown in the published regulatory impact assessments which are available in the Library.

### Contaminated Blood Products

**Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the Haemophilia Society; and what action he plans to take in respect of people who have contracted HIV and Hepatitis C from contaminated blood products. [21975]

**Yvette Cooper:** Officials met with the Haemophilia Society on 30 November 2001. Issues discussed included the Society's 'Carpet of Lilies' campaign, the CJD Incident Panel's consultation document "Management of possible exposure to CJD through medical procedures" (issued on 10 October 2001) and the role of primary care trusts in commissioning haemophilia services.

A special payment scheme (The Macfarlane Trust) for those infected with HIV through national health service blood products was set up in 1988. We have also set up a multi-disciplinary steering group to assist in the development of a strategic approach to hepatitis C as a public health issue. As a result, we will be publishing a consultation paper early this year.

### Haemophilia Drugs

**Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many UK-resident patients over the age of 16 are being treated with rcFVIII. [22325]

**Yvette Cooper:** The latest information from the United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre Doctors Organisation shows that 43 per cent. of patients aged 20 and over in the United Kingdom are receiving recombinant clotting factors.

All health authorities and national health service trusts in England have been asked to provide recombinant (synthetic) clotting factors for new haemophilia patients and children under 16. We are giving careful consideration to the case for providing recombinant clotting factors for all haemophilia patients in England.

### Chief Medical Officer Annual Report

**Mr. Bacon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* total costs and *(b)* design and printing costs were involved in producing the annual report of the Chief Medical Officer for the Department of Health 2001. [26148]

**Mr. Hutton:** The total cost for producing the Chief Medical Officer's annual report for 2001 was £74,506. Of this cost £17,863 was spent on printing and £56,643 was spent on the design, development and production of the report.

## TREASURY

### Uncollected Tax

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what are the latest estimated levels of uncollected *(a)* income tax and *(b)* other taxes (i) in cash terms, (ii) current values and (iii) as a percentage for each year since 1997–98; [24816]

(2) how much tax remained uncollected at the end of each fiscal year since 1978–79. [25302]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Figures for amounts of assessed and collectible tax as at the end of each accounting year (31 October) are available in the Inland Revenue's annual reports for years up to October 1998, in Table 1 of Appendix 1.

The figures for uncollected tax represent net tax charged but not paid as at the accounting date, and are a snapshot of the position at the date of the account. Most of the tax uncollected at the balance of each account is subsequently collected, and most of the amount outstanding attracts an interest charge.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the performance of Government departments against their Public Service Agreement targets. [26130]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave in response to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 10 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 502.

### Expenditure

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for the years 1997–98 to 2003–04 a detailed reconciliation between the public expenditure planning total and general Government expenditure. [26286]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The information sought can be found in tables 1.1 and 1.13 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (PESA) 2001–02, HM Treasury Cm 5101, April 2001. Those tables give spending details for the years 1998–99 to 2003–04. Data for 1997–98 are not available on the same basis because of switch to resource accounting and budgeting. The tables show the reconciliation between total departmental expenditure limits, and total managed expenditure.

### Social Security Expenditure

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the planned social security expenditure as a percentage of GDP in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03, *(c)* 2003–04, *(d)* 2004–05 and *(e)* 2005–06. [26103]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The planned total social security expenditure, excluding tax credits, as a percentage of GDP is:

*(a)* 2001–02: 11.1 per cent.

*(b)* 2002–03: 11.0 per cent.

*(c)* 2003–04: 11.0 per cent.

The Government have not yet published social security spending figures beyond 2003–04.

### Taxes

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the tax burden as a percentage of gross domestic product, using total taxes and social security contributions on an individual accounts accruals basis for each tax year from 2001–02 to 2006–07. [26333]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The available estimates of net taxes and social security contributions as a percentage of GDP are shown in Table B9, p. 175, of the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

### Comprehensive Spending Review

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the Comprehensive Spending Review and its impact on levels of public infrastructure investment. [26142]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Treasury Ministers receive a wide range of representations about public spending issues. These will be considered as part of the 2002 Spending Review.

### Capital Receipts

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce the capital receipts initiative for the next three years. [26100]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Capital receipts released from the disposal of surplus assets can be invested back into public services. Table B18 in the pre-Budget report 2001 sets out annual projections for sales of fixed assets up to 2003–04.

### Non-North Sea Tax Receipts

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the percentage of gross domestic product which will be accounted for by non-North Sea taxes and national insurance contributions in each of the next five years. [26331]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Estimates of non-North Sea taxes and national insurance contributions as a percentage of GDP can be derived from Table B9, p. 175, of the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

### Education Expenditure

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the planned education expenditure as a percentage of GDP in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [26102]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 776W.

### Hospital Repairs

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if expenditure on hospital repairs is classified by his Department as current or capital expenditure. [26138]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Expenditure on hospital repairs is classified as current expenditure in national accounts, and as resource expenditure in departmental budgets.

A major enhancement to a hospital that extended its working life or added new facilities would be classified as capital expenditure. Decisions on the classification of activities on the borderline between repairs and major enhancements would be made by a hospital's accountants and subsequently audited in terms of Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (GAAP) applied by the accountancy profession. The decision of the accountants would follow through into national accounts and departmental budgets.

### Government Trading Funds

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the financial performance of Government trading funds in each of the last four years. [26105]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Information on the financial performance of Government trading funds can be found in the annual reports and accounts prepared and published by each trading fund.

### Public Expenditure (Scotland)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to conduct a thorough needs assessment in order to determine the appropriate level of central Government support for public expenditure in Scotland. [26116]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Government's policy on devolved funding, including the Barnett formula, is set out in the Statement of Funding Policy, published by the Treasury in July 2000.

### Capital Expenditure

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown by Department of the estimated capital expenditure under the Private Finance Initiative in 2001–02. [26269]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Detailed figures setting out estimates of capital investment by the private sector in support of PFI deals (both signed and those at preferred bidder) and estimated payments made by Government under PFI contracts are published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report each year. Tables C16 and C17 of Budget 2001 include the latest projections of capital expenditure by the private sector under the Private Finance Initiative, broken down by Department, for 2001–02. In line with past practice, I expect to update these figures shortly.

### Departmental Reports

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the 2002 departmental reports to be published. [26115]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The 2002 departmental reports are expected to be published in April 2002.

### Public Sector Pay

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effective annualised increase in public sector pay for those workers covered by the pay review bodies in each of the last four years. [26334]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** I estimate the average cost of the annual pay settlements, from 1 April each year, as follows:

| | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| 1998 | 3.9 |
| 1999 | 4.1 |
| 2000 | 3.7 |
| 2001 | 4.0 |

The figure for 1998 is the full year cost. The first year cost was 2.7 per cent., reflecting the staged implementation of the recommendations of the pay review bodies that year.

### National Asset Register

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list central Government disposals from the National Asset Register in each of the last four years specifying the value of each disposal. [26141]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The National Asset Register provides details of all significant disposals of central Government assets by Department for each of the financial years 1997–98 to 1999–2000.

### Government Expenditure

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the amount in 2001–02 prices accounted for by general Government expenditure on services from 1979–80 to 2001–02 was, broken down by the current classification of sponsor Department. [26132]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Information about total managed expenditure on services by broad activity of spending, from 1984–85 to 2000–01, is published in table 3.3 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (PESA) 2001–02 (Cm 5101) and is presented in 1999–2000 prices.

Information about spending broken down by Department is published in tables 1.7, 1.8 and 1.9 of PESA 2001–02.

A breakdown of spending from 1979–80 to 2001–02 in 2001–02 prices, by current classification of sponsor Department, is not readily available.

### Asset Sales

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the local authority, central Government and public corporation components of sales of public sector land and buildings in each of the last five years. [26339]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Information about the sale of central and local government land and buildings, from 1995–96 to 2000–01, is published in table 3.8 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2001–02 (Cm 5101). Equivalent information for public corporations is not readily available.

### Access to Work Scheme

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what goods and services provided by the access to work scheme are considered to be a taxable benefit; whether the receipt of digital hearing aids funded through the Department of Work and Pensions access to work scheme can be considered a taxable benefit; and if he will make a statement. [25367]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Goods and services of whatever nature provided to an employee by reason of the employment are exempt from charge if supplied in order to carry out the duties of the employment and any private use is not significant.

### HIPC Debt Initiatives

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the staff report on the implementation of the HIPC debt initiatives referred to on page 5 of his joint statement of 16 November 2001 with the Secretary of State for International Development at the Ottawa meeting of the World bank and IMF. [26499]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The report of the World bank and IMF Development Committee on the status of the implementation of the HIPC Initiative is available on the World bank website at http://www.worldbank.org/hipc/Status_of_Implem_english.pdf.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Charities

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to receive the report on charities and the voluntary sector commissioned from the Performance and Innovation Unit. [26500]

**The Prime Minister:** The Performance and Innovation Unit's review on charities and the voluntary sector is expected to be completed by the spring.

### Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his visits to Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. [26498]

**The Prime Minister:** I visited Bangladesh, India and Pakistan from 3–7 January. I had discussions with the leaders of all three countries, and a series of other meetings aimed at further strengthening our bilateral relations. The visit also provided an opportunity for me to discuss key regional issues.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Sub-post Offices

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 650W, on sub-post offices, if she will list *(a)* the initiatives that received payments from the sub-post office start-up capital scheme in 2001–02, with the funding received in each case and *(b)* those that applied but did not receive funding. [24371]

**Mr. Alexander:** To date, there have been over 500 requests for further information about the sub-post office start-up subsidy scheme and 118 of these have generated requests for application forms of which 18 have so far been returned. Five applications for support under the scheme have now been approved and other applications are under consideration. One payment of £13,200 has been made in respect of an initiative at Capel-le-Ferne in Kent. No applications have been rejected.

### Consignia

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on Consignia's proposed job cuts. [24621]

**Mr. Alexander:** Consignia's intention to make the cost savings it has announced is an operational issue for the company which is consulting with the unions on the matter. The company has not informed the Government of specific plans of how it intends to achieve these savings.

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* employees and *(b)* managers there are in each business unit of Consignia, broken down by (i) gender and (ii) ethnic origin. [24452]

**Mr. Alexander:** Consignia is responsible for the number and location of its employees. I am advised by the company that the information sought is not available in the format requested.

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her latest estimate is of *(a)* the annual value of Benefits Agency business to Consignia which will be lost as a result of the introduction of automated credit transfer and *(b)* the expected revenue to be gained by Consignia through the operation of the Universal bank. [25370]

**Mr. Alexander:** The current value of Benefits Agency business to Consignia is some £400 million a year. The migration of benefit payments to ACT is scheduled to begin in 2003. How that migration affects the revenue of Consignia and the post office network will depend on a number of factors, not least how benefit recipients and other post office customers respond to change.

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria are used by Consignia to determine whether a post office is facing unavoidable closure; and if she will make a statement. [25369]

**Mr. Alexander:** Consignia define an unavoidable closure of a post office as one where no one suitable is prepared to take over from the departing sub-postmaster, where no suitable premises remain available or can be identified or where an associated retail business is no longer commercially viable.

### Broadband Services

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she intends to introduce legislation on improving access to broadband telecommunications networks in rural and semi-rural areas; and if she will make a statement. [24742]

**Mr. Alexander:** The Government's strategy was outlined in a written answer to the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 757W, and I refer the hon. Member to that response.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the *(a)* availability and *(b)* take-up of broadband services by (i) individuals and (ii) businesses in the constituency of Congleton. [24741]

**Mr. Alexander:** A map showing availability of broadband services in the UK was contained in "UK Online: the Broadband Future" and has been placed in the Libraries of the House, though there have not been any assessments made of coverage by constituency.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Food Imports

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the roles of *(a)* her Department, *(b)* the Food Standards Agency, *(c)* local authorities, *(d)* port health authorities and *(e)* other relevant public agencies, in the control of food imports. [18362]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* The Department is the central competent authority for animal health policy as it affects veterinary checks on the import of products of animal origin from third countries. The Food Standards Agency is responsible for public health policy and food enforcement activity by all local authorities including port health authorities. Local authorities and port health authorities (where one exists) are responsible for the enforcement of controls at point of import. Local authorities also have responsibility for health controls at all subsequent points in the human food chain. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise Department are responsible for ensuring that any product of animal origin presented for import is not released until the health controls at point of import have been completed satisfactorily.

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Treasury on how to improve co-ordination of controls on food imports. [20813]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Departmental officials are leading an inter-departmental review aimed at co-ordinating action across government to ensure that rules on imports of products of animal origin are enforced effectively and efficiently. In carrying out this task they meet regularly with colleagues in the Treasury, other Government Departments and responsible enforcement authorities.

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what controls the Government have to prevent *(a)* unsafe and *(b)* inferior food imports; and what plans she has to tighten those controls. [20812]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* All consignments of products of animal origin imported into the UK from other EU member states must have been produced in accordance with the harmonised Community rules laid down in various Council directives. Imports from third countries must have been produced to standards at least equivalent to those in this legislation. Among other things, this legislation sets out the licensing, structural and veterinary supervision requirements to be applied in meat, fish and milk processing plants.

All products of animal origin imported into the UK from third countries must enter at designated UK Border Inspection Posts (BIPs). All consignments are subject to documentary and identity checks and a proportion are subject to physical checks. The level of physical checks is laid down in Community legislation and depends on a number of risk factors. These ensure import conditions are met and that the products remain in satisfactory condition during transport. In line with Community rules, random spot checks at destination may be carried out on consignments of animal products imported from other EU member states.

The Government take very seriously the need to have effective controls on imports of animal products and we in DEFRA are co-ordinating action across government to ensure that the rules are enforced as effectively as possible.

Controls on the importation of food products for human use which are not of animal origin, such as fruit, vegetables and cereals, from countries outside the EU are not harmonised at EU level. Imports of such food must meet the food hygiene requirements in Great Britain's Imported Food Regulations 1997 and their equivalent in Northern Ireland for which the Food Standards Agency is

responsible. These Regulations require that imported food meets the same food safety standards as apply to food produced in the UK. The UK's local food authorities, who undertake day-to-day enforcement at air and sea ports, can refuse entry to or arrange destruction of foods that do not meet the UK's requirements. Such food imported from both third countries and other EU member states may be inspected at retail level to ensure that it satisfies requirements under the Food Safety Act 1990.

### Animal Health Bill

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will consult on the exercise of slaughter powers and other provisions of the Animal Health Bill. [27347]

**Mr. Morley:** I am pleased to announce that the Government are today issuing a paper for public consultation. This proposes criteria that will govern the use in England and Wales of the new slaughter powers contained in the Animal Health Bill, together with arrangements for operating the adjusted compensation scheme for infected premises.

This document has been sent to around 200 organisations, although any interested parties are welcome to access it on DEFRA's website http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/current.htm and respond. Copies have also been placed in the Libraries of the House.

### Farms, Buckingham

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many organic farmers are registered in the constituency of Buckingham. [23741]

**Mr. Morley:** This information is currently unavailable but a database is currently being developed which will allow interrogation of statistics to county level.

### Parish and Town Councils

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what strategy her Department is adopting to provide support and encouragement to parish and town councils to maximise their effectiveness. [26487]

**Alun Michael:** The Government believe strongly in the role and potential of town and parish councils to act as community leaders in their area.

Our strategy to help parish and town councils develop a new role and give communities the opportunity to shape their future is set out in the Rural White Paper, published in November 2000. We have made considerable progress in putting in place measures to help local councils develop their potential to lead and invigorate their communities, including (over three years): £15 million for Community Service Grants to help projects to maintain or introduce services which are local priorities; £15 million for Parish Transport Grants scheme for small scale projects to meet local needs; a further £5 million to help up to 1,000 parishes draw up their own town or village plans to set out local needs and aspirations. The Countryside Agency and the National Association of Local Councils have published a national training and support strategy for parish and town councils, towards which we have allocated £2 million. In November we published a consultation paper on putting the Quality Parish and Town Council concept into practice. This sets out our detailed proposals for enhancing the role of local councils, giving their communities a better deal on local services and a stronger voice in the decisions that affect peoples lives.

The National Association of Local Councils is now represented on the Rural Affairs Forum for England, which I chair, and which met for the first time on Wednesday 9 January.

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the recent Countryside Agency publication which denoted parish and town councils according to their level of activity. [26486]

**Alun Michael:** The publication to which my hon. Friend refers is a Countryside Agency working document made available in the Library of the House pursuant to my answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1018W, on rural parishes. It is part of the agency's work to monitor over time the state of the countryside and was the source of summary figures on "community vibrancy" that the agency published last April to form a baseline for reporting in future years. "Community vibrancy" is one of 15 Headline Rural Indicators identified to monitor progress in achieving the objectives we set in the Rural White Paper. Our aim is to see the indicator move in the right direction over time.

### Foxes

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the state of the fox population following the cessation of hunting as part of foot and mouth eradication. [26488]

**Alun Michael:** There is no information which could provide the basis for an answer to this question.

### Foot and Mouth

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farms were subject to contingency culls undertaken in each county area during the foot and mouth disease epidemic; and what percentage these culls represent of all culls. [26025]

**Mr. Morley:** During the foot and mouth outbreak in Great Britain, animals from 2,026 infected premises, 7,494 dangerous contacts premises (of which 3,329 were contiguous premises) and 257 slaughter on suspicion premises, have been slaughtered. No other farms have been designated for culling.

A breakdown of the animals slaughtered by county, by species and by premises type is available on the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk

*Source:*

DEFRA Disease Control System database as at 9 January 2002.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will inform hon. Members when the independent inquiry into the lessons to be learned from the foot and mouth epidemic has begun its work. [22337]

**Mr. Morley:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 735W.

### Departmental Employment Policy

**Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the process of selection of (i) former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials and (ii) former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions officials now working in her Department; and if she will make a statement. [25774]

**Mr. Morley:** When DEFRA was created on 8 June 2001, all staff working in MAFF and the staff working on environmental protection and wildlife and countryside in DETR transferred to the new Department. As at 1 November 2001, there were 8,157 staff in core DEFRA and 5,952 staff in DEFRA agencies, making a total of 14,109 staff. Of the 8,157 staff in core DEFRA, 635 came from DETR and 7,522 came from former MAFF or joined DEFRA as new employees since 8 June.

### Hunting

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what are the conditions with which *(a)* hunt organisers and *(b)* hunt followers must comply following approval of recommencement of hunting in England; and what is the purpose of each condition. [26646]

**Alun Michael:** This answer should be read against the background to the arrangements which I set out fully in an answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 905W, for allowing the controlled resumption of hunting.

A permit for hunting with dogs in foot and mouth disease free counties is issued to the hunt organisers and contains the following conditions which they must observe:

The date, time and location of each hunt meet, together with details of the likely area to be covered by the hunt and the likely number of participants, must be notified by fax, e-mail or in writing to the local DEFRA Animal Health Divisional Office, so as to be received at least two complete working days before the day of each meet;

A permanent record is maintained by the hunt master, chairman or other responsible person as any of them may designate until at least six months after the expiry of the validity of the permit of the date and location of every hunt, and of any unusual incidents occurring during the hunt, and that this record is made available on demand to an inspector;

All necessary precautions are taken to avoid any possibility of incursions in the course of the hunt by participants or by any dogs or horse into an at risk or high risk county or onto premises subject to Form A or D restrictions or any like restrictions imposed under Article 38 of the Foot and Mouth Disease Order and that the hunt is planned to take place in an area that will avoid the likelihood of any such incursions;

Best endeavours are used to encourage spectators to follow the progress of the hunt from public roads or from footpaths or bridleways which are not subject to FMD restrictions;

No dogs are used in the hunt if within the past 56 days they have been kennelled or fed at premises which receive or collect fallen stock from premises outside the county in which the hunt takes place or from an adjoining FMD free county;

Prior to hunting every participant has signed and dated a certificate of compliance with these conditions in the form required by DEFRA in respect of himself and any horse, quad bike, bicycle or other vehicle which he proposes to be used in the hunt and this certificate has been passed to the hunt chairman, master or other responsible person for the retention for at least six months after the expiry of the permit and that all such certificates shall be made available on demand to an inspector;

A certificate of compliance for each hunt in the form required by DEFRA is delivered to the Divisional Veterinary Manager at the local DEFRA Animal Health Divisional Office not later than three working days after the day of the hunt.

In addition, the following conditions apply to hunt participants.

No person shall: participate in a hunt authorised by a permit:

(i) if their main dwelling is not in an FMD free county; or

(ii) if they have visited any relevant premises situated in an at risk county or a high risk county in the period of seven days prior to the hunt.

Use any dog or horse in a hunt unless it has been kept for at least the preceding 30 days exclusively at premises in the county where the hunt is to take place or at premises in an adjoining county which is also a FMD free county.

Use a vehicle to transport horse or dogs for the purpose of a hunt, where that vehicle has previously been used to transport cattle, sheep, goats or other ruminating animals, pigs or deer unless it has been thoroughly cleansed and disinfected in accordance with schedule 2 of the foot and Mouth Disease Order and any other requirements applying in relation to such transportation since the last occasion on which it was so used.

Participate in a hunt authorised by a permit unless they are wearing clean outer clothing and footwear, and cleanse and disinfect the outer surfaces of their footwear before and after the hunt.

Use any bicycle, quad bike, or other vehicle in a hunt authorised by a permit unless the same has been thoroughly cleansed and disinfected before and after the hunt.

These conditions are designed to manage the disease control risks associated with hunting with dogs and to implement the recommendations of the veterinary risk assessment into these activities. Some conditions are necessary to ensure the efficient administration of the permit scheme.

Full details of the temporary system of permits for hunting with dogs, including the veterinary risk assessment, applications forms and certificates of compliance are available on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/.

### Farm Subsidies

**Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list by county the amounts paid to farmers in England and Wales for the last five years for each of the *(a)* CAP and *(b)* UK schemes for which she is responsible. [17652]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The information requested is not currently held in this format.

### Agricultural Subsidies

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of agricultural producer support in *(a)* the EU, *(b)* the UK and *(c)* England is met by (i) direct subsidy, (ii) price support, (iii) import charges, (iv) export refunds and (v) intervention. [26648]

**Mr. Morley:** The OECD produces annual estimates of agricultural producer support in OECD countries, called Producer Support Estimate (PSE). Their most recent provisional estimate for the EU shows that in 2000 about 40 per cent. of agricultural producer support is derived from direct subsidies. The remainder of the producer support is a result of market support measures (import charges, export refunds and intervention) and it is not possible to estimate the effect of these measures separately.

My latest estimates for the UK for 2000 indicate that about 45 per cent. of UK agricultural producer support is a result of direct subsidies, with the remainder resulting from CAP market support measures. The estimates for England are similar to the UK figure.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the written questions of the hon. Member for Vale of York tabled on 29 November, Refs. 20777, 20778, 20779 and 20780. [22055]

**Mr. Morley:** I refer the hon. Member to the replies given on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 850–51W, and 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 738–39W.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Northavon of *(a)* 3 April, her reference 153878, *(b)* 3 May, her reference 155624, *(c)* 14 June, her reference 156587, *(d)* 8 May on the 20 day standstill for livestock movements, our ref GWY/LH, *(e)* 4 May on behalf of Mrs. Thomas, *(f)* 4 May on behalf of Mr. Barton, *(g)* 26 June on behalf of Mr. Weaver and *(h)* 23 July on behalf of Mrs. Summers. [8485]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* All of the above letters have been responded to with the exception of the letter of 23 July of which we unfortunately have no record.

### Meat Foodstuffs

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the European Commission's directive on the definition of meat and meat foodstuffs; and if she will make a statement. [20137]

**Yvette Cooper:** I have been asked to reply.

The new definition establishes a common basis for declaring meat content of products within the European Community and will provide consumers with more transparent and consistent information about the meat products they buy.

The Food Standards Agency consulted the main stakeholders twice during the negotiation of the Commission directive. Although the new definition is more restrictive than the existing one in the United Kingdom, it is not intended that it should change current manufacturing practices of meat products. Some technical amendments will be required to the UK's Meat Products and Spreadable Fish Products Regulations, which lay down reserved descriptions and a minimum meat content in certain products such as sausages and burgers, to take account of the new definition. A consultation process on these amendments has already begun, and amended regulations will be prepared this year.

### Belgian Beef

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to improve surveillance measures on imports of Belgian beef in order to ensure the prevention of specified risk material entering the UK. [23058]

**Yvette Cooper:** I have been asked to reply.

Specified risk material, in the form of spinal cord, has been found in carcase beef imported from Belgium on two occasions, both during November 2001. The beef came from two different Belgian plants, and in each case only a small proportion of the total consignment of carcase beef was involved. The Food Standards Agency (FSA), which is responsible for food safety matters in the United Kingdom, informed the Belgian authorities promptly about these incidents, asking them to investigate and to notify the FSA of the action being taken to prevent a recurrence. On each occasion the FSA also notified the European Commission.

As meat is part of the single European market, beef from another European Union member state is not subject to border inspection controls. But it is subject to checks at the meat plant of destination within the United Kingdom. In April 2001, the FSA instructed the Meat Hygiene Service to check every consignment of imported carcase beef arriving at licensed meat plants in Great Britain. Similar advice was given to local authorities, and in Northern Ireland. This policy remains current practice.

### Beef Imports

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list by country the sources of beef found to have traces of specified risk material in consignments of beef imported into the UK in the past 12 months. [23059]

**Yvette Cooper:** I have been asked to reply.

In the past 12 months, traces of specified risk material have been found in consignments of beef imported into the United Kingdom from Germany (8 times), the Netherlands (5 times), Ireland (4 times), Belgium (twice), Spain (twice), Italy (once) and Denmark (once).

The sources of the beef are shown in the table.

| Country | Plant | Date of SRM find in UK |
|---|---|---|
| Germany | Loblein Teterower Fleisch, Gustrow | 17 January 2001 |
| | Westfleische, Lubbecke | 17 January 2001 |
| | Standard Fleisch, Oldenburg | 29 January 2001 |
| | Fleisch-Versand Heinz Gausepohl, Bakum | 1 February 2001 |
| | Fleischverkaufsstelk, Kalkar | 1 March 2001 |
| | Mueller Fleisch, Birkenfeld | 2 March 2001 |
| | Fleischzentrum, Wilhelmshaven | 30 March 2001 |
| | Gausepohl Fleisch, Bakum | 25 June 2001 |
| Netherlands | Brada's Vleesbedrijft, Leewarden | 1 March 2001 |
| | Brada's Vleesbedrijft, Leewarden | 5 March 2001 |
| | Domburg Vlees, Bodegraven | 7 August 2001 |
| | Exspl. J Gosschalk en Zoon, Epe | 21 August 2001 |
| | Kroot Vlees, Tilburg | 24 October 2001 |
| Ireland | Liffey Meats, Ballyjamesduff | 2 February 2001 |
| | Kildare Chilling, Kildare | 21 March 2001 |
| | Fair Oaks (Clonmel), Clonmel | 2 August 2001 |
| | Fair Oaks (Carlow), Bagenalstown | 10 and 11 December 2001 |
| Belgium | NV EEG Slacthuis Verbist, Izegem | 15 November 2001 |
| | NV Dierickx, Zele | 29 November 2001 |
| Spain | Givesa, Palencia | 7 March 2001 |
| | Fribin, Binepar | 9 March 2001 |
| Italy | Industria Carni, Torino | 20 March 2001 |
| Denmark | Danish Crown, Skive | 30 April 2001 |

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Viasystems

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what financial support will be provided to the people of South Tyneside after the loss of jobs in Viasystems. [9107]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Redundancies can have a devastating effect on local economies, especially where they occur in an area of high unemployment or the local economy is largely dependent on one industry. We are introducing the rapid response service so as to reduce the impact of large-scale redundancy on the whole community. The service offers a coherent response tailored to need and will help those affected by redundancy to make the transition to sustainable new jobs offering opportunities for progression.

The service is already helping people who have lost their jobs at Viasystems. Following the announcement of redundancies, rapid response funding of £202,000 was secured to provide help with training and resettlement. In the light of the company being placed in receivership additional measures were introduced to provide support for the redundant workers, including a telephone helpline for information on jobs, training and benefits. Additional staff from Employment Service, South Tyneside metropolitan borough council, Learning and Skills Council, North Tyneside council and local colleges ran sessions aimed at providing advice and counselling for redundant employees. Advice sessions have been held at local community centres which were attended by over 100 people. A further event with training providers and employers was held at Jarrow jobcentre on 20 October and attended by over 70 people and redundant workers were also invited to an employment fair at the South Shields families day on 23 October.

### Internet Learning and Work Bank

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost of the internet Learning and Work Bank. [14092]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The Learning and Work Bank was launched as Worktrain in March 2001. Worktrain is an internet portal bringing together, for the first time, information on job vacancies, learning opportunities, occupational profiles and child care providers. The aim of the service is to make it simpler for people to look for jobs and learning opportunities, and to provide other useful information to help them make work and career decisions.

Worktrain is a joint initiative of this Department with the Department for Education and Skills. Estimated costs for the financial year 2001–02 are £3 million.

### New Deal

**Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions his Department has had with other Government Departments to encourage employment of new deal participants. [18057]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Since new deal started, the Employment Service Large Organisation Unit have worked continuously with Government Departments and agencies on the recruitment of new dealers. They have also developed a close working relationship with the Cabinet Office to encourage employment of new dealers within Government Departments. This has resulted in:

1. An event in March 2000 for representatives from all Government Departments to discuss ways to encourage further new deal recruitment within the civil service.

2. The New Deal Civil Service Development Forum was established in June 2000. Thirty Departments were represented in this forum. The aim of the forum is to share best practice in new deal recruitment and to discuss any issues and concerns Departments may have.

3. A Civil Service Gateway training provision, developed in February 2001, to address recruitment issues and further increase new deal take up within Departments.

### Muslim Women

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to encourage greater participation in the labour market by Muslim women. [23812]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** Muslim women can benefit from the range of new deals and other welfare-to-work initiatives that we have introduced to help people overcome the barriers to employment and to make work pay, such as working families tax credit, the national minimum wage, and the national child care strategy. From later this year, we will also invest in a new service in five areas of the country, to reach out to minority ethnic people who are at a disadvantage in the labour market.

Measures are also being introduced in the current Employment Bill that will help working mothers to remain within the work force through better balancing of their work and home commitments. This is good for parents, children and business.

### ONE Programme

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the full cost of the ONE Programme will be, broken down into different stages, as it is rolled out. [24229]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The ONE pilots look at a new way of delivering services, bringing together the Employment Service, Benefits Agency and local authorities into a single point of contact for clients, while putting work and helping people overcome the obstacles to work at the heart of the benefit system. The 12 pilots are all fully operational and are due to run until 2002–03.

Expenditure on ONE for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 was £68 million, including development, implementation and live running costs. Forecast expenditure for 2001–02 is £39 million. £25 million funding has been provisionally allocated for 2002–03.

The lessons learned from the ONE pilots are being fed into the development of the Jobcentre Plus Service.

### Foster Carers

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the employment status of foster carers. [24566]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** People who provide fostering services are not treated as being in full-time work for benefit purposes and are able to claim income support and jobseeker's allowance in the normal way. Payments received from the local authority in respect of fostering are fully disregarded in calculating entitlement to these benefits. Nor are such payments taxable if they just cover the basic cost of looking after the child. These arrangements are intended to act as incentives for people to provide this type of service.

### Unemployment (Bradford)

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the level of unemployment was of *(a)* white and *(b)* non-white people in Bradford in 2001. [25031]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The information is in the table:

| | *ILO unemployment* | *Working age aILO unemployment (percentage)* |
|---|---|---|
| Overall | 18,626 | 8.3 |
| Non-white | 7,753 | 22.4 |
| White | 10,873 | 5.7 |

*Notes:*
1. The figures are for the Bradford city council area.
2. ILO unemployment measures the number of people who are out of work, want a job, have actively sought work in the last four weeks and are available to start work in the next two weeks or who are out of work, have found a job and are waiting to start it in the next two weeks.
3. The ILO data are extracted from the Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey for 2000–01 and are the latest available.
4. The figures for white ILO unemployment and the white ILO unemployment rate are calculated as the difference between the 'overall' and 'non-white' figures.

### Expenditure (Initiatives)

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 538W, on Expenditure (Initiatives), if he will specify the table number and the page number in the Department for Education and Employment departmental report 2001–02 to 2003–04 which contain details of the amount budgeted in each financial year for the planned lifetime of each initiative. [25787]

**Mr. Nicholas Brown:** The information requested is contained in table 4.2, on pages 28–29 of the report.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### National Sports Museum

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will establish a national sports museum; and if she will make a statement. [26095]

**Mr. Caborn:** The Government have no plans to establish or fund a national museum of sport. My Department has previously received representations from organisations seeking to establish privately funded sport museums. The establishment and funding of such museums is a matter for those organisations.

### Small Towns

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the Chairman of English Heritage about his organisation's role in the regeneration of small towns; and if she will make a statement. [25405]

**Dr. Howells:** Ministers have regular discussion with the Chairman of English Heritage about the work of his organisation. The Government's recent statement "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future" confirmed regeneration activity as an important part of English Heritage's remit, particularly through its Conservation Area Partnerships and Heritage Economic Regeneration Schemes. Some 60 per cent. of the £35 million offered by English Heritage each year for conservation work is

targeted at regeneration schemes, and many of these are in smaller towns. Of the 188 HERS schemes currently running, around 50 per cent. are in smaller towns.

### Social Exclusion

**Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies were open in each of the last 10 years to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22436]

(2) what estimate has been made of the administrative cost to the *(a)* state, *(b)* unsuccessful applicants and *(c)* successful applicants of the competitive grant schemes, provided by her Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22400]

(3) if she will list the competitive grant scheme, administered by her Department and its agencies, open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; and, for each scheme in each year *(a)* the number of applicants, *(b)* the number of successful applicants, *(c)* the total of grants awarded, *(d)* the number of pages in the application form and *(e)* if the grant can be used to fund the core costs of the applicant organisations; [22423]

(4) if she will place in the Library a copy of the application form for each of the competitive grant schemes administered by her Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22415]

(5) if she will publish a list of the grants made under the competitive grant schemes administered by the Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion. [22421]

**Dr. Howells** *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* The Home Office has lead policy responsibility for the Government's relationship with the voluntary and community sector. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), on 19 December 2001 *Official Report,* column 482.

### National Stadium

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment she has made of the merits of the process by which proposals for a new national stadium will be considered; [23333]

(2) what representations the Football Association has made with regard to the review of the national stadium proposals; and what account has been taken of them; [23334]

(3) if the Coventry bid for the national stadium remains part of the Task Force Review. [23335]

**Mr. Caborn** *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the statement given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 291–93. Copies of Patrick Carter's English National Stadium Review Interim Report were laid before the House on the same date.

## TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

### Railtrack

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which rail investment projects of over £10 million have been *(a)* agreed and *(b)* contracted since Railtrack went into administration. [22123]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 22 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 389W.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total funding is drawn down by the Railtrack administrator under section 2.1 of the commercial loan agreement. [26302]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The total is £847,746,792.

**Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much of the working capital facility in section 2.2 of the Railtrack commercial loan agreement has been drawn down. [26303]

**Mr. Jamieson:** None.

### Railways

**Mr. Lilley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when *(a)* the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, *(b)* the CEO of the Strategic Rail Authority, *(c)* the Chairman of Railtrack and *(d)* the Rail Regulator were appointed. [25241]

**Mr. Spellar:** The Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) was appointed on 1 December 2001. In accordance with the Transport Act 2000 the Franchising Director (who was appointed on 1 May 1999) was appointed as the Chief Executive of the SRA on 1 February 2001. He left the post on 17 December 2001. The Rail Regulator was appointed on 5 July 1999. The appointment of a Chairman of Railtrack is a matter for the company.

### Railway Investment

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much, in cash and real terms, was invested in *(a)* track and signalling capital projects and *(b)* other capital projects in the railway industry each year from 1998–99; and of each, how much was met from public funds. [26661]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Investment in the rail industry between 1998–99 and 2000–01 is shown in the table.

£ million

| | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rolling stock | 176 | 236 | 554 |
| Track and signalling | 1,012 | 1,315 | 2,126 |
| Other | 811 | 697 | 278 |
| Total | 1,999 | 2,248 | 2,958 |
| Total[1] (2000–01 prices) | 2,090 | 2,303 | 2,958 |

Although rail investment in these years is almost wholly undertaken by the private sector, its finance is indirectly supported by Government support payments to the rail industry channelled through the franchised train operating companies. It is not possible to provide an estimate of the proportion of investment supported by public subsidy.

### PPP (Transport Projects)

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 889W, on capital assets, if he will place in the Library information on the accounting treatment of the public private partnership projects relating to *(a)* British Dartford Thurrock Crossing, *(b)* Second Severn Crossing, *(c)* Birmingham North Relief Road, *(d)* Midland Metro, *(e)* Northern Line Trains, *(f)* A69, *(g)* A50, *(h)* A19, (i) A417/419, (j) M40, (k) A30/35, (l) A1(M), (m) Manchester Metrolink, (n) Docklands Light Railway Extensions, (o) Croydon Tramlink and (p) M1/A1 Link Road; and if he will make a statement. [24176]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

### Company Credit Rating

**Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has drawn up contingency plans for the company limited by guarantee if it fails to achieve a credit rating of A/A2; and if he will make a statement. [24179]

**Mr. Jamieson:** It is for the administrator to put a proposal for a transfer scheme before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, based on any propositions he receives. The administrator and all potential bidders will need to take account of the guidelines issued in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 669–71W. The guidelines specify, among other things, that potential bidders should be able to demonstrate that their proposed successor company will have a sufficiently high investment grade credit rating to raise the necessary finance for its activities.

### Council Housing

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the likely rent levels for local authority tenants in each Greater London borough following the proposed rent re-structuring. [25232]

**Ms Keeble:** Individual local authorities retain responsibility for rent setting. Rents following restructuring will depend, among other things, on the outcome of future spending reviews.

**Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he issues on who is given priority for council housing; and what priority is given to the homeless when they apply. [26631]

**Ms Keeble:** Section 167(2) of the Housing Act 1996 requires that, in framing its allocation scheme, an authority shall ensure that reasonable preference is given to certain categories of persons. These are:

(a) People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions

(b) People occupying housing accommodation which is temporary of occupied on insecure terms

(c) Families with dependent children

(d) Households consisting of or including someone who is expecting a child

(e) Households consisting of or including someone with a particular need for settled accommodation on medical or welfare grounds

(f) Households whose social or economic circumstances are such that they have difficulty in securing settled accommodation; and

(g) Households who are, or have been, owed a main homelessness duty (ie people found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need).

Section 167 also requires that additional preference be given to households consisting of or including someone with a particular need for settled accommodation on medical or welfare grounds who cannot reasonably be expected to find settled accommodation for themselves in the foreseeable future.

The Code of Guidance on Allocations and Homelessness, issued in 1996, gives guidance on how local authorities should discharge their functions under Parts 6 (allocations) and 7 (homelessness) of the Housing Act 1996. The code makes clear that it is for each authority to consider how to reflect the categories set out in s.167(2) in their allocations scheme, although generally they should ensure that greater preference is given to the more severe cases of need.

The Homelessness Bill will amend the reasonable preference categories. However, households who are owed a main homelessness duty will continue to be given priority for housing under the new provisions. We will be issuing a revised Code of Guidance to accompany the changes to the legislation.

### Civil Service Code

**Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many complaints have been reported in his Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; and how many of them related to special advisers. [25338]

**Dr. Whitehead** *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The procedures for making complaints under the Civil Service Code are set out in the Department's staff handbook. Civil servants are encouraged, in the first instance, to raise complaints made under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service

Code with their line manager. If, for any reason, this is not felt to be possible, perhaps because the line manager is part of the complaint, individuals may take their complaint to a nominated official. It is not possible to provide a comprehensive figure for the number of complaints made within this Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code as there is no requirement for managers to report to the centre details of complaints made under the Civil Service Code which are resolved within the management line.

### Council Tenants

**Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the legal status is of offer documents sent to council tenants prior to a ballot on stock transfer; and if plans within such documents are binding on new landlords. [25257]

**Ms Keeble:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave her on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 848–49W.

### Waverley Rail Route

**Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the Strategic Rail Authority and *(b)* Scottish Ministers regarding the re-opening of the Waverley rail route from Edinburgh to Carlisle. [25916]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There have been no recent discussions. Last year Scottish Borders council announced that a detailed application for formal consent to construct the railway is likely to be lodged with the Scottish Parliament by March 2003. If work goes to schedule and plans are approved the railway could be re-opened in 2008.

### Rail Capacity Study

**Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in the conduct of a rail capacity study for East-Central Scotland, with particular reference to services to and from England. [25915]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There are currently two reviews in progress. One study has been commissioned by the Scottish Executive to aid them in deciding upon their strategic priorities. The study consist of two phases, the first part of which reported in September last year and the main second phase which is due to report in May 2002. The Strategic Rail Authority has also commissioned Railtrack to undertake a study, also in two phases. The first part has recently been completed, the second phase has yet to commence.

### Tolls

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much has been received in tolls on the Second Severn Crossing in each year of its existence. [26064]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Second Severn Crossing opened in 1996. However, the concession for the crossing was granted in 1992, at which time the Concessionaire (Severn River Crossing plc) were able to use revenue from the existing crossing to partly finance the construction of the new crossing.

Listed is the toll revenue received since 1992. Up to 1996 the figure is for the first Crossing only, after that date the figure is for the two bridges combined. Separate figures for the two bridges is not immediately available.

| | £ |
|---|---|
| 1992 | 21,990,895 |
| 1993 | 34,365,696 |
| 1994 | 39,196,924 |
| 1995 | 43,773,796 |
| 1996 | 47,154,568 |
| 1997 | 51,112,112 |
| 1998 | 55,240,910 |
| 1999 | 59,831,779 |
| 2000 | 60,995,760 |

The final figure for toll revenue for 2001 is not currently available.

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which major *(a)* bridge, *(b)* tunnel and *(c)* trunk road tolls (i) can and (ii) cannot be paid by credit or debit card. [26079]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Of the major tolled bridges and tunnels (there are currently no major tolled trunk roads open) only the Tyne Tunnel accepts payment by credit or debit card. All of the undertakings (Dartford Crossings, Humber Bridge, Mersey Tunnels, Severn Crossings, Tamar Bridge and Tyne Tunnel) have a system for pre-payment for which payment by credit or debit card is available.

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what provision exists for tolls for the Second Severn Crossing to be paid in euro. [26078]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Concessionaire (Severn River Crossing plc) is already prepared to accept payment for tolls in euros.

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to allow drivers on the Severn Crossing to pay tolls with credit and debit cards. [26066]

**Mr. Jamieson:** There are no plans at present to allow credit card payments due to the fact that finance companies levy about a 3 per cent. surcharge for such transactions. Neither the Concessionaire (Severn River Crossing plc) nor the Government are currently prepared to fund this surcharge. However, the Concessionaire and the Government will continue to review this position.

### Second Severn Crossing

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the outstanding debt is on the Second Severn Crossing; and if it will be repaid. [26065]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The outstanding debt on the crossing stands at £469,606,000 as at 2000 accounts. It is intended that the whole of this debt will be paid by the end of the concession period, likely to be about mid 2014.

### Road Vehicle Lighting Regulations

**Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress his Department's review of Road Vehicle Lighting Regulations has made. [26082]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions intends to carry out a public consultation shortly on proposals to update the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 to relax certain provisions and to align others with requirements already in force under European Community law.

### Planning Appeals (Listed Buildings)

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many appeals affecting listed buildings have been *(a)* upheld and *(b)* dismissed in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [25966]

**Ms Keeble:** The provision of information on planning appeals is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Chris Shepley to Mr. Bob Russell, dated 11 January 2002:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about planning appeals affecting listed buildings over the last five years.

The information requested is as follows.

*Appeals with listed building issues*

| | *Allowed* | *Dismissed* |
|---|---|---|
| *Planning* | | |
| 1997 | 570 | 1,227 |
| 1998 | 583 | 1,185 |
| 1999 | 542 | 1,186 |
| 2000 | 454 | 1,091 |
| 2001 | 592 | 1,284 |
| *Enforcement* | | |
| 1997 | 49 | 193 |
| 1998 | 108 | 160 |
| 1999 | 116 | 114 |
| 2000 | 62 | 175 |
| 2001 | 50 | 135 |

*Listed building appeals*

| | *Allowed* | *Dismissed* |
|---|---|---|
| *Consent* | | |
| 1997 | 266 | 549 |
| 1998 | 202 | 437 |
| 1999 | 143 | 319 |
| 2000 | 176 | 385 |
| 2001 | 164 | 363 |
| *Enforcement* | | |
| 1997 | 44 | 126 |
| 1998 | 49 | 112 |
| 1999 | 86 | 62 |
| 2000 | 50 | 79 |
| 2001 | 18 | 61 |

### Renewable Energy

**Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to revise PPG22 to take account of Government targets for renewable energy generation. [25931]

**Ms Keeble:** It is already our policy to promote a positive approach to planning for renewable energy to help meet the Government's targets for producing electricity from renewable sources. In 2000 we initiated the preparation of regional assessments and targets for renewable energy provision to encourage a more strategic approach to planning at regional and local levels.

We intend to review the existing planning policy guidance note of renewable energy (PPG 22) as soon as practicable.

### Vehicle Emissions

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the use of fuel economy labels to help introduce less polluting and more fuel efficient vehicles. [25932]

**Mr. Jamieson:** Provision of information to consumers on the fuel economy and $CO_2$ emissions performance of passenger cars is an important element of the Government's policy for reducing $CO_2$ emissions. Provision of fuel economy labels on new passenger cars and of general information on fuel economy at the point of sale has been a requirement under UK law since the mid 1980's. From 21 November 2001 the UK implemented a new EU directive which, besides making changes to the format and content of information to be provided on cars at point of sale, also requires $CO_2$ emissions to be displayed.

Comparative figures on the fuel and emissions performance of all models of new passenger cars are available on the Vehicle Certification Agency's website at www.vcacarfueldata.org.uk and in "The New Car Fuel Consumption and Emissions Figures" booklet published by VCA.

### Bus Safety

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent research his Department has carried out into safety considerations concerning passengers standing in buses; and what discussions he has had with bus and coach operators on the subject of the safety concerns of passengers standing in those vehicles. [26484]

**Ms Keeble:** My Department is currently looking into the issue of standing passengers. We are participating in a research project under the European Community 5th Framework Project—Enhanced Coach and Bus Occupant Safety (ECBOS), which is looking at all safety issues that effect bus passengers. This includes seated and standing passengers, provisions of internal fittings, handholds, steps and gangway slopes inside the vehicle. The findings of this work will be used to influence any future regulatory changes in this area.

## Older Population

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what estimates have been made of the resident elderly population of Somerset county council area in each financial year from 1997–98 to 2002–03; [25852]

(2) what information he has collated on the numbers of retired people of pensionable age *(a)* living in and *(b)* living away from their home area who enter supported residential care; [25856]

(3) what estimates have been made of the number of *(a)* elderly supported residents and *(b)* elderly people living in private households in Somerset county council area in each financial year from 1997–98 to 2002–03. [25853]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The following table provides the information requested.

*(a) Elderly supported residents in residential and nursing care on:*

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 31 March 1997 | 1,993 |
| 31 March 1998 | 2,174 |
| 31 March 1999 | 2,211 |
| 31 March 2000 | 2,092 |
| 31 March 2001 | 2,455 |

*(b) Elderly population:*

| | *(i) total residents* | *(ii) residents in private households* |
|---|---|---|
| Mid 1997 | 93,851 | 88,954 |
| Mid 1998 | 94,657 | 89,718 |
| Mid 1999 | 95,242 | 90,272 |
| Mid 2000 | 95,945 | 90,939 |

*Source:*

(a) Department of Health statistical return SRI

(b)(i) ONS mid year population estimates; (ii) ONS mid year population estimates adjusted by the proportion of total residents that are in private households as recorded in the 1991 Census

In the case of population data, the estimates for 2000 are the latest available, and are used in the 2002–03 local government finance settlement. The number of residents in private households is estimated in the same way as for the standard spending assessment formula for elderly residential social services, by assuming that the proportion of total residents in private households is the same as that recorded in the 1991 Census. The figures for the number of supported residents are the actual numbers reported by authorities to the Department of Health rather than estimates. The figure for March 2001 is the latest available. As part of the same data return, the Department of Health collects information on the numbers of supported residents that each local authority is supporting outside their own local authority area. The information can be broken down by age, so those of pensionable age could be specifically identified.

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) for what reason the standard spending assessments for 2002–03 were not calculated by reference to the total elderly residential population in each local authority area; what plans his Department has to revise the method of calculation; and if he will make a statement; [25854]

(2) what steps his Department plans to take to develop a single standard spending assessment distribution formula that covers the residential and domiciliary care of elderly people; [25855]

(3) how the formula to estimate the number of elderly supported residents in local authority areas has operated in each financial year between 1997–98 and 2002–03; what assessment he has made of its effectiveness for *(a)* England, *(b)* London boroughs, *(c)* Shire counties and *(d)* Somerset; and if he will make a statement. [25859]

**Dr. Whitehead:** The methodology underpinning the standard spending assessment (SSA) formulae has been unchanged since 1999–2000. The formula for residential services was changed in 1999–2000 so that it is based on the elderly population in private households (prior to this it was based on the total resident population). The population in private households excludes the population that is already in institutional care. Some residents that are in residential care in each authority area are funded by other authorities. If they were included in the formula, they would count towards the authority in which they are placed, even though another authority is bearing the cost.

Other arguments that have been made in favour of the change are that the research on which the formula is based considered the characteristics of those in private households about to enter care (and not those already in care), and that the formula should therefore be on the same basis. The number of people in residential care in an authority is also partly dependent on local policy variation, and an objective formula should not reflect this. In estimating the relative number of potential supported residents in each area, the formula gives more weight to elderly people aged 85 plus and aged 75–84 than those aged 65–74. The formula also takes account of differences in deprivation between areas. The following indicators have been used since 1998–99:

Elderly on income support

Pensioners in rented accommodation

Pensioners living alone

Elderly with limiting long-term illness

Elderly on attendance allowance or disability living allowance

Pensioners not in a couple and not a head of household.

In 1997–98 the formula only used indicators of rented accommodation, limiting long-term illness, and a measure of independent sector provision.

The White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" sets out our assessment of the effectiveness of the SSA system. Our assessment focuses on systemic weakness that apply to all authorities rather than issues for individual authorities or groupings of authorities. We have concluded that there are significant limitations, including complexity and the use of SSAs as a measure of "spending need". That is why we have decided to replace SSAs with a new formula-based approach that will be fairer and more intelligible. These new formulae will take effect in 2003–04. We are actively working with local government to develop the new system, and a number of research projects have been set in hand in order to inform the work. This includes a project commissioned by the Department of Health from the University of Kent in order to look at the possibility of a single formula for elderly domiciliary and residential care.

This work is still at the early stages and we have yet to take a view on the best way forward. We will be consulting widely before taking final decisions.

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what resources were allocated, per head, to meet the needs of the elderly population in each local authority area in England in the latest year for which figures are available. [25851]

**Dr. Whitehead:** DTLR allocates grant to local authorities based on the standard spending assessment (SSA) formulae. There are two SSA formulae focused on the needs of elderly people: the formula for elderly residential and the formula for domiciliary social services. Details of each authority's elderly domiciliary and residential SSA per person aged over 65 have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The figures are for the provisional local government finance settlement for 2002–04.

There are other services provided by local government to elderly people, including cultural and leisure services. These other formulae are based on figures for the population as a whole, and it is not possible to identify an element specific to the elderly without making crude assumptions.

It should be noted that the SSAs are not equal to the actual level of grant provided to local authorities by central Government. This is a lower figure that recognises authorities ability to raise resources through council tax and their share of national non-domestic rates. The actual level of general grant support provided for individual services is not identified, and is a matter for individual authorities to decide.

### Shoreham Trust Port Authority

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason he has not appointed any board members to Shoreham Trust Port Authority since their terms expired on 31 December 2001; and when he expects to do so. [26085]

**Mr. Jamieson:** We are currently considering candidates for these appointments and expect to be able to announce the outcome shortly.

### South East Regional Air Services Study

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what preliminary findings from the South East Regional Air Services Study will be made available to county councils in the region in time for them to be taken into account when producing their drafts for county structure plans. [26084]

**Mr. Jamieson:** During the study, we are not going to make any comment on the options under consideration—that would be premature, would spread unnecessary concern and blight and would undermine the consultation process.

We expect the study to be completed shortly. This will be followed by full public consultation on the short-listed options, currently scheduled for spring 2002. Decisions made following the consultation will feed into an Air Transport White Paper which we aim to publish in the second half of the year.

The West Sussex structure plan 2001–2016, currently on deposit, makes clear that the Structure Plan will not be able to take account of the SERAS study outcomes.

**Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he anticipates the completion of the South East Regional Air Services Study; if its findings will be published in full; and how it will be made available to the public. [26083]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The South East and East of England Regional Air Services Study (SERAS) is nearing completion. This will be followed by full public consultation on the short-listed options for airport development.

During the consultation period, we intend to make the study findings accessible to the public in hard copy and on CD.

### Traffic Management

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of measures of traffic congestion; and which measure his Department uses for the purposes of assessing the cost and benefit of road construction and traffic management schemes. [26664]

**Mr. Jamieson:** As part of the assessment of the costs and benefits of road schemes, an estimate is made of the expected change in journey times as a result of the scheme, compared with a forecast without the scheme. Money values are attributed to those changes in journey times.

In making an overall assessment of the merits of road proposals, this measure of congestion relief is considered alongside other impacts including environmental and safety ones and compared with the capital and maintenance costs of the scheme. In addition, a measure of the total vehicle hours saved is used to assess that scheme's contribution to the Department's target for congestion.

### Transport (Isle of Wight)

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the targets agreed by the Isle of Wight Council for the delivery of transport services upon which his specific grant or borrowing permission is contingent; and what steps he takes to monitor the advertisement of those targets. [24013]

**Ms Keeble:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given today. [PQ 26665].

### Highways (Southern England)

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the targets agreed between his Department and highway authorities in the geographical counties of Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Sussex for the delivery of highways and transport services, identifying those on which his specific grant or borrowing permission is contingent. [26665]

**Ms Keeble:** Our guidance to authorities on Local Transport Plans (LTPs) made clear that plans must include a set of indicators for measuring performance against targets and other outputs which can be used to assess whether the LTP is delivering its stated objectives. Local authorities determine the precise package of indicators and targets which best reflect their local circumstances and although such indicators are not formally agreed by the Department they should reflect relevant national targets where they exist. Authorities are required to provide annual progress reports (APRs) in which to report on how their LTPs are being implemented and the progress in working towards the locally established objectives, national and local targets and other outputs.

The allocation of capital resources is determined through an assessment of the LTPs and APRs which authorities submitted. We announced initial capital allocations for the implementation of the first five year LTPs in December 2000 and firm allocations for 2002–03 were announced last December.

Section 109(4) of the Transport Act 2000 placed a statutory requirement upon local transport authorities as to the publication of local transport plans and bus strategies. They are required to make them available for inspection, give notice for bringing them to the attention of the public and to make copies available on request at not more than cost. It is for local transport authorities to ensure that they meet their statutory requirements in this regard.

Given the volume of data requested I will write to the hon. Member with details of the indicators and targets for the local highway authorities concerned and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 236W, whether West Quay road, Southampton, is a trunk road. [26663]

**Mr. Jamieson:** West Quay road in Southampton forms part of the A3057, which is not a trunk road.

## A Roads (Taunton)

**Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has, as part of the London to South West and South Wales Multi-Modal Transport Study, to analyse the costs and benefits of a non-road dualling multi-modal option, including local traffic safety measures, to address traffic safety and congestion issues on the A30/A303 and on the A358 to Taunton; and if he will make a statement. [25371]

**Mr. Jamieson:** As part of their work, the consultants carrying out the London to South West and South Wales Multi-Modal Transport Study (SWARMMS) are addressing various issues associated with the environment, safety, the economy, accessibility and integration in relation to the A30/A303 corridor and the A358 between the A303 and the M5. A number of different options to provide solutions are being considered and non-road dualling and local safety measures are included. The consultants' recommendations are expected by the end of April and the costs and benefits of the various approaches will be clearly laid out in their report.

## Vehicle Registration

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost was *(a)* to Government and *(b)* to other parties of introducing the new vehicle registration system. [26659]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The total cost to Government of the new registration system, including running costs to year 2011, is forecast at £2,383,000. The exact costs to other parties are not known. Estimated compliance costs are published in the Regulatory Impact Assessment, a copy of which is lodged in the Libraries of the House.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many vehicles were registered with DL registrations in *(a)* the last year and *(b)* the last 10 years of the old vehicle registration system. [26657]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The number of vehicles newly registered each year with DL suffixes between 1991 and 2001 is as follows:

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1991 | 3,733 |
| 1992 | 3,765 |
| 1993 | 2,982 |
| 1994 | 2,786 |
| 1995 | 2,807 |
| 1996 | 2,914 |
| 1997 | 4,651 |
| 1998 | 9,359 |
| 1999 | 4,695 |
| 2000 | 4,990 |
| 2001 | [1]3,463 |

[1] Up to the end of August

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many vehicles were registered in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* Northern Ireland in (i) the last year and (ii) the last 10 years of the old vehicle registration system. [26658]

**Mr. Jamieson:** The following table shows the number of newly registered vehicles in each year between 1991 and 2000 and also for 2001 where figures are currently available.

*Registrations of new vehicles*

*Thousand*

| *Year* | *Great Britain* | *Northern Ireland* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 1,922 | 79 |
| 1992 | 1,902 | 78 |
| 1993 | 2,074 | 83 |
| 1994 | 2,249 | 91 |
| 1995 | 2,307 | 97 |
| 1996 | 2,410 | 104 |
| 1997 | 2,598 | 112 |
| 1998 | 2,740 | 121 |
| 1999 | 2,766 | 122 |
| 2000 | 2,871 | 120 |
| 2001 | [2]2,968 | [2]70 |

[1] First 11 months
[2] First six months

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS

### Means Tests

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if, pursuant to her reply of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 960W, she will list each financial means test applied under education legislation. [26652]

**Margaret Hodge:** We apply means tests, either directly or indirectly, for the following educational purposes:

Schools—free school meals (and free milk where available); remission of charges for board and lodging payments on residential school trips; assisted places scheme; music and dance scheme

Post-compulsory Education—education maintenance allowances; learner support funds which are made up of: access funds, child care support funds, residential bursaries; dance and drama awards

Higher Education—student support including: grants towards tuition fees, student loans, including hardship loans; additional grants for students with dependants, including dependants grants, school meals grants and child care grants; hardship funds and bursaries, including opportunity bursaries and access bursaries; loans, hardship funds and fee remission for part-time students.

### Sixth Forms

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the schools in the London borough of Wandsworth which have a sixth form. [25901]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** There are seven maintained secondary schools in the London borough of Wandsworth which have a sixth form, as follows:

Ernest Bevin College
Chestnut Grove School
Battersea Technology College
Graveney School
Burntwood School
Elliot School
Southfields Community College.

### Healthwise Education Packs

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether she recommends *(a)* The Primary Schools Drugs Education Pack, *(b)* Taking Drugs Seriously, *(c)* Taking Sex Seriously and *(d)* The Primary Schools Sex and Relationships Education Pack published by Healthwise for use in schools and by school teachers. [26653]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** No. The Department for Education and Skills does not recommend or endorse individual resources. It is for schools to decide which resources are most appropriate to meet the needs of their pupils, in support of a school's personal, social and health education programme. The Learning and Skills Act 2000 places a statutory responsibility on head teachers and governors in devising a school's sex education policy to protect their pupils from inappropriate teaching and materials.

### Social Exclusion

**Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what estimate has been made of the administrative cost to the *(a)* state, *(b)* unsuccessful applicants and *(c)* successful applicants of the competitive grant schemes, provided by her Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22404]

(2) Skills if she will publish a list of the grants made under the competitive grant schemes administered by her Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22407]

(3) if she will place in the Library a copy of the application form for each of the competitive grant schemes administered by her Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22412]

(4) how many different competitive grant schemes administered by her Department and its agencies were open in each of the last 10 years to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22434]

(5) if she will list the competitive grant schemes, administered by the Department and its agencies, open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion and, for each scheme in each year *(a)* the number of applicants, *(b)* the number of successful applicants, *(c)* the total of grants awarded, *(d)* the number of pages in the application form and *(e)* if the grant can be used to fund the core costs of the applicant organisation. [22425]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis** *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* The information is not currently collected by my Department in the form requested. I am placing in the Library of the House copies of the application form for each of the competitive grant schemes that are available.

## DEFENCE

### Afghanistan

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, in the circumstances of a joint patrol involving Afghan security forces and British troops, the latter would be in on-the-spot command, in the event of hostile action. [26485]

**Mr. Hoon:** Under the terms of the agreement between the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Interim Administration, the ISAF will conduct joint patrols for liaison and familiarisation purposes but also as part of a broad objective of providing reassurance to the local population. The ISAF will also conduct independent patrols.

In patrolling together, the ISAF and Afghan Interim Administration forces will not be under joint command. The unified Command and Control arrangements under Major General McColl are clear and these will provide

ISAF forces with sufficient scope to react appropriately to any attack on them. The ISAF has robust Rules of Engagement which are appropriate to its mission.

These Rules of Engagement are in accordance with international and domestic law.

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many troops he plans to deploy in Afghanistan; and when their deployment will be complete; [26348]

(2) if he will make a statement on the timetable for troop deployment in Afghanistan. [26353]

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the UK element of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan to be fully deployed. [26674]

**Mr. Hoon:** The United Kingdom's contribution to the ISAF in Kabul will total up to 1,800 personnel. In addition and in the short term, we are deploying nearly 300 Army and Royal Air Force personnel to help repair Kabul International airport. This will help us in re-supplying the ISAF and will be of lasting benefit for the Afghan people.

I expect the UK element of the ISAF to be fully deployed by mid-February.

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance he has requested from the US to aid the deployment of ground troops in Afghanistan. [26351]

**Mr. Hoon:** Assuming that the hon. Member is referring to the deployment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the United States agreed to our request for practical support for the deployment of the ISAF and they have established a liaison team at the headquarters of the force. I am withholding further details under section 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what UK forces will be deployed in Afghanistan by Friday 11 January; and what the full UK deployment will comprise. [26673]

**Mr. Hoon:** As of 11 January, UK forces deployed as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan will comprise elements of Headquarters 3 Division and Headquarters 16 Air Assault Brigade, D Company of the 2nd Battalion of the Parachute Regiment plus logistic, communications and other enablers.

On current plans, the full UK contribution to the ISAF will comprise up to 1,800 personnel, which in addition to the units already deployed will include the balance of the 2nd Battalion the Parachute Regiment, engineer units plus other logistic enablers.

We will also deploy sufficient personnel to activate and operate Kabul International airport.

### Pensions

**Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many enlisted personnel have retired on a full pension in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [25834]

**Mr. Ingram:** Information on the number of personnel retiring on full pension, that is those payable on completion of 37 years service, is not identified separately and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### C130 Hercules

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many C130 Ks and how many C130 Js are equipped with a full Defensive Aids suite; when he plans to equip the balance of the fleet; and how many C130 Ks and C130 Js are adopted for special forces roles. [26352]

**Dr. Moonie:** I am withholding the information requested in accordance with Exemption 1a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

### Rapid Reaction Mechanisms

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what response he has made to *(a)* OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) requirements for rapid expert assistance and co-operation teams and *(b)* EU requirements for a rapid reaction mechanism for civil crisis management. [26668]

**Peter Hain:** I have been asked to reply.

HMG strongly support the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its missions, and has responded promptly and substantially to the Rapid Expert Assistance and Co-operation Teams (REACT) programme rolled out in April 2001.

The Government support the EU's Rapid Reaction Mechanism which allows for rapid intervention from the European community's budget in situations of emerging or actual crisis.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Carabiner

**Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the business contracted out by his Department to Carabiner since May 1997. [22886]

**Peter Hain:** Since May 1997 the Department has awarded major contracts for the provision of event production services to Carabiner for the following events:

1. The G8 Birmingham Summit from 15–17 May 1998.

2. The European Council in Cardiff from 15–16 June 1998.

Carabiner were also involved in one event for the Your Britain, Your Europe campaign.

The event production contracts do not include the "contracting out" of services normally performed "in-house" by the FCO.

### Gibraltar

**Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Gibraltar. [24917]

**Peter Hain:** I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 312W.

### Balkan War Crimes

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects those indicted for war crimes in the Balkans to be transferred to the Hague Tribunal. [25429]

**Mr. MacShane:** According to official figures from the Tribunal (ICTY), of those indictees currently in The Hague, 10, including Slobodan Milosevic, have been arrested and transferred by governments and 15 have surrendered voluntarily. In addition, 18 individuals who were the subject of the NATO Stabilisation Force (SFOR)'s 26 operations to date (14 of which have involved British troops) remain in detention.

Full co-operation with the ICTY is an international obligation. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary raised this issue directly with FRY President Kostunica and Croatian President Mesic during official visits to London in late 2001, and we have also discussed it with the political leaders of Bosnia. We have made it clear that the transfer of all remaining indictees, including Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic and Aute Gotovina must be accelerated in 2002.

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# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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**SIXTH SERIES** **VOLUME 377**

## SESSION 2001–2002

*17th December 2001—11th January 2002*

**Printed indexes to Hansard**

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

**Indexes on the Parliamentary website**

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

*SCOPE*

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

*ARRANGEMENT*

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

## *HEADINGS*

### *Choice of headings*

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

### *Geographical coverage*

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
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### *Parliamentary material and business*

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
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- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

### *Guidance on headings*

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

## *REFERENCES*

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
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  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

## *ABBREVIATIONS*

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

**Parliamentary background**

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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